Community and Identity in an LGBT Softball League:

Constitution, Practice, Negotiation, and Problematization

by

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ABSTRACT

This study situated a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) softball league within the logic of homonormativity and queer futurity and explored how community and identity were constituted, practiced, negotiated, and problematized. The project endeavored to address the questions: What is the meaning and significance of community for the League participants? To what extent and how does participation in the League affect gender and sexual identity discourse and practice? And, in the context of the League, how are dominant ideologies and power structures reinforced, disrupted, and produced? A critical ethnography was undertaken to render lives, relations, structures, and alternative possibilities visible. Data was collected through participant observation, interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and archival document analysis. A three stage process was employed for data transformation including description, analysis, and interpretation. LGBT identified sports clubs, formed as a result of identity politics, are understood to be potential sites of transformation and/or assimilation. Although the League was imbued with the discourses of inclusion and acceptance, the valorizing of competition and normalization led to the creation of hierarchies and a politics of exclusion. The League as an identity-based community was defined by what it was not, by what it lacked, by its constitutive outside. It is possible to learn a great deal about community by looking at what and who is left out and the conspicuous absence of transgender and bisexual participants in the League highlights a form of closure, a limit to the transformative potential of the League.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Beyond the Closet and Into the Mainstream?

Community is a social construct imagined by the people who perceive themselves a part of a group. It helps to provide people with a sense of understanding, a sense of orientation towards the world, and helps to answer the questions: Who am I? Who is like me? Where do I belong? (Gitlin,1993). In a sense, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBT) grouping has always been an “imagined community" (Anderson, 1991). In the 1960s, gay activists needed to demonstrate the existence of a sizeable gay community, substantial enough to matter but not large enough to threaten a homophobic society. They looked to the dated yet singular Kinsey Study (1948) in which a passage read, “10 percent of the males are more or less exclusively homosexual… for at least three years between the ages of 16 and 55.” Although Kinsey did not claim that his study was generalizable, that quote was used to assert that 10 percent of the population was gay. According to Gates, “The motivation behind using the 10 percent figure was less about science and more about politics. In those days, gay activists needed to prove the very existence of a gay community. One in 10 was big enough to matter” (2011, para. 2).

Now, over half a century later, there is still debate over the size of the LGBT community and what it means to be a member. In 2012, Gallup released the largest single study of the LGBT population on record, with the title, “Special report: 3.4% of U.S. adults identify as LGBT.” The Gallup researchers emphasized that measuring sexual orientation and gender identity is “challenging since these concepts involve complex social and cultural patterns” (Gates & Newport, 2012, p. 2). The researchers also noted that the persisting stigmatization of LGBT identities may deter people from being forthcoming about their identities; correspondingly, they speculated it is

likely that an unknown number of people remain in "the closet" and are not included in estimates of the LGBT population.

In previous times, "the closet" characterized gay and lesbian life. Gay men and lesbians had to maintain constant vigilance about exposing their sexual identities due to the fear of economic peril, violence, repression, and ostracism. In response to the stigmatization by wider society, gays and lesbians created separate social networks and organizations, such as bars, bookstores, political groups, churches, and sports leagues, which helped to establish a collective identity and served as a basis for political mobilization. Although Seidman (2002) recognized that the closet remains a reality for far too many lesbians and gay men, he contended that due to the normalization and assimilation of homosexuality, contemporary gay life can be described as "beyond the closet." People may conceal their sexual identities in specific situations or with specific individuals, but it is no longer is a primary concern. According to Seidman (2002), "Gay life today is very different than it was just a decade or two ago. Gay Americans today have more choices about how to live, and their lives often look more like those of conventional heterosexuals than those of the closeted homosexuals of the recent past" (p. 6). As a result of homosexuality being normalized and routinized, a gay identity has become decentered and a less significant marker of the self.

Like "beyond the closet," the concept "post-gay" (Ghaziani, 2011) implies that a gay or lesbian identity may no longer be central to a lesbian or gay person's self-definition. In the past two decades, as LGBT activists have constructed a collective identity characterized by building bridges to the dominant culture, emphasizing perceived similarities to the majority, muting differences, and suppressing what is distinctive about gay identity, the rate of lesbian and gay assimilation into the mainstream has exceeded a critical threshold and has entered a "post-gay" era. This

assimilation has advanced alongside increased cultural acceptance. Headlines in major national newspapers such as the *Los Angeles Times* have proclaimed, "Gays may have the fastest of all civil rights movements" (Barabak, 2012); a 2014 Gallup poll found that "Americans" support for the moral acceptability of gay or lesbian relations reached a record high of 58%[1] (Gallup, 2014); and 92% of LGBT adults indicated that society has become more accepting of them in the past decade and expected the level of acceptance to increase in the decade to come (Pew, 2013).

However, the idea of "beyond the closet," "post-gay" or complete assimilation, is not unequivocal, for acceptance is not universal. Coming out cannot eradicate the differences of where LGBT people are coming from (Dean, 1996). In the main, acceptance depends on one's ability and willingness to fit within heteronormative ideals and impersonate the standards of normal. Findings from a 2012 nationally representative study conducted by Pew Research Center[2] demonstrated that LGBT people perceive and experience levels of acceptance, discrimination, and assimilation differently. Although 92% of LGBT adults said acceptance is improving, only 19% said there is a lot of social acceptance, 59% said there is some, and 21% said there is only a little. Correspondingly, 53% said there is a lot of discrimination. Whites were much more likely than non-whites to say that society is more accepting of LGBT adults now than it was a decade ago (58% versus 42%), and non-whites are more likely to say that being LGBT is extremely or very important to their identity (44% versus 34%).[3]

The survey also found that LGBT people differ on a range of attitudes and experiences related to their sexual identities. Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, and

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[1] That is 20% higher than 2002, when it was 38% (Gallup, 2010).
[2] N=1,197.
[3] For example, 39% of LGBT adults reported being rejected by a friend or family member at some point in their lives because of their sexual or gender identity; 30% say they have been physically attacked or threatened; 58% say they have been the target of slurs and jokes; and 21% say they have been treated unfairly by an employee (Pew, 2012).

transgender adults are often depicted as being a part of THE "LGBT community," but opinions vary in how much the different groupings and the individuals within those groupings share and/or contest meanings about community and identity.[4] When asked how much they feel they share common concerns and identity with other groups, 70% of gay men said they feel they share a lot or some common concerns with lesbians, while 70% of lesbians said the same of gay men. Those were the highest reported sense of commonality. Only 24% of bisexual men said they had a lot or some in common with transgender people, and 32% said they did not share any common concerns with lesbians. When asked to rank the importance of specific policies that affect the LGBT population, equal employment rights (57%) and legally sanctioned marriages (53%) were the top priorities. Among the different groups, lesbians were more likely than gay men and bisexuals to rate legal marriage (lesbians, 69%; gay men, 54%; bisexuals, 50%) and adoption rights (lesbians, 60%; gay men, 45%; bisexuals, 42%) as top priorities. Meanwhile, gay men were more likely than lesbians and bisexuals to say HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment programs should be a top priority (gay men, 57%; lesbians, 45%; bisexuals, 40%).

In terms of assimilation strategies, participants overall were evenly divided on whether members of the LGBT population should "be able to achieve equality while maintaining a distinct culture and way of life" (49%) or whether "the best way to achieve equality is to become part of mainstream culture and institutions like marriage" (49%). However, gay men were more likely to prefer maintaining a distinct culture and way of life (LGBT, 49%; gay men, 53%; bisexuals, 47%; lesbians, 42%). This study provided a valuable glimpse into the problematics of assuming and operating as though the LGBT community is one homogeneous group. Only a segment of the lesbian and gay population has experienced acceptance and

[4] There were too few confirmed transgender respondents to tabulate separately (N=43)

assimilation; and this has created a politics that reinforces white, male, gender-conforming, middle-class standards of sexuality that further marginalize those whose identities do not fit within the hegemonic ideals. Asserting an identity cannot guarantee or be equated with a specific politics and, for some, the discourse of assimilation, "with its notion of a gay subject unified by common interests, [is] viewed as a disciplining social force oppressive to large segments of the community in whose name it [speaks]" (Seidman, 1997, p. 125).

The competing visions and strategies of assimilation (homonormativity) and transformation (queer futurity) have been in perennial tension throughout LGBT history. These perspectives frame the contemporary debate now taking place regarding the social and political meaning of the changing status of the "LGBT community" in America and raise many important questions: Who makes up the community? What does it mean to be a member? And, who gets to decide? In the next section I examine the debate over same-sex marriage, the issue that has defined the contemporary LGBT movement, to illustrate the differences in the logic of homonormativity and queer futurity: One seeks access and acceptance into existing institutions while the other insists on "potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1).

Queer Futurity and Homonormativity

> Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer…We have never been queer yet, yet queerness exists for us an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future…Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present…We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*…Queerness is… not simply a being but a doing for and toward

> the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world. (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1, italics in original)

Queerness and claiming a queer identity is a politics of possibility. It provides a way of thinking about "the production of culture and what difference *difference* makes. Queer presents an opportunity to complicate the unquestioned understandings and intersections of the sex-gender-sexuality-desire matrix" (Johnson & Kivel, 2007, p. 102, italics in original). It challenges us to move beyond the status quo, to take apart identity categories, to disrupt the dichotomous constructs of gender and sexuality, and to blur group boundaries. In the queer politics of deconstruction, unyielding collective categories (gay/straight, man/woman) are an obstacle to resistance and change. Sexual and gender identities are viewed as socially constructed and socially situated products, and these socially reproduced binaries are the basis for and currency of oppression: "fluid, unstable experiences of self become fixed primarily in the service of social control" (Gamson, 1995, p. 391). A queer modality seeks the transformation of society and views sexual liberation as intricately related to other struggles for dignity and freedom (Pronger, 2000). Queer futurity looks past the options available in the present towards the potential of what could be, what should be.

The transformational logic of queer futurity is in direct contrast to the assimilationist logic of the homonormative approach gay men and lesbians have adopted in the past several decades to make themselves an effective political force and gain "virtual equality" (Vaid, 1995). Lisa Duggan (2002) is credited for theorizing the concept of homonormativity to describe a political agenda promoted by mainstream lesbian and gay organizations, one that promotes heteronormative ideals such as marriage, child-rearing, the military, and the "free" market.

Homonormativity “is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (p. 179).

In order to pursue this political agenda and gain access to dominant institutions, gays and lesbians have given themselves what various civil rights movements had: a collective identity with distinct group boundaries. Contemporary organizing reflects an “ethnic” model of identity in which lesbians and gays share “the same fixed, natural essence, a self with same-sex desires” and “the shared oppression…[of] the denial of the freedoms and opportunities to actualize this self” (Gamson, 1995. 391). Homonormative logic requires a unified gay subject with distinct group boundaries for successful political gain. And the political pursuit has been a single-issue politics –- to end the discrimination against lesbian and gay people. And, to some degree and in important arenas, it has worked.

Identity politics has proven to be a powerful tool for gaining meaningful legal rights in the lives of LBGTQ people. In the past decade, “policy wins for LGBT equal rights in the United States have been dramatic and significant” (Vaid, 2012, para. 9). For example, same-sex marriage is legal in 36 states and the District of Columbia, the “don’t ask, don’t tell” military policy was repealed, anti-discrimination ordinances have been enacted on both state and local levels, legislation has been passed to address bullying in schools, and transgender people have been added to existing civil-rights laws. However, for all of the achievements in recent history, the mainstream gay and lesbian rights movements has done little to challenge the “hierarchies, institutions, or traditions” that created and perpetuate the injustice and oppression to which they have been subjected. Thus, virtual equality has been established in numerous realms, creating a state of conditional equality that grants

legal and formal equal rights to LGBT people but does not "transform the institutions of society that repress sexual, racial, and gender difference" (Vaid, 2012, para. 7).

The homonormative strategy that the LGBT movement has pursued over the past quarter century appears far more myopic than what it sought in the 1970s and 1980s, when sexual liberation was not conceived as a single struggle that required clear categories of collective identity. For example, after the Stonewall riot of 1969, gay and lesbian activists formed the Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in New York City. The organization drew from the various radical social movements of the time and aimed for a revolutionary transformation of society. As opposed to fighting the ban on gays in the military, the GLF protested the Vietnam War. They marched alongside members of the Black Panther Party and drew from the work of radical feminists. They viewed themselves as a part of "larger movement of oppressed minorities seeking the overthrow of a destructive social order" (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997, p. 321). GLF rejected pragmatic, assimilationist politics; its statement of purpose declared,

> We are a revolutionary homosexual group of men and women formed with the realization that complete sexual liberation for all people cannot come about unless existing social institutions are abolished. We reject society's attempt to impose sexual roles and definitions of our nature…" (D'Emilio & Freedman, 1997, p. 321)

Many who support the assimilationist, pragmatic agenda pursued by contemporary LGBT activists in the United States would reject the GLF statement of purpose as naïve, impractical, or merely utopian. However, as Muñoz (2009) suggested, this statement is useful for illuminating the gulf between the GLF and the logic of the present movement. The "we" in the statement can be viewed, not in terms of a ossified collective category, but in the logic of futurity. He explains,

> The "we" speaks to a "we" that is "not yet conscious," the future society that is being invoked and addressed at the same moment. The "we" is not content to describe who the collective is but more nearly describes what the collective and the larger social order *could be, what it should be*…This is to say that the field of utopian possibility is one in which multiple forms of belonging in difference adhere to a belonging in collectivity (Muñoz, 2009, p. 20, italics added for emphasis).

Muñoz went on to explain that "multiple forms of belonging-in-difference" and extensive critiques of social inequalities are lacking in the contemporary mainstream LGBT movement. Instead, by constructing LGBT people as a single, unified community, complex internal differences and sexualities are oversimplified (Gamson, 1995). One of the main critiques of a narrow identity politics is the reification of identities that leads to constraining individual freedom by discouraging multiple and contradictory meanings, allying sameness with unity, deterring internal dissent, demanding conformity, and persecuting difference. Thus, the logic of homonormativity restricts an individual's ability to creatively interpret one's identity by rewarding LGBT people who come the closest to impersonating heteronormative standards by allowing them access to rights and legitimation. In contrast, those LGBT individuals at the bottom of the hierarchy are seen as a threat to the "just-like-everyone-else" class of homonormative individuals and are marginalized and excluded.

A campaign that illustrates the homonormative politics of the contemporary movement is "Americans for Marriage Equality," which states that "Only marriage can provide true equality" (n.d.). This campaign is promoted by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest LGBT civil rights organization in the United States whose mission is "to end discrimination against LGBT citizens and realize a world

that achieves fundamental fairness and equality for all" ("Mission Statement," n.d.) The right to marry provides real and concrete benefits to lesbian and gay couples including social recognition, legal rights, and financial advantages. According to the HRC, there are 1,138 benefits, rights, and protections provided on the basis of marital status in Federal law (HRC.org). Some of them include: filing joint income tax returns with the IRS and state taxing authorities; receiving Social Security, Medicare, and disability benefits for spouses; receiving veterans' and military benefits for spouses; obtaining insurance benefits through spouses' employers; taking family leave to care for your spouse during an illness; receiving wages, workers' compensation, and retirement plan benefits for a deceased spouse; visiting your spouse in a hospital intensive care unit or during restricted visiting hours in other parts of a medical facility; making medical decisions for your spouse if he or she becomes incapacitated and unable to express wishes for treatment; filing for stepparent or joint adoption; obtaining immigration and residency benefits for noncitizen spouse; and having visiting rights in jails and other places where visitors are restricted to immediate family. These are meaningful, tangible legal rights in the lives of LGBT people.

According to the HRC, marriage brings equality and legal rights to all. However, queer activists argue the "all" conceived by the HRC is in fact a privileged "some" that includes only an extremely limited vision of kinship and living arrangements and denies the history of queer people who do not fit within the heteronormative structure of what a relationship looks like. Gay marriage furthers the dominance of marriage as the only legitimate site of intimacy and "potentially exacerbates class-based inequality by maintaining a legal system in which certain economic and civil rights are only afforded to married couples" (Shah, 2009, n.p.). Additionally, rather than contesting dominant heteronormative assumptions, gay

marriage upholds and sustains them by pushing for full gay and lesbian inclusion in traditional normative neoliberal institutions. Instead of challenging binary gender roles as heterosexist, gay marriage normalizes the homosexual body to access privilege and leads to the creation of hierarchies and a politics of exclusion.

In contrast to the promise of equal rights for all, Butler (2004) demonstrated how gay marriage renders diverse sexual practices and relationships that are not recognized by the law "illegible or, worse, untenable," and leads to the formation of new hierarchies in public discourse. According to Butler, "these hierarchies not only enforce the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate queer lives, but they also produce tacit distinctions among forms of illegitimacy" (2004, p. 106). The logic of homonormativity demands that in order to maintain similarities to one group, dissimilarities to another must be maintained; therefore, boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are carefully policed and those who do not conform to respectable and recognizable relationship types are marginalized.

Thus, the strong claims of queer futurity: that the logic of homonormativity makes a grave error in seeking admission into traditional institutions such as marriage without challenging the root cultural system; that the discussion must be expanded beyond marriage politics; that the diverse ways people form relationships, practice love, create communities, establish households, and structure families should be recognized and honored;[5] that it is necessary to separate the "is" of facts and truths from the "could be" of potential (Marcuse, cited in Gordon, 2004, p. 142); that this is *not* how it must be; and that it is essential to see beyond the quagmire of the present.

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[5] See "Beyond same sex marriage: A new strategic vision for all our families and working relationships (2006), http://www.beyondmarriage.org

The positioning of the impossibility and the undesirability of change has been so successful in contemporary discourse that Jameson (2007) observed, "most of us are probably unconsciously convinced of these principles, and of the eternity of the system, and incapacitated to imagine anything else in any way that carries conviction…" (p. 231). For Foucault, the practice of questioning the limits of our most certain ways of knowing is critique. Critique requires us to respond to the present by asking, "What is the relation of knowledge to power such that our epistemological certainties turn out to support a way of structuring the world that forecloses alternative possibilities?" (Butler, 2002) The practice of critique reveals the prevailing conditions of truth and power as contingent and creates the possibility for disrupting the self-sacrificing relationship of obedience to the authority of prevailing norms (Foucault, 1997). Queer futurity maintains that assimilationist politics do not represent what is actually possible or impossible, realizable or unrealizable; they represent what is allowed to be viewed as possible or impossible, realizable or unrealizable.

Ahmed (2010) pointed out "just how threatening it can be to imagine alternatives to a system that survives by grounding itself in inevitability." She continued by describing how a "false consciousness about the world is what blocks other possible worlds, as a blockage that makes possibles impossible, such that possibles are lost before they can be lived, experienced, or imagined" (p. 165) Ahmed asserted that consciousness does not belong to an individual, but is passed down and through the structure of the social world. False consciousness is inherited when an individual is socialized to see truths in certain areas and falsities in others. Among other consequences, false consciousness misrecognizes the cause of suffering. Consciousness is about recognizing that society is arranged in a way that causes inequality and that society is arranged in a way that promises marriage as a

site of legitimation. This promise excludes other forms of families, relationships, households and communities and upholds marriage as the only legitimate site of intimacy. In contrast, queer futurity creates a space in which the instinct of freedom can be cultivated, hunger for authentic and just communities are nourished, and the recognition that current conditions are only one possibility yet are spoken as inevitable truth.

Current Study

The logic of queer futurity prescribes that the homonormative approach the LGBT movement has pursued in the recent past has squandered the potential to pose a challenge to the status quo (Vaid, 2012). According to Pronger (2000), gay community sport has contributed to this process through its homonormative and assimilationist culture. LGBT-identified sports clubs, formed as a result of individuals creating visible and active communities based upon a shared identity, are understood to be potential sites of transformation and/or assimilation. The dialectic relationship between sport and identity, in which identities are fluid, unstable, and constantly performed and in process, "engages with sport as a dynamic social and cultural force. The mutable nature of sport, of identity and of the relationship between the two offers possibilities for resistance, contestation and transgression of hegemonic gender and sexual power relations" (Aitchinson, 2007, p. 1).

In this regard, some researchers contended that "gay sports spaces offer an alternative, 'inclusive' sports environment" in which LGBT people can participate without fear of discrimination, not only related to sexuality, but often extending into other exclusionary boundaries such as ethnicity, gender, physical ability, class, and health status (Watson, Tucker & Drury, 2013, p. 1235). While others argued that the assimilationist approach of LGBT sport, which requires the appropriation of mainstream sporting practices, reinforces dichotomous binaries such as gay/straight,

man/woman, winner/loser and, thus, perpetuates existing power structures (Pronger, 2000).

Sport is a normalizing institution that produces and reveals inequalities (Donnelly, 1996). However, no specific institutions are inherently oppressive nor are others inherently empowering (Foucault, 1997). Instead, people are actively involved in producing, sustaining, and resisting power structures. LGBT sports provides a rich context to explore if alternatives to the institution of sport, which "survives by grounding itself in inevitability," are being imagined, if there is recognition that the constructs of sport and identity are causing inequality, and if there is consciousness that society is arranged in a way that promises assimilation as a site of legitimation.

This research explored how community and identity were constituted, practiced, negotiated, and problematized in an LGBT softball league. The project endeavored to address the questions: What is the meaning and significance of community for the League participants? To what extent and how does participation in the League affect gender and sexual identity discourse and practice? And, in the context of the League, how are dominant ideologies and power structures reinforced, disrupted, and produced?

CHAPTER 2

THEORETIC AND RESEARCH FOUNDATIONS: A REVIEW OF KEY LITERATURE

The rise of lesbian and gay sports clubs and events parallels the rise of the lesbian and gay movement. Liberationists celebrated gay and lesbian sexuality and called on people to "come out of the closet" and be visible. The affirmation of an identity other than exclusively heterosexual was viewed as much as a political act as an individual or social one (Eaklor, 2008). This new visibility facilitated the development of gay and lesbian political and cultural communities. The movement's emphasis on gay pride led to the expansion and creation of community organizations such as professional associations, community centers, and sports leagues. According to D'Emilio (1983), "gayness and lesbianism began to encompass an identity that for many included a wide array of private and public activities" (p. 239).

As the movement based on sexuality as a signifier of identity expanded, so did the creation of lesbian and gay specific organizations, including recreation-based sporting leagues. Members of sporting communities that share a common sexual identity, in some respects, have potential to transform the formerly hostile environment of sport into a vehicle for the creation of a gay and lesbian counterculture. Four decades ago, it was unfathomable that sport could be a site for an expression of gay pride, as is now the case with many LGBT sports leagues and events (Pronger, 2000). However, as Pronger (2000) contends, arguments that progress has been made towards gay and lesbian transformation in the arena of sport are overstated. Despite increased visibility of lesbian and gay people, the culture of mainstream sport continues to be overwhelmingly homophobic and a strict enforcer of gender norms and roles. He further asserts that, "the very suggestion that there has been significant progress for lesbians and gays in sport (or, for that

matter, in society in general) is an ironic expression of the low expectations of a deeply homophobic consciousness" (p. 224-225).

LGBT leagues and events have generally been viewed as having the potential to be either assimilationist or transformative: If assimilationist, they would be a force for normalizing homosexuality; if transformative, they would challenge heteronormativity and homophobia, as well as contribute to wider social change. The manner in which the current debate has been portrayed is understandable historically and, to some extent, a useful starting point, but a more nuanced, contextualized and complex view is essential. In the following sections I explore leisure and sport, the social construction of community and identity, constraining and enabling functions of power, and the study of LGBT leisure and sport in order to highlight the conceptual ideas and theoretical frameworks that inform this study of an LGBT softball league.

Leisure and Sport

Leisure is conceptualized in nearly as many ways as it is experienced. At its most basic level, it can be understood as discretionary time; essentially, it is free or unobligated time that allows for personal choices (Russell, 2005). Leisure is a significant social, cultural, and economic force that greatly impacts the well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction of all people (Edginton, Jordan, DeGraaf, & Edginton, 2002). However, it is important not only individually but also collectively. According to Russell (2005), "How we express ourselves through our pastimes helps define who we are as a community, as a society, and as a world. Our pastimes are likewise shaped by who we are collectively" (p. 137). Therefore, leisure both reflects and shapes our cultural values (Kraus, 1994).

Leisure provides the opportunity for the pursuit of various activities such as sport, which is a popular leisure activity that plays an important role in the lives of

millions of Americans (Prettyman & Lampman, 2006). Sports can be characterized, and differentiated from other types of leisure activities, as being competitive, having widely accepted rules, and generally involving physical activity (Kelly & Freysinger, 2000). Throughout this dissertation, scholarly work from the fields of both leisure and sport will be utilized, with sport being situated within the context of leisure (and viewed as a form of leisure).

The influence of leisure on one's life, whether positive or negative, is a highly important determinant of life satisfaction and well-being in U.S. culture (Leitner & Leitner, 2004). For example, research has found leisure can contribute positively to a healthy and active lifestyle (Edginton *e*t al., 2002), provide opportunities for individuals to explore their identities and build self-confidence (Kelly, 1996; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000; Krane, Barber, & McClung; Shaw, Kleiber, & Caldwell, 1995), support people in challenging dominant ideologies and socially imposed norms (Bialeschki & Pearce, 1997; Johnson, 2008; Kleiber & Kane, 1984; Wearing, 1992), and facilitate the development of networks and communities that provide functional and emotional support (Elling, Knop, & Knoppers, 2003; Jacobson & Samdahl, 1998; Johnson, 2008; Son, Yarnall, & Kerstetter, 2010). On the other hand, leisure has the potential to negatively impact one's well-being (Edginton *et al.,* 2002) through creating and reinforcing dominant ideologies such as heterosexism and hegemonic masculinity (Hekma, 1998; Johnson, 2002 & 2008; Kivel, 1996 & 1997), reproducing gender roles and inequality (Wearing, 1992), and enhancing feelings of stigmatization and isolation (Caldwell, Kivel, Smith & Hayes, 1998; Kivel, 1994 & 1997).

Leisure cannot be explored in isolation from the wider structures and cultures from which it emerges and must be viewed "as a site of conflict, contestation, transgression and transformation" (Aitchison, 2003, p. 46; Prettyman & Lampman, 2006). For LGBT people, leisure must be viewed within the context of power relations

that are constructed and reproduced through heterosexism, homophobia, hegemonic masculinity, and other interlocking structures of oppression and privilege, such as sexism, racism, classism, ageism and ableism. Sport, more than other leisure activities, has historically been, and still is, overwhelmingly hostile to the presence of gay and lesbians (Pronger, 2000).

Sport is one of Western culture's most powerful forces for reinforcing the ideology of heterosexual male superiority and dominance (Eitezen & Sage, 2003). Sporting culture not only distinguishes sharply between masculine and feminine, it also subordinates the broad range of actual masculinities to hegemonic masculinity, the culturally idealized form of masculine character. The rigid and limiting practice of hegemonic masculinity requires "the subordination of women, the marginalization of gay men, and the connecting of masculinity to toughness and competitiveness" (Connell, 1990, p. 94). Despite increased LGBT visibility, mainstream sports continue to be "overwhelmingly hostile" to an obvious LGBT presence (Pronger, 2000). Messner (1992) explains that, "The extent of homophobia in the sports-world is staggering. Boys learn early that to be gay, to be suspected of being gay, or even to be unable to prove one's heterosexual status is not acceptable" (p. 34). Because identifying as gay or lesbian in the heavily masculinized arena of sport can result in stigmatization, harassment, and violence, many LGBT people are dissuaded completely from participating in sports activity, while others remain in the closet while playing on predominantly heterosexual teams. Another increasingly popular option is to participate in LGBT sports clubs and events.

Social Construction of Community and Identity

In response to a history of being excluded, silenced, and rendered invisible, lesbian and gay activists in the 60s called on people to acknowledge their sexual identities privately and publicly. This emphasis on identity politics, organizing based

on a single common identity, led to the creation of organizations (such as political groups, community organizations, and sports leagues) that allowed for visibility and collective power. Due to the relational nature of power, the subject position of lesbians and gays, which had previously been used to shame and stigmatize, was now seen as a source of pride and cause for mobilization. However, the weaknesses and limits of identity-based organizing soon generated conflict within the LGBT movement. Critics of identity politics contend that organizing around a single identity ignores and debases the multiplicity of identities actually held by people. For example, groups of people who come together on the basis of their sexuality will still find imbalances of power such as sexism, classism, and racism (Pharr, 2010). Correspondingly, critiques of community have focused on the universalization of an identity in order to produce unity.

Construct of Community

> Because the term community serves as a core construct for organizing a variety of social groups for very different ends, it is central to the symbolic and organizational structures of intersecting systems of power. The idea of community constitutes an elastic social, political, and theoretic construct that holds a variety of contradictory meanings around which diverse social practices and understandings occur. (Collins, 2010, p. 10)

Community has been conceived of in myriad ways. Some notions include communities of place where people are brought together by geographic boundaries; communities of identity where people share common characteristics or affiliations; and communities of interest where people share the same pursuit or passion. Although there are substantial differences about what comprises community, relationships (real or imagined) are at the core of all definitions. According to Freie (1998), it is the sense of connectedness, of mutual interest and support, that is often

described as the essence of community. Liepins (2000) contends that community can be viewed as a form of intentional collectivity in which people construct shared (and/or contested) meanings, "such as commonality, social connection, nurturance and the identification of belonging and otherness" (p. 31).

The ideal of community is understandably compelling. However, Joseph (2002) argues, "against the idealization of community as a utopian state of human relatedness, and more important, against the idea that communities are organic, natural, spontaneous occurrences" (p. ix). The concept of community is often evoked by identity-based social movements to mobilize constituents and validate their cause to a larger public. As a result, this complex sense of solidarity should be problematized as universalizing identities and relations, conjuring binary oppositions (e.g., community/individual, belonging/otherness, dominate/subordinate), and requiring a policing of boundaries. Communities are created and enacted by different people for different purposes in different places and times. Young (1990) contends that the essence of community "privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, [and] sympathy over recognition of the limits of one's understanding of others from their point of view" (p. 301).

History of Assimilation and Transformation Debate

The lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBT) community is not immune from this critique. Although the LGBT community is often portrayed as a homogenous group with a single identity politics, in reality it is as diverse as the U.S. general population itself and plagued with internal divisions. LGBT people live throughout the United States; same-sex couples can be found in every state and in 93% of all U.S. counties (Gates, 2012). Data from the Gallup 2012 survey show that African Americans (4.6%), Hispanics (4.0%), and Asians (4.3%) are more likely than whites (3.2%) to identify as LGBT (Gates & Newport, 2012). A recent survey of more

than 6,400 transgender Americans found that 24% identified as people of color (Grant, et al., 2011). In addition to the disproportionately higher representation of LGBT status among nonwhite population, Gallup's analysis shows that LGBT Americans tend to have lower levels of education and income than other segments of the population. LGBT people are extremely diverse and consequently have diverse needs and wants.

Throughout the history of the movement, LGBT people (at different times with different groupings) have clashed over a fundamental question about the overall goal. Is the movement aimed at assimilating people into the mainstream or is the goal to seek societal transformation? Assimilation and transformation are "interconnected and often congruent; the former makes it possible to imagine the latter. But [the] pursuit of them takes different roads and leads to very different outcomes" (Vaid, 1995, p. 37).

The 1969 Stonewall riot, involving the police raid of a gay bar in New York City's Greenwich Village, is frequently cited as the event that marked a transition from a moderate assimilationist approach to a more transformational one. The liberationists of that era, inspired by the social justice movements of the 1960s, attracted people because of a common sexual identity, as well as similar political interests (D'Emilio, 1983). The movement had a more radical and far-reaching vision than the homophile movement that preceded it, which had used a more cautious approach and was conservative in its demands (Richardson & Seidman, 2002). In seeking tolerance and acceptance by mainstream society, the homophile movement adopted the line, "We (homosexuals) are just like you (heterosexuals) except for the minor difference of our homosexuality" (Eaklor, 2008, p. 158). In contrast, the liberationists were more critical of societal institutions and were interested in revolution, organizing, and mobilizing (Richardson & Seidman, 2002). Instead of

portraying a favorable public image of the respectable gay and lesbian that could fit into American society, they had a distinctive and defiant edge and claimed that it was America that needed to change, not them. Vaid (1995) outlines four ideas that the Gay Liberation movement introduced into the existing homophile movement:

> (1) the notion that coming out and pursuing gay and lesbian visibility held the key to our freedom; (2) that queer freedom would profoundly change gender roles, sexism and heterosexual institutions like the family; (3) that gay, lesbian and bisexual people were an integral part of the broad demand for social change and needed a political philosophy that made connections to race, gender and economic issues; and (4) that the creation of a gay and lesbian counterculture was an essential part of establishing lesbian and gay identity. (p. 57)

During the 1970s, the focus on coming out and celebrating homosexuality led to the development of lesbian and gay subcultures, as institutions and organizations were created that were not centered around the bars (Miller, 2006). Gay and lesbian enclaves were formed as people migrated to cities and opened feminist bookstores, gay male communes, churches, sports leagues, and gay and lesbian businesses. During this time, homosexuality became a lifestyle, and this meant very different things to different people.

The problem of diversity was quickly brought to the forefront of the movement. The answer to what constituted a gay and lesbian issue was wide-ranging and depended on who was asking. For lesbians, sexism was a lesbian issue; for Hispanic gay men, racism was a gay issue; for poor gay people, classism was a gay issue; "but for middle-class white men, stigma due to homosexuality itself was the issue that mattered most" (Vaid, 1995, p. 59). Over time, gay liberation, and its commitment to transforming economic, political, and social institutions, acquiesced

to a single-interest vision in which issues pertaining to sexual orientation were the only legitimate gay and lesbian issues.

Tension between Mainstream Gay or Lesbian Movement and Queer Logics

One preeminent contemporary debate within the LGBT community is framed by the distinction between mainstream gay or lesbian versus queer, that is, assimilation versus transformation. Mainstream contemporary organizing reflects an ethnic model of identity in which gays and lesbians share a fixed, natural essence and are in need of civil rights protection (Gamson, 1995; Esterberg, 2002). In order to pursue an assimilationist, right-based agenda, this model constructs gays and lesbians as a unified community with distinct group boundaries. By forging a collective identity, this model has proven to be an effective force in this United States for gaining legal and political rights. However, this strategy simplifies "complex internal differences and complex sexual identities" and avoids "challenging the system of meanings that underlies the political oppression: the division of the world into man/woman and gay/straight. On the contrary, [it ratifies and reinforces] these categories" (Gamson, 1995, p. 400).

On the other hand, queer logic, which emerged as an heir to the gay liberation movement, argues that identities are historical and socially reproduced binaries (gay/straight, man/woman) are inaccurate, untenable, and oppressive. Queer logic questions the very foundation upon which lesbian and gay politics has been built, and deconstructs "ideas of a 'sexual minority' and a 'gay community,' indeed of 'gay' and 'lesbian' and even 'man' and 'woman. It builds on central difficulties of identity-based organizing: the instability of identities both individual and collective, their made-up yet necessary character'" (Gamson, 1995, p. 390).

Queer logic seeks to deconstruct identity categories, challenge the status quo, and transform society. This can be contrasted with homonormativity which employs

an ethnic model of identity, looks to assimilate into existing institutions, and pursues a single-issue politics. Rather than questioning racism, classism, sexism, or militarism, as did the movements before them, the contemporary rights-based movement concentrates its resources on marketability, visibility, marriage, and the military (Binnie, 2009; Butler, 2004; Duggan, 2002; N. Shah, 2006; S. Shah, 2009; Vaid, 1995, 2012). This logic of homonormativity promotes heteronormative ideals, such as what makes life manageable and secure, and institutions such as marriage and the military (Duggan, 2002). This strategy seeks participation in existing institutions and is not concerned with undermining hegemonic structures including gender, race, class, sex, citizenship and power.

Homonormativity demands a status and the right to practices that lead to the creation and perpetuation of hierarchies and a politics of exclusion. People who come the closest to impersonating heteronormative standards are deemed most worthy of receiving rights and legitimation. In contrast, those LGBT individuals at the bottom of the hierarchy are seen as a threat to the just-like-everyone-else class of homonormative individuals receiving rights and legitimation from the state. In order to maintain similarities to one group, dissimilarities to another must be maintained, therefore, boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are carefully policed and those who do not conform to the narrow parameters of respectability and legibility are marginalized.

Butler (2004) cautions that fighting for rights to become "real," that is, to have one's identity legitimized and incorporated into the existing system, can itself overlook the more fundamental problem, which is that the system itself is constraining. She acknowledges the strategic necessity that requires LGBT and other individuals with non-normative identities to look toward the system for their legitimacy and rights; however, she warns that this approach must be taken with a

critical eye toward disrupting constructed discourses of legitimacy. Otherwise, it may serve to reinforce the policing, rather than loosening, of restrictive and binary ideas of gender, sexuality, and kinship.

The tension between transformation and assimilation strategies has characterized the gay and lesbian movement since its inception, and the question of what constitutes meaningful social change is at the heart of this conflict. According to Vaid (1995), the LGBT movement has and is pursuing a mainstream civil rights strategy that aims for assimilation into mainstream society and reinforces rather than challenges dominant cultural norms, thus it is only capable of producing a simulation of equality that fails to transform culture. Assimilation seeks heterosexual society's tolerance and acceptance, increased visibility, and fair treatment, and this has led to a state of "virtual equality," in which "gay and lesbian people are at once insiders…and outsiders,…marginal and mainstream,…assimilated and irreconcilably queer" (Vaid, 1995, p. 4). Instead of a movement grounded in homonormative logic, she argues for an innovative LGBT movement that moves "beyond seeking the reform of laws to maximizing the life chances, freedom, and self-determination of all LGBT people" (Vaid, 2012, p. xi). Instead of seeking access and acceptance into existing institutions, the logic of queer futurity imagines alternatives and creates possibilities.

Power as Constraining and Enabling

The understanding of the constitution and meaning of LGBT community, or LGBT communities, is multiple and contradictory. For some, community might be a concept that conjures images of universal togetherness, for others it might embody notions of commonality, and, for still others, it might represent a failed promise (Ahmed, 2003). By acknowledging the multiplicity of people who may be invested in a certain construction of community, but have unequal access to its benefits, it is

possible to examine how power operates (Liepins, 2000, p. 27). "Because the construct of community constitutes both a principle of actual social organization and an idea that people use to make sense of and shape their everyday lived realities," it is central to investigating intersecting power relations (Collins, 2010, p. 8).

According to Hall (2000), identity (be it gender, sexual, racial, etc.) is the intersection between the discourses and practices that position individuals as subjects and the ways in which individuals position themselves within these discourses. Hall's (2000) conceptualization asserts that identities are never unified, and, instead, are "increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation" (p. 17). Additionally, Butler (1990) contends that different identity categories, such as heterosexual, homosexual, man, and woman, are effects of discourse and power relations, as opposed to essential or inherent characteristics. For example, the performative nature of gender demands that, through the repetitive citation of language, gesture, dress, and symbols, we consolidate an impression of being a man or a woman (Butler, 1988). Although gender is an unstable identity that is constantly (re)created it produces real consequences. Gender (and sex and sexuality) norms "are not only instances of power; and they do not only reflect broader relations of power; they are one way that power operates. After all, power cannot stay in power without reproducing itself in some way" (Butler, 2009, pp. II-III). Gender (or one's learned performance of unified gender behavior) is entirely a social construction, a fiction that, therefore, is open to resistance, contestation, and transformation. However, those that exist outside the limits of established norms, whether gender, sex, or sexuality, become ineligible for recognition as a subject.

Speaking to the historically situated and fluid nature of identities, some scholars have implied that the rapid rate of assimilation of gay and lesbian into mainstream society has resulted in contemporary life as "post-gay" (Ghaziani, 2011) or "beyond the closet" (Seidman, 2002). These concepts suggest that a gay or lesbian identity is no longer central to a lesbian or gay person's self-definition. During this era, activists construct collective identity using a difference muting "us and them" framework as opposed to the oppositional "us versus them." This period is characterized by making connections to the majority, downplaying differences, and accentuating similarities to the dominant culture. This politics of normalization is not without problems, however. Because transformational changes have not been made and heterosexuality is still privileged, the post-gay world resonates most with those who can most closely conform to heteronormative standards.

Homophobia, Heteronormativity, and Hegemonic Masculinity

"Homophobia is usually the last oppression to be mentioned, the last to be taken seriously, the last to go. But it is extremely serious, sometimes to the point of being fatal" (Smith, 1993). At a time that public tolerance for gay rights is at a record high (Gallop Poll, 2013), in 2013 alone, 1,402 sexual-orientation biased hate crimes were reported to the FBI (fbi.gov). There is ample evidence that across the United States violent hate crimes are a grave, pervasive problem. Because hate crimes attack a core aspect of the victim's identity and group membership, what distinguishes them from other types of crime is not their ubiquity, rather, it is the psychological impact they have on the victims, their friends, their families, and the entire gay community (Herek, 2009). Bias motivated attacks send a message to LGBT people that they are not safe if they are visible; as long as individuals "transgress the bounds of 'appropriate' sexual and gender identity" they are in danger of harassment, persecution, and violence (Kivel, 2007, p. 164).

For people who exist outside the "dominative model of sexual correctness" (Rubin, 1993, p. 3), the boundaries, binaries, and exclusions of community can result in oppression, marginalization, and stigmatization. Butler (2009) uses the term "precarity" to designate certain populations that are at a heightened risk of exposure to vulnerability, violence, and death. Research has found that -- compared with their heterosexual peers -- lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people have a higher prevalence of mental health disorders, including depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, affective disorders, and suicide (Cochran, 2001; King et al., 2008; Mayer et al., 2008). Mental health disorders are not inherent to being a member of LGBT population, rather, they can result from the stigma, prejudice, and discrimination experienced by members of minority groups (Mayer et al., 2008; Mays & Cochran, 2001). Researchers propose that LGBT people, like members of other minority groups, are exposed to chronic social stress as a result of their stigmatized social status and identity (Meyer, 1995, 2003; Aneshensel & Phelan, 1999; Scheid & Horwitz, 1999).

The view that heterosexuality constitutes the only normal and valued form of social and sexual relations is known as heteronormativity. Thus, in a heteronormative culture, the privileging of heterosexuality is institutionalized and normalized to the point that it often goes unrecognized. Through institutions and individual members, homosexuality is degraded, discredited, and socially constructed as invalid relative to heterosexuality. According to Lenskyj (2013), "The concept of heteronormativity encompasses both homophobia and heterosexism, that is, active prejudice and discrimination against sexual minorities, as well as the implicit ideological assumptions that shape societal attitudes and practices" (p. 139).

As heteronormativity refers to the dominant form of sexuality, hegemonic masculinity refers to the culturally idealized form of masculinity within the gender

hierarchy (Connell, 1990). Society strongly encourages men to embody this type of masculinity because it legitimizes patriarchy and heterosexuality, which guarantees the dominant position of men and heterosexuals, and ensures the subordination of women and non-heterosexuals (Johnson, 2008). Kimmel (1994) argues that American men are socialized into a very rigid and limiting definition of masculinity. He states that men fear being ridiculed as too feminine by other men and this fear perpetuates homophobic and exclusionary masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is defined not only in relation to femininity, but also in relation to multiple, competing, and subordinated masculinities, such as racial and sexual minorities. Hegemonic masculinity (and gender in general) is socially constructed, historical, fluid, and unstable. Because hegemonic masculinity is socially constructed, it is not automatic and can be disrupted. Over time, it may even disrupt itself (Connell, 1992).

Leagues of Our Own

In contrast to the stress associated with precarity, there are also protective properties such as "group solidarity and cohesiveness" that shield LGBT people from the adverse mental health effects (Meyer, 2003, p. 6). Research has found that LGBT people rely primarily on their friendship networks for social support that acts as a buffer for stress associated with transgressing "appropriate" sexual and gender identities (Dewaele, Cox, Van den Berghe & Vincke, 2011). Lewis et al. (2002) found that participation in LGBT groups was associated with less anxiety and depression, reduced stress about sexual identity concealment around friends, family and the public, and decreased internal conflict related to sexual orientation. Frable, Wortman, and Joseph (1997) found that having gay friends and attending gay social events were associated with a positive gay identity, and that positive group identity was then related to high self-esteem, high well-being, and low distress. LGBT people

counteract minority stress by establishing alternative structures, communities, and values that enhance their groups (Crocker & Major, 1989; D'Emilio, 1983).

Through sport and community, LGBT sports leagues and events are situated within a social and historical context to create a space of assimilation and/or a space of transformation. Fraser (1993) calls these alternative spaces of transformation "counterpublics" and hooks (1990) refers to them as "spaces of radical openness." Counterpublics are "parallel discursive arenas" where marginalized groups "invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser, 1993, p. 67). These sites of resistance allow for the conceptualization of alternatives and "the production of counter-hegemonic discourse that is not just found in words but in habits of being and the way one lives" (p. 207). These spaces "nourish one's capacity to resist" and offer "the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternatives, new worlds" (hooks, p. 150).

Imagining alternatives requires what Foucault (1997) refers to as a critical attitude, or critique, "a certain way of thinking, speaking and acting, a certain relationship to what exists, to what one knows, to what one does, a relationship to society, to culture and to others" (p. 42). This relationship requires questioning present conditions, interrogating the dominant discourses of truth, and practicing the "art of voluntary insubordination" (p. 47). Critique creates possibility by disrupting the relationship between truth and power, challenging the limits of present discourse, and expanding what is considered recognizable, intelligible, and possible. Critique possesses transformational and emancipatory potential.

In the setting of LGBT leisure, critique is a practice whereby a subject gives herself the right to question the relationship between heterosexual/homosexual, masculine/feminine, and how truth, power, and discourse shape those dichotomies in

the context of sport. This questioning of reality can expose the "dialectical relationship between structure and agency and show how meaning systems within gay and lesbian communities are located along axes of difference" (Johnson & Kivel, 2007, p. 96). At the same time that LGBT individuals are stigmatized, discriminated against, and excluded, the discourse about homosexuality and gender also makes possible a "reverse discourse" (Foucault, 1978) that facilitates identification, mobilization, community building, and the founding of LGBT community organizations. Due to the relational nature of power, wherein it is not just a negative, coercive, or repressive force but something that is also resistive, productive, and positive, it is necessary to reflect critically on and examine how existing practices and institutions are both constraining and enabling.

LGBT communities are created by and for those who are ineligible as subjects and excluded from some dominant forms of community. Like all communities, LGBT communities "are affected by relations of power in the very ways in which they involve some bodies and not others" (Ahmed, 2003, p. 255). The discursive othering of certain bodies serves to define and regulate what constitutes a legitimate position for the human subject (Butler, 2004).

Using Foucault (1979, 1978), community can be conceived as a constraining and enabling process formed in and through power relations. Because there are no specific institutions or structures that enable subjects or others that constrain (Foucault, 1979, 1978), subjects are concurrently empowered and oppressed by the same discourses, institutions, and norms. Power is constraining and negative in the sense of the imposition of normalization and the ubiquitous standards against which one can be judged and oppressed in regards to sexuality. Concomitantly, power is positive and productive in enabling the subject position of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer.

Throughout the history of the gay liberation movement, organized sport has been an integral part in the development of LGBT communities (Cahn, 1994; Messner, 1992). LGBT sports clubs and events provide an opportunity for individuals to experience a sense of pride, a safe and welcoming environment, and feelings of belonging to the larger gay community (Elling, Knopp, & Knoppers, 2003). They also provide an opportunity, within the process of taking part in sports, for individuals and groups to challenge and reinforce homophobia, contest and strengthen existing sexual or gender norms, and foreclose and create possibilities for transformation and change. Through sport and community, LGBT sports leagues and events, founded as a result of single-identity politics and the constraining and enabling character of power, are situated within a social and historical context to create a space of legitimation and/or a space of liberation. Sporting communities that share a common sexual identity present rich contexts in which to address the meanings of LGBT community, politics of identity, and the lived experience of meaningful social change.

Research on LGBT Leisure and Sport

Research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBT) populations and leisure and sport emerged as a topic of exploration about thirty years ago. Thus far, although it has been over a quarter of a century, a dearth of articles has been published about sexual identity and leisure and sport. Kivel (2007) speculated that this omission reflects the controversial nature of sexual identity, its perception as personal as opposed to public, and the heteronormativity of the leisure field and society as a whole. Although the leisure and sport fields have been sluggish in including the LGBT population, research efforts have expanded considerably from the most nascent stage of description, justification, and theoretical appeals to the investigation of the politics of identity and the possibility of sport as resistance to heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity.

Theoretical and Conceptual Justifications

The earliest articles in the body of LGBT and leisure research consisted of descriptions of lesbian and gay leisure and justifications for why the leisure and recreation experiences and needs of this segment of the population should be studied. Three decades ago, Grossman and Wughalter (1985) addressed the previously ignored population of homosexual male gym members, including issues such as occupation, reasons for joining a gym, involvement in physical activities outside the gym and number of hours engaged in these activities, types of leisure activities, and information about dietary and smoking behavior. Their findings disclosed diverse occupational categories and challenged the popular stereotypes that gay men were interior designers and hair stylists. Additionally, the research contested the widespread image that male homosexuals' primary leisure experience was recreational sex and that they were, thereby, promiscuous (Grossman & Wughalter, 1985).

The authors explain that "homosexuals and heterosexuals are more alike than commonly assumed" and homosexuals often eagerly partake in recreational activities alongside heterosexuals; however, "there are times when homosexuals have special needs" (p. 7). In introducing the study in this way, the authors reveal a just-like-everybody-else mentality that is criticized by opponents of homonormativity. According to Shah (2009), this assimilationist approach upholds and sustains dominant heteronormative assumptions rather than contests them by pushing for full gay and lesbian inclusion in traditional normative neoliberal institutions. Conversely, the introduction of "special needs" could be read as equating homosexuality with disability, which suggests that the authors simultaneously furthered assimilation and marginalization.

Additionally, the construction of "the other" essentializes the homosexual identity as uniform. It creates a binary opposition of homosexual/heterosexual that falsely universalizes, creates overly general claims, and perpetuates stereotypes about the homosexual population, which is exactly what the article claims it is trying to counteract. For example, the authors asserted that the diversity of the professional categories of the participants "reflect(s) the diversity of the occupations of members of the gay population" and disputes the stereotype that the majority of homosexuals are "interior decorators, hair stylists, florists, or male models" (p. 10). The authors create a universalizing narrative based on the responses of ninety homosexuals in an isolated location that does not take into account race, ethnicity, gender, or class, and simultaneously produces a hierarchy of legitimacy for homosexual professions. The universalizing narrative makes false generalizations about a fictional homosexual and creates an account in which the just-like-everybody-else homosexual is dutifully participating in the neoliberal economy.

In other words, homosexuals who come the closest to impersonating heteronormative standards of professional success are deemed most worthy of receiving rights and legitimation. This also applies in terms of sexuality. Grossman and Wughalter's abandonment of a politics of sexual freedom, in return for the quest of homonormativity and respectability, can been seen in the report of the findings which "challenged the stereotype that the most prevalent leisure experience of male homosexuals is recreational sex and that they are, thereby, promiscuous" (p. 11). This demonstrates further the sanctioning and marginalizing of certain homosexualities whereby heteronormative standards of respectability are pursued.

However, it is important to recognize the specific cultural and social factors that shaped this research. According to Anderson (2011), the mid 80s was the apex of homophobia, which was spurred by the combination of the AIDS epidemic, the

right-wing backlash of the sixties and seventies, and the presidency of Ronald Reagan (who was allied to the Christian right) (Eaklor, 2008; Miller, 2006). "The New Right exploited AIDS as a weapon with which to maintain inequality, to overturn the achievements of the 1970s, and to return the nation to an era of more traditional heterosexual values" (Engel, 2001. p. 50). Harassment and violence directed at gay people more than doubled from 1985 to 1986; being open about one's sexuality meant risking physical injury, job, family, and health care, while people actually with HIV were refused treatment. Conservatives took advantage of this crisis to use AIDS to (re)link homosexuality with sickness and pathos. This apathy and the vehement anti-gay rhetoric, which targeted both men and women, "acted as a catalyst to unite people who identified as gay, lesbian, and bisexual" (Eaklor, 2008). The coming together of different people and perspectives eventuated debates over the assimilationist and transformationist strategies.

Grossman's later work (1992, 1995), commonly recognized as initiating scholarly dialogue about individuals who identify as lesbian and gay, explored and explained how the prejudice against and stigmatization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth results in rejection, isolation, abuse, and victimization. Isolation has detrimental cognitive, social, and emotional consequences; the most catastrophic of which is suicide. Grossman believed that recreation specialists and teachers are both responsible and able to create an environment where lesbian and gay youth can experience freedom and equality in leisure and education settings through the development of a culture of acceptance, inclusion, accurate information, and appropriate peer and adult role models. He provided specific examples of positive experiences that could be employed that would counteract the negative effects of stigmatization, isolation, and homophobia.

The research transitioned from focusing on a specific gym to surveying the national landscape. Pitts (1988) was one of the first authors to publish on the establishment of lesbian and gay organizations. She gathered demographic data to identify and describe gay and lesbian leisure organizations, organization founders and their motivations, and the activities offered. Only 33% (27) of the founders indicated any participation in organized sport prior to the development of and participation in their organization and its activities. The most frequently stated reasons for starting the organizations were (1) to provide organized sports activities specifically for the lesbian and gay community; (2) Gay Games inspired;[6] and (3) as a healthy alternative to the bars. The respondents also identified their current motives and indicated if these had changed since the founding (initiation dates ranged from 1976 to 1986). Eighty-eight percent indicated that their current motives were threefold: (1) to organize sports activities primarily for gay and lesbians; (2) to promote or encourage participation regardless of skill; and (3) to promote a positive image of gay people.

Pitts later (1997) conducted a longitudinal study that disclosed an emerging lesbian sports industry. She also specified two factors in the development of lesbian and gay sports organizations: the mainstream market's failure to serve the lesbian and gay population satisfactorily, and the failure of the bar scene to encourage healthy lifestyles. The work of Grossman and Wughalter (1985), Pitts (1988), and Grossman (1992, 1995) provided the theoretical justifications for why the experiences of lesbian and gay individuals should be included in leisure research and laid the foundation for the next generation of research that focused on the leisure experiences of LGBT individuals. Although pioneering, the initial research was

[6] The Gay Games will be discussed further in the section "Research on LGBT Leisure."

problematic on various levels that contemporary queer scholars address, such as contributing to assimilation, essentialism, and privatization.

Individual Leisure Experiences

In the mid-90s, the literature transitioned from substantiating its place in the field of leisure research to conducting empirical studies elucidating the leisure experience of individuals. This also marks the juncture where the research moved away from assuming a common meaning of leisure for all LGBT people to exploring the broad and diverse meanings of leisure to individuals who identify as LGBT. The findings revealed that, although sexual identity is a basis for difference in leisure behaviors, the differences in leisure meanings and experiences are not based solely or even primarily upon individual characteristics of LGBT individuals. Instead, cultural forces such as heterosexism and homophobia influence the choices available to sexual minorities. The authors argued that sexual minorities are distinctly aware of their difference from the dominant culture, and as a result they are often excluded or exclude themselves from sport and leisure (Kivel, 2007).

Two of the studies that addressed sexual minorities in the leisure studies literature examined leisure experiences and behaviors of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning young people (Caldwell, Kivel, Smith, & Hayes,1998; Kivel, 1994). Kivel (1994) used qualitative interviews to examine how youth, ages 18-23, define, conceptualize, and understand their personal leisure or free-time. Many of her findings supported the theoretical assertions made by Grossman (1992) regarding the negative effects of homophobia. She found that the social construction of leisure for lesbian and gay youth involves the three central themes of sexual identity, issues of safety, and coming out. LGB youth do not differ from their heterosexual peers in their enjoyment or conceptualization of leisure; rather, the difference in their experiences lies in the pejorative way society views homosexuality and how

subsequent stigmatization impacts leisure choices. Caldwell et al. (1998) also discovered negative consequences of homophobia in an exploratory study regarding the leisure experiences and behaviors of adolescents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning their sexual identities. This quantitative study focused on an expansive set of sexual identity issues and concluded that sexually gay and questioning youth experience leisure differently and more negatively than their non-gay peers.

Other studies examined how leisure was understood and assigned meaning in the lives of lesbian mothers (Bialeschki & Pearce, 1997a; Bialeschki & Pearce, 1997b). In order to understand the meaning and importance of leisure within a nontraditional family structure, these studies used qualitative interviews to explore the role negotiation of lesbian partners with dependent children. Bialeschki and Pearce's studies (1997a & 1997b) demonstrated how lesbian mothers designed and negotiated strategies and made conscious decisions around household and child-care responsibilities based on interest, time, and ability to acquire help as opposed to heterosexual gender norms. This process helped these lesbian couples to develop their own sense of family; in turn, they participated in more leisure activities because of the absence of gendered social roles in their lives. Leisure also facilitated participants' challenge to compulsory heterosexuality by being socially visible in leisure settings such as parks and campgrounds.

Compulsory heterosexuality was apparent in the stigma and discrimination that older lesbians faced in Jacobson and Samdahl's (1998) study. The authors examined leisure in the lives of lesbians over the age of 60 in regards to their experiences with and responses to discrimination. Jacobson and Samdahl found the women's experiences produced negative feelings such as isolation and separation from the rest of society; this is a common theme woven throughout the literature on

leisure and LGBT populations. However, in response to the isolation, the women in the study actively created safe spaces for their own private lesbian community where they could validate and nurture one another.

Looking at a different subculture, Johnson (2008) explored negotiated hegemonic masculinity in a country-western gay bar. Through the examination of social practices and cultural descriptions, Johnson (2008) discovered that gay men who connect to a leisure community, like a group of friends from a bar or an athletic team, are given the freedom to experiment with various non-heterosexual identities. The men are searching for sense of community that validates and affirms their status as a sexual minority and allows them to experiment with multiple masculinities. Johnson (2008) found, like most of the investigators, that leisure provided both positive and negative contexts for the LGBT population. The men in this study confronted and negotiated masculinity in ways that both perpetuated and challenged compulsory heterosexuality and hegemonic masculinity. The social identity of the gay men in his study was always tied to symbolic power, strength, and self-worth.

Role of Leisure in Identity Development

Kivel and Kleiber (2000) examined how lesbian and gay adolescents use leisure to establish a positive self-identity. The investigators found that leisure provided participants with contexts for developing personal identity; conversely, issues of sexuality compromised the value of leisure in terms of participants' leisure social identities. Participants described how within leisure contexts they came to better understand themselves, their relationships with others, and the social world. However, based on their leisure activities, these same individuals did not develop social identities as athletes, actors, musicians or as openly lesbian or gay. A possible explanation for the results is that lesbian and gay youth may practice isolation strategies in order to avoid homophobia or heterosexism. Kivel and Kleiber (2000)

posited that distancing tactics could explain why leisure contexts were beneficial in terms of private, personal identity formation, but not in terms of public, social identity formation.

Krane, Barber, and McClung (2002) and Krane and Barber's (2003) research on leisure and identity development in lesbian women produced disparate findings than the Kivel and Kleiber (2000) study above. The investigators examined sexual orientation in the sports setting of the Gay Games through the lens of social identity theory. They found that much of the respondents' positive sentiment was in regards to the significance of having a welcoming athletic space, the incredible sense of community, the empowering effect of the experience, and the social and political importance of participating in the Gay Games. The prevailing responses in this study were that the Gay Games enhanced both the personal and social identities of the participants, as well as collective esteem. Personal identities were improved through increased self-concept and self-confidence, pride in sexuality, well-being, and personal identity. Social identity was strengthened as knowledge about the LGBT community was gained. The findings supported the social identity perspective's assertion that the enhancement of social identity leads to an increase in collective esteem. The studies also documented a link between enhanced collective esteem and intention to participate in more social change activities such as coming out and talking freely about participation in the Gay Games. The authors suggested that creating teams or leagues for LGBT individuals could possibly lead to increased social identity and, therefore, self-esteem (Krane et al., 2002; Krane & Barber, 2003).

Sport as Assimilation and/or Transformation

Using Vaid (1995), Pronger (2000) set up a binary of transformation versus assimilation gay agendas where transformationists seek overall societal change and assimilationists seek societal acceptance and tolerance for lesbian and gay people. In

terms of sport, he contends that, "Gay sports culture is the very model of liberal, inclusive lesbian and gay politics and aspirations," which exemplifies the mainstream lesbian and gay philosophy that declares, "Lesbians and gays are just like anybody else" (p. 232). Gay community sport requires gay men (he does not address women) to work within the established system and appropriates their otherness. This is contrasted with the ethics of alterity that "is characterized not by inclusion but by openness, openness to otherness in a way that allows the other to deconstruct the system, to call into question the system's limits, particularly in its appropriation of their otherness" (p. 230).

For Pronger, an assimilationist strategy is problematic because it elides or diminishes the opportunity of gay sports, through its inherent alterity, "to transform sport's cultural conservatism…which could in turn contribute to the critique and transformation of oppressions that are perpetuated by conservative political cultures more generally" (p. 227). Although Pronger (2000) decries the omission of the transformative promise of sport, he acknowledges that gay community sports have improved the lives of some gay and lesbian people "whose greatest ambition is to join the dominant discourse" (p. 233).

The largest and most researched LGBT sports organization or event is the Gay Games; founded upon the principles of "participation, inclusion, and personal best," the goal of the Games is to cultivate and enhance the self-respect of the LGBT population worldwide and to bring about respect and understanding from those outside the LGBT population (Gay Games Federation, 2008). Tom Waddell, the founder of the Gay Games, considered them a prime opportunity to prove to mainstream society that gay people were just like anybody else –- that is, they played sport; additionally, the Games were seen as a vehicle to challenge stereotypes about gay men not being masculine (Symons, 2007).

Accordingly, the Games were founded with motives that included inclusion and legitimation, not with the intention of societal transformation. However, some scholars contend that they are a site of resistance to homophobia and heterosexism (Symons, 2007; Waitt, 2003) and create social change (Krane, Barber, and McClung; 2002) through the pursuit of a "liberal democratic model of reformist sport" (Symons, 2007).

In an article previously discussed, Krane et al. (2002) examined the individual experience of lesbians in the setting of the Gay Games through the lens of social identity theory and found the experience to be empowering on an individual and collective level. In a different analysis, Symons (2007) concluded that, because of the public visibility, mainstream support, and validation and encouragement of LGBT sport and culture, the Gay Games is a meaningful challenge to deep-seated homophobia, "at least within the host city" (p. 156). However, she does caution about the possible ghettoization of the LGBT sports club and the additional problems that could bring.

An additional study by Rowe, Markwell, and Stevenson (2006) found that participants generally did not view the Gay Games as subversive or radical; rather, they viewed it as an opportunity to prove their sporting prowess and challenge stereotypes. In fact, for many the "radical" aspect of the Games was the ability to prove that gay men could be masculine. Although the participants may not have been explicit about the political motivations, the authors found that throughout the Games there were "manifold opportunities for disrupting conventional images of sport" (p. 162). On the other side, the Gay Games have been viewed as contributing not only to normalization, but to racism and sexual oppression as well. Davidson (2012) examined the early Gay Games and determined them to be a homonormative site of leisure formation seeking mainstream acceptance. By using such examples as

the commodification of sport, the privatizing impulses of the AIDS crisis, and the granting of immigration wavers, she found that, instead of resisting normalization, they were complicit in reinforcing the "privileged center" and worked to distance themselves from the abnormal (p. 10).

According to Waitt (2003), analysis of the Gay Games is important because it represents a location where "marginalized social groups attempt to challenge cultural norms that are oppressive and constrain the bodily performances of those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex" (p. 168). As illustrated by the aforementioned studies, this is certainly not a given and not limited to analyses of the Gay Games. Studies of other sites of LGBT sporting communities can provide insight into the debate on whether LGBT sports events and leagues are driven by an agenda of assimilation and legitimation or by an agenda of societal transformation.

Speaking directly to Pronger's (2000) critique, Jarvis (2006) asserts that, although gay softball may not transform the existing institution of sport, it does have the potential to contest and destabilize the current understandings of dominant sporting masculinities. Jarvis (2006) conducted an ethnographic study of a gay softball team and found, like Rowe et al. (2006), that "the politics of the gay men researched does not indicate that they have explicit interest in subverting or transforming wider sporting cultures" (p. 72). However, what the research did find is that, for the men, playing softball was a liberating experience that provided a site to validate and de-stigmatize their identity as gay men.

Jones and McCarthy (2010) undertook a qualitative study of a gay soccer team and also found that positive personal gains are reported from participating in gay sport. Importantly, many participants said they experienced a genuine sense of belonging within a community for the first time. Additionally, the researchers

discovered that participants had not considered their actions political even though they had made comments regarding challenging straight hegemonic masculinity, providing a supportive space for young people, occupying traditionally male-dominated spaces, and desiring to create positive change for the gay community.

Elling, Knop, and Knoppers (2003) believe that LGBT leagues and events raise questions about the social integrative meanings and function of sport, as they can function as both a vehicle for integration and a tool for resistance to the homophobic culture of sports. The authors found that gays and lesbians are influenced by negative factors such as discrimination and exclusivity that encourage individuals to leave mainstream organizations. Concurrently they are influenced by positive factors such as a safe and welcoming environment, likeminded people, and feelings of belonging that promote the joining of LGBT organizations. They posit that LGBT sports clubs and events can create an atmosphere of "queer resistance" and "integration of sexual difference" that "contest[s] hegemonic heterosexual sports culture" (Elling et al., 2003, p. 453).

Price and Parker's (2003) ethnographic study examined the ideological importance of a UK-based amateur rugby union club (KCSRFC) for gay and bisexual men. Like Pronger (2000), they employed a dichotomy of gay sports culture that either promotes an assimilationist agenda of inclusion or transformational agenda that "challenges heterosexist definitions of sport as an 'exclusive' cultural practice" (p. 109). Because the KCSRFC is a rugby club for gay and bisexual men that is attempting to gain acceptance and equality within mainstream rugby culture, the club had a liberal sexual political stance that promoted an image of normality and respectability. According to the authors, the KCSRFC is a club struggling for recognition and acceptance within a heterosexist sporting structure. Price and Parker

(2003) put forth the possibility that, in reality, the KCSRF reinforces heterosexist definitions of sport through its political inactions both on and off the field.

In another study, Caudwell (2007) explored a women's footballing (soccer) subculture in England to examine the diversity of the sex, gender, and sexuality experiences through highlighting marginalized players, specifically the "femme-inine" and the transsexual players. The team in the study is part of a larger club that developed as a space for lesbian community and to provide members some relief from lesbian-phobia and as an alternative to competitive leagues. The central motivations for the club were "lesbian visibility, lesbian solidarity, and the pleasure of playing, for its own sake, and socializing" (Caudwell, 2007, p. 185).

The focus on a lesbian-identified team elucidates the ways in which players create and produce footballing space in comparison to popular cultural representations. Over the years, the club has contested various forms of homophobia (including direct assault and numerous forms of harassment) and struggles to establish a safe place to play within football's regime of heteronormativity. However, player interactions surrounding the femme-inine and transsexual bodies clearly illustrate the complexity and omnipresence of heteronormativity. The footballers had very specific and stereotypical ideas of what the femme players were capable and what was expected of the transsexual players.

In this lesbian subculture, normative is redefined but within certain parameters. Caudwell considers the possibility that lesbian players might reinforce the values, beliefs, and status of heteronormativity through the devaluing of "femme-inity" and transsexuality, and, at times, denying certain players access to certain positions (striker, defender, etc.). The entrenched nature of heteronormativity was also examined by Eng (2008) who found that it not only affects lesbians and gays but also those who may display signs of "excessive"

femininity or masculinity and, therefore, are suspected of being gay, and, therefore, "representative of something negative and consequently not wanted in the particular sport setting" (p. 116).

Travers (2006) also looked at the experiences of transgender players in LGBT sports leagues. She researched a sample of North American lesbian softball leagues to examine gender conforming and gender transforming elements in the transgender inclusion policies of these leagues. The research found the majority of the leagues did not address transgender issues in their policies. Where policy did exist, it was limited by the framework of the gender binary. Only one league out of approximately 30 studied had adopted a policy designed to include gender-transforming participants that allowed them to play wherever most comfortable. Travers (2006) concluded, "The potential for lesbian softball leagues to model a queering of sport requires that such organizations address the tensions between women-only sporting spaces and a heteronormative gender binary" (p. 431).

Like Pronger (2000), Johnson and Kivel (2007) found Vaid (1995) useful for addressing the tensions in the literature and, in a straightforward fashion, asserted that "the mainstreaming of lesbian/gay culture may have yielded a better cultural and political life for lesbians/gay men, but that those improvements are merely shifts in discourse and nothing more than virtual equality" (p. 93). The body of research, thus far, demonstrates little to challenge Pronger's (2000) assertion that LGBT sports have done scarcely anything to transform the cultural conservatism of sport. However, the research has returned important findings that indicate people have experienced community, affirmed identity, and challenged hegemonic masculinity. The "Who's winning?" depends on how we keep score.

Chapter Summary

Overall, the current literature covers a range of issues related to gender, sexuality, and sport and leisure. However, further work is needed to explicate the meanings of community and identity in LGBT sports leagues and events. In general, community is a space where identity is publicly performed and acknowledged, and intentional groupings need to be problematized and complex relationships need to be investigated. Community should be interrogated as a site of both shared and contested meanings, even as both unity and difference need to be explored. Additionally, as community requires a border and sense of collective identity, much can be understood by examining what is left out (Liepins, 2000).

Additionally, it is worth investigating how and if the discourses of assimilation and transformation impact people in their lived experiences. Do they view fixed and historical definitions of identity as oppressive or a way to construct meaning in their lives? How do the competing and interconnected logics of homonormativity and queer futurity shaped people's views of themselves and others and how does this manifest itself in the site of sport? Is critique being practiced in the normalizing institution of sport and are people constructing oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs in order to open up space and make life more livable for some (and not others)? How do participants in an LGBT sports league make sense of and navigate the internal diversity of the LGBT community. Also, is the post-gay era a reality for people who choose to participate in LGBT specific organizations? And how are different groupings among the LGBT community impacted by this discourse? If people are truly moving "beyond the closet" what does that mean for the future of LGBT sports clubs and events? Are they/will they be seen as necessary and desirable?

The goal of this chapter has been to address the conceptual ideas and theoretical frameworks that inform this ethnographic study of an LGBT softball league. By examining the literature on leisure and sport, the social construction of community and identity, constraining and enabling functions of power, and the study of LGBT leisure and sport, I have offered a rationale for why it is necessary to move beyond analyses that take for granted identity and community in LGBT sports leagues and toward questioning what LGBT community means in this setting, what identities are welcome within these borders and which are marginalized, and who gets to decide. In the next chapter I focus on the specific methods utilized for investigating how community and identity were constituted, practiced, negotiated, and problematized in a LGBT softball league.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

> Locating sport – as a cultural form within which the production of knowledge and identities takes place – within the material and institutional contexts that structure everyday life provides the underlying site for the critical interrogation of sporting experiences, forms, meanings, structures, and practices (Andrews, Mason, & Silk, 2005, p.1).

The purpose of this study was to explore how community and identity were constituted, practiced, negotiated, and problematized in an LGBT softball league. The project addressed the questions: What is the meaning and significance of community for the League participants? To what extent and in what ways does participation in the League affect gender and sexual identity discourse and practice? In the context of the League, how are dominant ideologies and power structures reinforced, disrupted, and reproduced? A qualitative ethnographic design was utilized to collect data through participant observation, interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and archival document analysis in order to build a "complex, holistic picture" (Creswell, 1998, p. 15) that recognizes multiple intersections and illustrates the complexity of identity and experience.

Research Design and Theoretical Framework

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is useful for exploring a problem, centering participant voices, making sense of complex situations, providing holistic accounts, and conveying multiple perspectives. Qualitative research is interpretive and inductive, in that it seeks to investigate and describe a phenomenon in depth (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The approach favors naturalistic observation and interviewing over the approaches preferred by quantitative research such as questionnaires,

structured interviews, and experiments. According to Mack (2005), the key difference in the two methods is their flexibility. Because qualitative methods seek in-depth exploration, research techniques imply a degree of closeness, openness, and flexibility in conditions and instruments, that stand in contrast to the inflexibility, closed-ended nature, and control of quantitative methods that seek to confirm hypotheses (Mack, 2005; Padgett, 2008).

Critical Ethnography

Because ethnographic research combines "research design, fieldwork, and various methods of inquiry to produce historically, politically, and personally situated accounts, descriptions, interpretations, and representations of 'human lives'" (Tedlock, 2000, p. 455), it is a common research method employed to explore the experience of LGBT people in sport (for example, see Bridel & Rail, 2007; Caudwell, 2007; Jarvis, 2006; Jones & Aitchison, 2007; Price & Parker, 2003). It is useful for studying a cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged time period by collecting primarily observational and interview data. Ethnographic design facilitates the understanding of a particular subculture through its holistic perspective, which views "all aspects of the phenomenon under study as parts of an interrelated whole" (Padgett, 2008, p. 31).

Correspondingly, ethnography relies on direct observation and an emic (or insider) perspective as opposed to the etic (or outsider) perspective adopted by many researchers (Padgett, 2008). Additionally, ethnography approaches the project from a relativist ontology, that is, "a perspective holding that cultures must be understood on their own terms, not judged by the beliefs and values of other, more powerful groups" (Padgett, 2008, p. 31). Ethnography is about centering participant voices in a culturally relevant and meaningful context, which in this case is the softball field and various other settings where individuals enact the role of the

League participant. The research process is flexible and typically evolves contextually in response to lived realities encountered in the field setting.

According to Thomas (1993), "Critical ethnographers describe, analyze, and open to scrutiny otherwise hidden agendas, power centers, and assumptions that inhibit, repress, and constrain" (p. 2). This approach endeavors to avoid the essentialism that reproduces dichotomous social categories (such as homosexual/heterosexual, masculine/feminine, athlete/non-athlete, black/white). Instead, this work examines how categories of identity are produced discursively, what they mean, and how they operate in and through the League (Kivel, 2000; Scott, 1992). This analytical shift allows for a move from the question "What is?" to consider alternative possibilities and ask "What could be?" (Madison, 2012).

Critical Constructivism

The guiding paradigm for this study was critical constructivism in which the intent of the research is to make sense of the meanings others create about the world. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), "The constructivist paradigm assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower-and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (p. 24). This paradigm was most appropriate for the current study because a relativist ontology was necessary to recognize the diverse experiences and complexity of views of people participating in the League. A subjectivist epistemology addresses the formation and negotiation of meanings through interaction with others and historical and cultural norms, which was important to understanding one's experience with a gay or lesbian identity. Additionally, a naturalist methodology, or going to people in their own environment, entails the most appropriate set of methodological procedures for understanding the meaning and value of the League to its participants.

Constructivism holds that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they exist and meanings are developed that are varied and multiple depending on how each individual is situated in place and time. It avoids developing a universalizing narrative that makes false generalizations about LGBT people, and allows for a spectrum of meaning and understanding that is truly representative of the extremely diverse gay and lesbian population.

Queer Standpoint Theory

This study was also informed by queer standpoint theory (King, 1999). The first component of the theoretical framework, standpoint theories, assumes that an individual's life circumstances influence how that person perceives and constructs a social world (Collins, 1990; Smith, 1987). Life experiences structure how individuals understand the world and are defined by membership in various social groups. Although all beliefs held to be truths are rooted in some subjective standpoint, not all group members occupy the same standpoint (Buzzanell, 1995). The second component of the framework, queer theory, challenges the essentialist notions and rigid categorizations of heterosexual and homosexual and, instead, proposes an understanding of sexuality, gender, and identity that emphasizes unstable boundaries, multiple identities, and cultural constructions that change depending on historical and cultural context (Jagose, 1996). According to Halberstam (1998), a queer methodology is not bounded by academic rigidity and, instead, benefits from a diverse set of methods used to generate data on subjects traditionally excluded. Queer standpoint theory offered an interpretive lens that resists dominant normativity and challenges "that which has constrained what may be known, who may be the knower, and how knowledge has come to be generated and circulated" (Honeychurch, 1996, p. 342).

Situating the Research

Conducting research through a critical lens requires recognition of the researcher's "limited location and situated knowledge" (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). In the League, I was a team member and league participant long before I was a researcher. In 2004, newly out to myself as a lesbian, I was looking for access to others with similar sexual identities and came across the League. I have a clear memory of my first time, over a decade ago, walking towards the ballpark filled with nervous excitement and a head swimming with questions.

Exploratory Study

Over the years, as I walked toward the softball fields, the butterflies in my stomach diminished, but the questions amplified. In grappling with how I viewed the League, and what kind of significance it had to me, I came to want to understand what it meant to others. In 2012, I carried out a mixed methods exploratory study using an internet-based survey and semi-structured interviews. The data were based on 58 survey responses and 11 follow-up phone interviews. The study aimed to examine a wide range of topics including why people participated in the League, if an individual's sense of identity and community was impacted by participation, if there was a change in individual's friendship network since joining the league, and if functional and emotional support was impacted. The primary findings, which were presented at the Society for the Study of Social Problems annual conference (Mertel, 2012), indicated a correlation between participation in the League and increased functional and emotional support. The motivation for the current research emerged from a desire to conduct a more in-depth investigation into the meaning and significance of participation. See Appendix A for overview of study findings.

Researcher Positionality

Since 2004, I have played on-and-off (due to injury or scheduling conflicts) on different iterations of the same women's team.[7] My previous experiences impacted both how I viewed the League and the participants I was able to recruit. As Wheaton (2002) observed, "There are some private worlds, including certain sport cultures, where only insiders have access to respondents" (p. 240). A gay and lesbian softball league is such a sport culture. The friendships and connections I made over the years were instrumental and essential in enabling me to find willing participants for this research. I relied on my personal network to generate "snowball sampling" and implemented recruitment strategies to gain access to people outside my social circle, which was generally limited to my team. Recognizing positionality necessitates directing attention beyond the subjective self and recognizing how my subjectivity, in relation to others, informs and is informed by the engagement and representation of others (Madison, 2012). Bhavnani (1993) contends that, as researchers, we need to hold ourselves accountable to high quality work by explicitly analyzing our relation to and with those whom we are researching. This interrogation "allows us to become answerable for what we learn how to see" (Haraway, 1988, p. 583).

Sampling Strategy

In accordance with the goal of the research, to understand the impact of the League on individuals' sense of community and identity, purposive sampling was used to generate information-rich participants for the study. The intent of qualitative research aligns itself with purposive sampling, which is the deliberate selection of individuals who will most effectively enable the researcher to understand the

[7] During the fall 2013 season of my research my team was not participating, and I joined a different women's team for the season in order to expand my scope of experience. This is a common occurrence during the more casual fall season when many fewer teams play. I disclosed my research to the team and got consent before participating. For the spring season, when my team was again competing, I rejoined.

phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2009). Additionally, qualitative researchers often employ a small, but meaningful, sample to maximize internal validity, rather than a representative sample that emphasizes the potential for generalizations. A combination of sampling strategies was used including convenience, maximum variation, and snowball. According to McDavid, Huse, & Hawthorne (2006), employing a variety of sampling strategies provides "triangulation, flexibility, and meets multiple interests and needs" (p. 19).

Different sampling strategies were used depending upon the appropriateness for the particular method. For participant observation, convenience and maximum variation sampling was undertaken by utilizing accessible subjects. During the spring 2014 season, a total of 29 teams, approximately 450 athletes, participated in two different divisions, open (co-ed but mostly men) and women's (exclusively women), at four different skill levels ("A", "B", "C", and "D," with "A" being the most skilled). Twenty-two teams were in the open division and seven of the teams were in the women's division. Maximum variation sampling captures heterogeneity and identifies common patterns across the sample population (Padgett, 2008). In the context of participant observation, games and teams were chosen to maximize the range of observations in terms of both the women's and open sides and diverse skill levels.

For interviews and open-ended surveys, convenience and snowball sampling strategies were utilized. Convenience sampling involved selecting individuals who were the most accessible and willing to participate. Snowball sampling involved asking participants and contacts to use their social networks to refer me to other people who could participate in the study. The study was open to all current and former League participants. A great deal of flexibility was required in the recruitment process when the league-wide email distribution list (which had the emails of current and former players) was deactivated the summer of 2013 for updating and never

again (as of my current knowledge) reactivated. This necessitated a patchwork of strategies, which comports with a queer methodology.

Information about the study was distributed electronically through email and Facebook. An email blast about the study was sent to the contact list of the local LGBT community center (Appendix B), information was posted on the League's Facebook page (Appendix C), and an email or Facebook message was sent to all of my contacts who were affiliated with the League (Appendix D). Fliers (Appendix E) were also handed out at the fields and at bars that sponsored teams from the League. Both convenience and snowball sampling strategies were beneficial for generating information-rich participants for the study and saving time and effort.

Data Collection Strategy

The ethnographic research included over 100 hours of participant observation, eight individual and multi-person interviews (totaling 20 interviewees), 53 open-ended surveys, and archival document analysis. It is not possible to calculate what proportion of League players was observed, surveyed, or interviewed because the total population number of current and former League participants was unavailable due to lack of record keeping. However, the observation schedule discussed below enhanced the research's inclusiveness.

Participant Observation

In my fieldwork role, I was a "complete participant," conducting research from the role of a full participant (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 158). Participant observation provides valuable information about the phenomenon under investigation and "It seems to be the best way to discover the everyday experiences of players" (Caudwell, 2007, p. 185). This method allowed entry to interactions and spaces that may not otherwise have been accessed, e.g., practices, the dugout, and team meetings.

Participant observation was undertaken during the spring 2014 softball season (which spans thirteen weeks), where the teams were competing for spots in the Gay Softball World Series (open division) and ASANA World Series (women's division), and the more casual fall 2013 softball season (which spans nine weeks). In my role as participant observer, I was a member of two different women's division "C" teams, one in the spring and one in the fall. The main site for participant observation was four softball fields within a large city park, where both the women and open leagues play, on Sundays from 8:00am to 4:00pm. A schedule was established for participant observation to ensure systematic observation in which all teams were equally represented and there was balance between open and women's league sampling. Observations included the two games each week (each an hour in length) my team played and observation of a minimum of two additional games with emphasis on the open league in order to ensure the inclusion of men's teams in the research. Additional observation sites included practices, League fundraisers, the annual League-sponsored tournament that hosted both local and national teams, an out of state LGBT tournament, team meetings, social events at local LGBT bars, and the local AIDS Walk. In all, I conducted an estimated 100 hours of observation during the course of the research.[8]

Brief field notes, or "jottings" (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995), were documented during the observations using handwritten notes, voice recordings, and photographs taken on my cell phone to serve as triggers for the writing of full field notes. After each observation, full notes were written up as soon as possible. In order to be methodologically rigorous, each set of full notes (schema adapted from Mulhall, 2003) included a description of structural and organizational features (what the fields or other settings are like and how the space is used), agents (who is

[8] Clearly, this research was also informed by my previous time in the field as a participant.

present, how they behave, interact, dress, move, perform), practices (how participants are engaged, involved, and interact), verbal exchanges (conversations, arguments, discussions, dialogues, complaints, or any conversations heard or overheard, including specific words and phrases used), connections (relationships between actors, interactions, behaviors, and theory), the chronological summary (recording of events as they occur both before, during, and after the field), a personal reflection (examination of how personal values, experiences, and beliefs can influence the research), and questions for consideration (questions to address in the future).

Semi-structured Interviews

In order to attend to the voices of the study participants, participant observation was augmented with individual and multi-person, semi-structured interviews consisting primarily of open-ended questions. Twenty people were interviewed, eight individually and twelve in multi-person interviews (four multi-person interviews were conducted numbering between two and five participants). Interviews were conducted between August 2013 and February 2014. In line with constructivist epistemology, the interviews were intended to obtain in-depth information from the perspective of each individual about the concepts and themes that emerged from the observations, emphasizing personal perspective and interpretation (Creswell, 1998). In-depth interviews enable participants to "share rich descriptions of a phenomena" in an open and explorative process without being directed by a priori hypotheses or structured by existing measures (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.314). According to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), "The individual in-depth interview allows the interviewer to delve deeply into social and personal matters, whereas the group interview allows interviewers to get a wider

range of experience but, because of the public nature of the process, prevents delving as deeply into the individual" (p. 315).

In this study, the numbers of individuals involved in multi-person interviews ranged from two to five people. These multi-person interviews allowed "for people to interact around a question and create meaning or supplement each other's answers" (Beitin, 2012, p. 245). The participants got to hear each other's responses, consider them in relation to their own views, and make additional comments if they chose. Participants do not need to agree or reach consensus, similarly, they do not need to disagree. Morgan (2006) contends that when participants are engaged in the conversation, the discussion often evolves into sharing and comparing. He maintains that participants "share their experiences and thoughts, while also comparing their own contributions to what others have said. This process of sharing and comparing is especially useful for hearing and understanding a range of responses on a research topic" (p. 123).

In advance of the interviews, the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance approved the protocol. Approval of the research can be found in Appendix F. Interviews were conducted between September 2013 and February 2014. Individual interviews included the founder of the league, an individual instrumental in expanding and developing the league, a current board member (who is also a current player), a long-time coach who had just retired from the league, two current players, and two former players. Whether it was a group or individual interview was determined by the participants. Some participants were more comfortable doing a group interview and others preferred an individual interview.

Multi-group interviews work best when participants have prior established relationships (Patton, 2001). Accordingly, the composition of the multi-person interviews was driven by the participants and included two couples (two separate

interviews), a couple and a friend, and a group of five teammates (two of whom were a couple). Except for one person, all of the participants in the multi-person interviews were active players. Additionally, two of the participants were player/coaches and one was a member of the Amateur Sports Alliance of North America (ASANA), the national governing body for the women's side. Ninety percent of my participants were female, and 10% were male; 85% were white and 15% Hispanic. Ages ranged from 31 to 58 years and the mean was 40.25 years. The large majority of participants were lesbians (70%), 10% were gay, 5% bisexual, and 10% did not identify. The two women who did not identify are a couple and have been for twenty years. The range of years participating in the League was 1 to 22 years with 10.35 as the mean. See Table 1 for a description of the participants and Table 2 for a demographic summary.

Table 1

Description of Participants – Semi-structured Interviews

Alias	Sex/ Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	Age	Sexual Identity	Years in League	Current Player	Group Inter-view	Leadership Role
Natalia	F	Hispanic	56	Lesbian	22	No	No	Coach
Patty	F	Hispanic	39	Bisexual	1	No	No	
Jessica	F	White	40	Doesn't id	15	Yes	Yes (2)	
Joanne	F	White	43	Doesn't id	15	Yes	Yes (2)	Coach
John	M	White	51	Gay	21	No	No	Board member
Linds	F	White	32	Lesbian	8	Yes	Yes (2)	
Maori	F	Hispanic	37	Lesbian	5	Yes	Yes (2)	
Dora	F	White	35	Straight	3	Yes	Yes (5)	
Betty	F	White	58	Lesbian	16	Yes	Yes (5)	
Judy	F	White	46	Lesbian	17	Yes	Yes (5)	National board member
Linda	F	White	44	Lesbian	17	Yes	Yes (5)	Coach

Kacie	F	White	31	Lesbian	2	Yes	Yes (5)	
Alex	F	White	43	Lesbian	10	Yes	No	
Anne	F	White	36	Lesbian	9	Yes	Yes (3)	
Maria	F	White	31	Lesbian	3	Yes	Yes (3)	
Carrie	F	White	33	Lesbian	3	Yes	Yes (3)	
Kim	F	White	28	Lesbian	6	Yes	No	
Carly	F	White	33	Lesbian	9	Yes	No	
Brian	M	White	58	Gay	22	No	No	Founder
Lisa	F	White	31	Lesbian	3	Yes	No	Board member

Table 2

Summary of Participants – Semi-structured Interviews

Variable	Mean or %	Standard Deviation	Range
Sex/Gender	90% female, 10% male		
Race/Ethnicity	85% white, 15% Hispanic		
Age	40.25 years	9.20 years	31-58 years
Education	65% college degree, 5% advanced college degree, 25% some college, 5% high school diploma		
Sexual Identity	70% lesbian, 10% gay, 5% bisexual, 5% straight, 10% don't identify		
Length of Participation in League	10.35 years	6.99 years	1-22 years
Current Participation	80% currently participate, 20% do not currently participate		

n=20

The interviews were scheduled in advance at a prearranged time and location, based upon the participants' requests and availability. Six interviews took place at coffee shops, two at bars, one at a restaurant, one at a park, one at the home of two participants, and one at my home. Interviews lasted between one and two hours.

The interviews were organized around a set of predetermined questions regarding the role of the League in the life of the participants, and the interview guide focused on the key domains of the study (community, identity, and sport). The questions were developed out of a combination of my personal experience, data obtained from the 2012 exploratory study, and the literature review. After the first and second interviews, some changes were made to the interview schedule. For example in the first two interviews, I began with the question, "Can you tell me about yourself?" In both of the interviews, I was met with a confused look. I decided to start with a question that would elicit more of a story-like answer and changed the

first question to, “How did you come to join the League? Why? When?” This seemed to get the respondents to open up quickly and provided rich data. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) assert that “Questions that are not effective at eliciting the necessary information can be dropped and new ones added. The iterative nature of the qualitative research process in which preliminary data transformation coincides with data collection often results in altering questions as the investigators learn more about the subject” (p. 316).

Interviews began with me reading the consent form (Appendix G) and then asking participants to sign. (I also gave a copy to each participant.) Participants were then asked to fill out the demographic information on the back of the form which included name, age, race/ethnicity, gender identification, sexual identification, education level, occupation, year began participating in the League, and number of years playing softball overall. In the first two interviews, I asked the demographic questions at the beginning of the survey. This changed to written self-completion because it better facilitated the multi-person interviews. The interviews were audio recorded in order to allow me to be fully present in the interviews and to probe for depth without the distraction of note-taking.

Next, I explained how the interview would take place. This varied for individual and group interviews. In individual interviews I explained, “I have about 20 questions. I will ask a question and then you will respond, hopefully in as much detail and elaboration as possible. Also, if you have a story that pertains to the question, it would be really great if you told it. Stories are really helpful for understanding your experiences. In this interview, there are no right or wrong answers. You are telling me about your reality, your experiences. You are the expert and I am here to learn from you. There may be times when I ask you to expand on an answer or to clarify something so I make sure I understand.” In the multi-person

interviews the only differences with the introduction were that I stated that I had about 10 questions (which were chosen for their saliency and because they had provided the most information-rich answers in the earlier interviews), knowing it was not likely to get through all of the interview schedule. See Appendix H for interview schedule. I also added, "Everything you say today will be kept completely confidential, and I ask that what is said in this interview, stays in this interview. It is really important to me that you feel comfortable to speak freely of your experience." Four individual interviews had been conducted before the first multi-person interview. Therefore, I had experience with the interview instrument and how participants responded to the questions. In the multi-person interviews, I was certain to ask the ten highly salient questions, while other questions were chosen from the interview schedule based on participant responses.

Qualitative interviews are purposeful conversations intended to gather descriptions of the participants' realities and center on careful questioning and listening (Johnson, 2002). Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they maintain some structure while allowing for flexibility to ensure the research is based on the complex identities and experiences of the participants. Correspondingly, in my interviews, the interview schedule (Appendix H) was viewed as a guide rather than an inflexible set of questions intended to be asked in a particular order. All interviews after the first two, started with the question, "How did you come to join the League?" and, depending upon the response and information provided, moved on to various questions. At times, other questions, not on the interview schedule, emerged from the dialogue between the participants and me; "Digressions can be very productive as they follow the interviewee's interest and knowledge" (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 316). Additionally, probes were used to stimulate respondents to produce more information in a non-leading way.

Open-ended Survey

To explore additional participants' experiences about the topics that were addressed in the interviews, an open-ended survey was used. Because this format allows the respondents to respond freely, it was seen as an appropriate instrument (Somekh & Lewin, 2005). The questionnaire was created after the first three interviews had been conducted and, therefore, I had an idea which questions provided the most information-rich responses. The questions were derived from the interview schedule and were intended to elicit responses that augmented the interview data. The questionnaire contained 15 questions, some with multiple parts (See Appendix I). The first section of the survey included demographic questions which asked about sex/gender, race/ethnicity, age, education level, sexual identity, length of participation in the League, and current participation status. The remainder of the questionnaire contained content questions similar to those in the interviews addressing topics such as motivation for participation, experience with sport, meaning of the League, whether or not the League is a community, and favorite and least favorite parts of the League.

In total, 53 surveys were completed. Between October 2013 and March 2014, 23 surveys were completed through the online computer program Qualtrics. Additionally, hard copies of the survey were given to a key informant who distributed them in early April 2014 at three locations: a practice session of two open teams, a city league game (a non-gay men's league one of the open teams participated in to get more competition), and a Sunday during games for the League. See Table 3 for a demographic summary of questionnaire respondents. An estimated 60 surveys were distributed by the key informant, 30 were returned, 20 of which were completed, with the remaining 10 partially completed, but still providing useful information.

Table 3

Summary of Participants – Questionnaire

Variable	Mean or %	Standard Deviation	Range
Sex/Gender	45% female, 55% male		
Race/Ethnicity	73% white, 17% Hispanic, 4% African American, 2% Asian, 2% Navajo, 2% other		
Age	35.04 years	7.58 years	20-50 years
Education	28% college degree, 15% advanced college degree, 40% some college, 17% high school diploma		
Sexual Identity	41.5% lesbian, 45% gay, 2% bisexual, 2% transgender, 7.5% don't identify/other, 2% straight		
Length of Participation in League	5.37 years	4.19 years	1-20 years
Current Participation	85% currently participate, 15% do not currently participate		

n=53

Archival Analysis

In addition to participant observation, interviews, and an open-ended survey, archival document analysis was undertaken to better understand the history, meanings, and motivations of the league. Official documents "function as institutionalized traces, which means that they may legitimately be used to draw conclusions about the activities, institutions and ideas of their creators or the organizations they represented" (Wolff, 2004, p. 284). Documents accessed through the website (from May 2013 to January 2015) included the website text, league by-laws, board meeting minutes (spanning from 2003 to 2014, although not all were available), and the League's code of conduct.

Additional documents were the websites for both the open and women's national governing organizations and three newspaper articles, two press releases, and a magazine article pertaining to a lawsuit and the resulting settlement brought

again the national governing organization for the men's side. Also, a magazine article about the league published in a local gay magazine in March 2013 was included. Documents were analyzed for themes such as motivations for founding the league (Pitts, 1988), meaning of community and identity (Ahmed & Fortier, 2003; Collins, 2010; Freie, 1998; Young, 1990), and queer and mainstream lesbian and gay tactics (Caudwell, 2007; Gamson, 1995; Jarvis, 2006; Price & Parker, 2003; Rowe et al., 2006; Vaid, 1995; Waitt; 2003).

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. According to Patton, "The challenge in qualitative analysis lies in making sense of massive amounts of data. This involves reducing the volume of raw information, sifting trivia from significance, identifying significant patterns, and constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal" (2002, p. 432). One of the first steps in the data analysis process is getting organized. The sheer volume of data generated by qualitative methods can be overwhelming.

Data Management

As I began to compile jottings and expanded field notes I organized the data in file folders on the computer and created hard copies which I organized into file folders. Following each interview, I spent time recording notes, observations, and highlights. The digital recordings were transcribed word-for-word and transcriptions were printed. Additionally, all transcribed interview documents were entered into NVivo 10, a qualitative data analysis computer software package. Any additional notes were compiled and also entered into NVivo. Interview consent forms and transcript hard copies were organized into file folders. Twenty-three surveys were completed through the online computer program Qualtrics. The responses from hard copies of the additional 30 surveys that were completed in person were inputted to

Qualtrics word-for-word. Then, the entire body of surveys was exported via an Excel spreadsheet and entered into NVivo 10. A hard copy of the survey responses was printed and put in a file folder. Lastly, all archival documents were organized in computerized file folders and I created hard copies which were organized into physical file folders. All hard copies were stored in a locked file cabinet. This system allowed me to stay organized while dealing with such a voluminous amount of data.

Description

Data analysis in ethnography is unique because it "is an ongoing process which begins with the early days of the research, the planning, and continues until the achievement of the final product, the ethnographic text" (David & Sutton, 2011, pp. 321). It is an iterative process that builds on ideas throughout the study (Fetterman, 1989). Throughout this process, my intention was to focus the data on a theoretical understanding of how identity and community were constituted, practiced, negotiated, and problematized in a LGBT softball league. In order to achieve that goal, I followed Walcott's (1994) suggestion that data analysis include the three overlapping and simultaneous processes of creating descriptions, undergoing analysis, and constructing interpretations.

Description and quotation forms the foundation of all qualitative reporting (Patton, 2002). My goal was to create thick, rich, and detailed descriptions of the League and its participants. I attempted to recognize not only who was talking, but who was not talking and to look beyond the surface level to explore issues that were mundane, assumed, implicit, and part of the participants' common sense (Tracy, 2010). It is important, however, to acknowledge that, as the researcher in this ethnographic process, I was an active participant rather than passive recorder of events (Thomas, 1993). In order to acknowledge and minimize the influence of my standpoint and involvement on this work, I allowed my participants to speak for

themselves as much as possible. I included long quote passages if I felt they provided thick description that allowed for "the reader to enter into the situation and thoughts" of the participants (Patton, 2002, p. 503).

Analysis

Description is enhanced by analysis and interpretation. The process of analysis included the identification of essential features and the systematic description of interrelationships among them (Walcott, 1994). In the beginning stages of my data analysis, I read through the hard copies of the expanded field notes, interview transcripts, and survey responses multiple times in order to take in the entire body of data. Next, I began open coding that involved line-by-line categorizations of small segments of data by writing "any and all ideas, themes, or issues they suggest, no matter how varied or disparate" and began the initial attempt to identify and formulate ideas, themes, and categories found in the data (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

Open coding was conducted in NVivo and involved identifying substantive statements relevant to the investigation of community, identity, and sport. I highlighted the statements and created a new code, which were words or short phrases, or, as time went on, selected from an existing list of codes. In this stage, I created codes regardless of how varied or whether I thought it would be useful later. I also noted words that appeared frequently in the data, for example, "friend(s)" was present 237 times, "together," 174, "fun," 151, and "family," 119. I created those words as codes themselves. Several rounds of open coding allowed me to create a large list of 62 codes that I compiled on a Word document and compared, contrasted, clustered, sorted, reduced, and refined.

As a result of the large number of codes generated through open coding, I used my overarching research question to provide direction and focused my ongoing

analysis on the shared and contested meanings about identity and community created in and through the League. During the process of focused coding I again did a line-by-line reading, but this time I based my analysis on a smaller set of topics that were identified as having potential for the major themes (Emerson et al., 1995). For example, as I stated above, during the open coding process I identified the prevalence of the word “together.” Participants used it in the sense of being together, bringing together, getting together, playing together, coming together, partying together, and so forth. In reviewing the code, it was clear that the pivotal piece was *who* the League was bringing together: gays and lesbians. To illustrate, here is a statement that was coded as “together”: “[The League] brings the gay community together in a positive way.” I had also coded “meeting others,” “connecting with others,” and “socializing with others.” In looking at all of these codes during the focused coding process, I saw that they were all interrelated and had the theme of bringing lesbians and gays together in a space. Thus, I determined all of these codes could be combined into the one code of “bringing ‘us’ together.” I recoded all of the statements in NVivo to reflect the changes. Following are examples of statements that were give the code “brings ‘us’ together:

- [The League] brings a lot of different people together for the community aspect of it;
- [As a result of participating in the League, we know] we’re not the only ones that are lesbians anymore, there's a whole bunch of us;
- [The League has given] me a better outlet, a better place, you know, and more fun times to be with people that are like me and have more fun in that respect.
- The league definitely makes you feel like you have a place to congregate with people who can relate to your life;
- Mostly all of my friends, I have met through the [League]; and

- I have found that there are a lot of links to the entire LGBT community that interconnect through [the League].

It is important to note that due to the complex nature or community, identity, and sport, many of the statements were assigned multiple codes.

Always with the focus of shared and contested meanings of community and identity in mind, I repeated the process of comparing, contrasting, combining, and reducing until the initial 62 codes that resulted from the open coding process were distilled into 22 codes. During this process I recorded theoretical memos that sought "to clarify and link analytic themes and categories" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 143) and reflectively read and re-read the full data collection to ensure the substantive statements were consistent with the original context. Patterns, themes, and categories were then formulated by identifying, relating, and clustering "common and/or divergent ideas, beliefs and practices" (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 324). For example, the analysis revealed a pattern of participants perceiving the League as a community, including the commonalities and differences expressed views. That pattern makes the "League as a community" a major theme in the study. Further, data analysis identified three categories that led participants to view the League as community: sharing, doing, and connecting.

Interpretation

This final component of the data analysis process was creating an interpretation of what I learned. My goal was to bring meaning and coherence to the themes, patterns, and categories I had discovered. As Patton (2002) notes, "Interpretation means attaching significance to what was found, making sense of the findings, offering explanations, drawing conclusions, extrapolating lessons, making inferences, considering meanings, and otherwise imposing order" (p. 480). It is also the stage where researchers make connections between the data and the theoretical

structure that guides the ethnographic study (Johnson, 2002). In this study, I made interpretations about the nature of the "we" in the community described by participants and considered where the League could be situated in the queer versus mainstream lesbian and gay debate. These interpretations were based on the patterns, themes, categories and connections that I developed in my analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were addressed at all stages in the research process. Approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Arizona State University was sought and obtained before the research began (see Appendix F). My research project was disclosed to the softball teams on which I participated and through my recruitment activities on and off the field. For the surveys, the informed consent form was the opening page of the survey. It included an explanation that participation in this study was voluntary, and there were no immediate, direct benefits for study participants nor any foreseeable risks or discomforts to participation. If participants found a question to be upsetting or stressful, they could elect to skip it, and there was no penalty for lack of participation or withdrawing from the study at any time. Also, all study participants were 18 years or older. Responses were anonymous and it was not possible to connect any one person with their responses. In the case of those who provided contact information for future inquiry, anonymity was also maintained as it was not possible to link individual responses with participants' identities. Seven people left contact information and from those seven, one did an in-person interview. Additionally, the contact information provided was confidential and only the researcher had access to the information. Participants that clicked the "forward" button expressed their consent to participate.

In regards to the interviews, informed consent was gained verbally from the participants and tape recorded. The introductory statement addressed explicit

consent for audio recording, the purpose of the research and the central research question, the procedures of the research, the possible risk and intended benefits of the research, the voluntary nature of research participation, the participant's right to stop the research at any time, and the procedures used to protect confidentiality. Confidentiality was ensured through the designation of aliases for all participants and the cloaking of specific details in order to prevent possible identification. Those aliases were used as identifiers in all written documentation and other materials. All study documentation, including field notes, recordings, transcriptions, survey results, and interview consent forms were carefully handled and secured in a locked file cabinet. Participants were informed that results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but no names or identifying information will be used.

Methodological Limitations

Of necessity, the interview and survey samples were small and the participant stratum was narrow. Due to the nature of my insider status, I utilized snow-ball sampling which has advantages but also the disadvantage of under/over-representation of particular subgroups. In this case, there is an over-representation of lesbians and under-representation of gay, transgender, and bisexual participants in the interviews. Recruiting other participants in order to mitigate this limitation was exceedingly difficult. Because the exploratory study had been conducted only a year earlier, people might have experienced survey fatigue or thought they had already participated. Also, the fact that the governing board was in transition while the research was conducted affected my ability to distribute information to the population.

As with any qualitative study, one inherent characteristic of the study is that it will not be easily replicated. Additionally, due to the nature of a qualitative design, in which researchers look for a small but meaningful sample, the sample is not a

representative sample and will not allow for generalizations to the overall population. Data saturation was reached to the extent that major themes were addressed repeatedly, but given the highly mutable nature of identity, community, and sport and the many research nuances, it seems highly unlikely that overall data saturation could be achieved. Additionally, people were very reticent to be interviewed or complete the survey.

The possible challenges for multi-person interviews were addressed by keeping group sizes very small, ensuring all participants were well acquainted in order to maximize levels of comfort, and by paying close attention to participant interaction. In terms of the four couples, I made sure to directly address both partners to ensure that I was getting input from each person as opposed to assuming that one spoke for both of them. However, multi-person interviews are susceptible to members withholding or changing information because of the presence of other people, while individual interviews are susceptible to participants holding back or altering information "if the truth is inconsistent with their preferred self-image or if they want to impress the interviewer" (Beitin, 2012, p 245). In regards to individual interviews, there is little that can be done to address inconsistencies in reality versus image, but I did attempt to assuage any fears that there were any right or wrong answers and make it very clear that the participants were the experts and I was there to learn from them.

Chapter Summary

In an effort to understand how community and identity were constituted, practiced, negotiated, and problematized in an LGBT softball league, I undertook a critical ethnography in order to render lives, relations, structures, and alternative possibilities visible. This study was informed by the following research questions: What is the meaning and significance of community for the League participants? To

what extent and in what ways does participation in the League affect gender and sexual identity discourse and practice? In the context of the League, how are dominant ideologies and power structures reinforced, disrupted, and reproduced? I officially began researching the League in September 2013 and continued until May 2014. A qualitative ethnographic design was utilized to collect data through participant observation, interviews, open-ended questionnaires, and archival document analysis. I employed a three stage process for data transformation including description, analysis, and interpretation. The next section is my findings, which discusses the results of my data transformation.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: PART I

CREATING COMMUNITY BASED ON GAY AND LESBIAN IDENITITY

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first gives a description of the League including its founding and governance, and how it regulates competition. The second explores the ways people discursively created shared meanings about and through the constitution of the League and how this shaped participants' experiences.

The League's Beginnings

> In the big picture I feel like I'm someone who has walked through a lot of mine fields. And I'm out on the beach, I'm one of the last trees standing there. So, I don't expect people to understand what I've been through. I feel like a little bit of a human dinosaur that can relate to all of the youngins, you know, what happened and what I saw, umm, but it's a mix of satisfaction and a mix of loneness, and a mix of feeling older. .. But, I just've seen a lot. A lot of rough stuff, in a way. And somehow I just kept going and a lot of it is luck of genes and a lot of it is that I never liked to really go out very late. I always wanted to get up early in the morning and play softball or volleyball or golf, and, uh, I remember distinctly, both here and [my former town], I did think it was a really good idea to create something that got people to have to go to bed, stop drinking and drugging, and get up and go outside, you know. So, it was kind of health, phys ed minded, the stuff I've done. But, so many of my compatriots are gone (Brian[9], league founder, interview).

The early 90s, when Brian was forming the League, was immediately after the apex of homophobia (Anderson, 2011) spurred by a combination of the AIDS

[9] "Brian," along with all the other names used in this research, is a pseudonym.

epidemic, the right-wing backlash against the sixties and seventies, and the presidency of Ronald Reagan (who was allied with the Christian right) (Miller, 2006). Being open about one's sexuality meant risking violence, harassment, job, family, and health care, while people actually with HIV were refused treatment. AIDS was used to (re)link homosexuality with sickness and pathos. At the same time, the federal government was noticeably silent and inactive in response to the AIDS crisis. This apathy and the vehement anti-gay rhetoric, which targeted both men and women, "acted as a catalyst to unite people who identified as gay, lesbian, and bisexual" (Eaklor, 2008). Situating the league within a larger context renders visible the "relations to other groups and to larger sociopolitical formations…no one group can be understood as if outside the relational and structural aspects of identity formation" (Weis & Fine, 2004, p. xvii).

In 1992, Brian moved to the Southwest after an HIV discrimination settlement and "didn't really have anything to do." At the time, he didn't have a job and was taking care of his very sick partner (Brian, interview). He had previously participated in gay and lesbian softball leagues in other cities and was part of the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Alliance (NAGAAA), which was formed in 1977 to promote "the participation of gay men and lesbians in organized softball competition" (*NAGAA Now*, n.d.). Brian saw organizing a gay and lesbian softball league[10] as an escape from the difficulties of his life. In interview he said that, "It was kind of a way for me to get out of the house and shake off what happened to me…I just got out there with a lot of fervor. And I think the community was coming together a little more strongly out of necessity of so many people dying. And now [the community is] a little more relaxed and splintered."

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[10] There had previously been a lesbian softball league in the city, but, by that time, it had discontinued.

On the League website, a brief history of the league, written by Brian, begins, "The early years of the softball league were influenced usually in an unspoken way by the HIV epidemic around us" (Brian, *History*, 2009). Given the political and social climate at the time, Brian recruited players through local gay and lesbian bars and AIDS organizations throughout the city. This approach was seen as most desirable since "privacy was an extremely important issue, as being 'outed' could cause the loss of a job" (*History, 2009*). Brian collected nearly 200 names and phone numbers of people interested in participating and called them using code words. In early 1993, the first large-scale practices were held. It became very clear that players' abilities differed greatly: "The things that really separated beginners were cleats and mitts...a lot of the guys that came out had no idea what cleats were, which I thought was hilarious. But then there were guys that said, I used to play in San Francisco, Birmingham…and then a couple of guys that had played through high school, I could tell they had played" (interview). At the practices, Brian along with a small group of the most skilled and experienced individuals ranked all the players, and assigned them to teams in an attempt to disperse skills and experience as evenly as possible throughout the League.

In its initial season, five teams were created (four men's and one women's) and sponsored by two gay bars, one lesbian bar, and two gay-owned local businesses. Brian recalls that, on opening day of the first year, two guys wanted to hang a big flag with the well-recognized LGBT symbol, a pink triangle, on it, but four or five guys "just went pale" and cried "'Nooooooo' -- they were school teachers and they were scared to death" (interview). During that initial period, there were "two things…that caused you not to want to be too out." The first was you could lose your job. Brian explained that "We had one school teacher that was somehow discovered to be gay and was fired, partly because he played softball [in a gay and lesbian

league]. And we had one guy that worked for the Sprint Cup Nascar team, and he was our tournament director one year and he was on TV briefly [discussing the League] and he was fired for that" (interview). The second deterrent was that "if you were discovered to be gay, health insurers would cancel your health insurance. And that was important for guys and it was a very private thing…So the kind of anti-gay blanket was still over us and the HIV and AIDS was over us…So that was on everybody's mind, death and dying…There were a lot of ugly things that happened back then. So that kind of…pressurized us more, there was more of a fight, but a hidden fight…The whole process of the community being accepted by all other communities really has had, it did have, a big effect on us…I thought it was important that we always stayed away from politics and being too out" (interview).

During the first season the games were played on Sundays, and gays, lesbians and their friends and families would come out of curiosity to watch: some would be gauging whether or not they wanted to play and others were just enjoying being outdoors with other gays and lesbians. Brian and other players were constantly keeping an eye out for new players and marketing and promoting in an attempt to grow the League. The end of the season was marked by a banquet at a local lesbian bar and "It was small enough that it was kind of like a club, and there was a little bit of spirit, that extra pumping of adrenaline that was going on, because we knew it was something new" (Brian, interview).

According to Brian, the 1990s was a period of growth for LGBT softball leagues around the country. He received calls from around the nation asking what was required to get a league started and he assisted other cities with the process. Over the next few years the League recruited additional players and continued to grow; at the same time, the women focused on enhancing their numbers and participation sufficiently to have their own division. On the League website, Brian

(2009) wrote that, since the 1990s, the league has steadily grown and “can realistically expect to move up to one of the five to ten largest leagues in the country very soon. Each year, with our spring and fall leagues and our annual [tournament], we provide a healthy team sports outlet for several hundred lesbians and gay men, which is something we should all be proud of.”

My official participation observation for this research and analysis began on a sunny September morning in 2013, as I approached a park on the outskirts of this major metropolitan area. The park was made up of four fields that almost formed a clover. The space was bustling with ballplayers on the fields intensely competing in games, men reciting sing-song cheers in dug outs, spectators on the concrete steps that served as stands, and people milling about in between the four fields. Many of the people not playing were wearing uniforms, warming up on the sidelines, waiting for their next games to start, or relaxing after their games finished. Other spectators were fans, partners, family members, children, and pet dogs. Many of the fans wore t-shirts and hats with their teams’ logos. Some kept score and made sure the players needs were met, handing out water or tending to an injury. Others cheered and some were clearly there for the social aspects. People in the stands were talking, making jokes, and laughing, and many were drinking beer.

On the grass in between the fields there were large shade tents where groups of people, with ice coolers and folding chairs, sat and socialized. Generally people sat or stood in groups of men or women (and sometimes, but less likely, groups of men and women) averaging six to twenty people. Many of the groups were visibly demarcated by team affiliation, but different groups associated freely, traveling from one area to another to make conversation and share beers. Throughout the fields there were public displays of affection: women sitting on each other’s laps, men holding hands and kissing, and many butts being slapped. On the fields, some of the

teams had banners on the back of the dugouts with their teams' names and a rainbow flag in the background. In contrast to the early days of the League twenty years previously, and representative of societal changes, the ballpark had clearly been established as an LGBT environment. This is the same scene, more or less, that I have encountered countless Sundays over the last decade. See Appendix J for a picture of the field layout.

Since its inception, the League has grown from four open division teams, whose players are men or men and women, and one women's team to, at its largest point, 25 open teams and 15 women's teams.[11] The size of the League ebbs and flows depending upon factors that are difficult to ascertain; influences suggested by participants included League leadership, internal politics, cultural shifts, and the location of the Gay Softball World Series.[12] During the current research the League was comprised of 22 open teams and seven women's teams.

League Governance

> The purpose of [the League] is to foster local, regional, national and international sports competition predominately for gays, lesbians and anyone dedicated to promotion of the amateur athletic experience for persons of all skill level and abilities regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, creed, religion or national origin. The primary focus of [the League] will be to provide venues for adult slow-pitch softball competition. Additionally, the organization will endeavor to develop people of all abilities and experience to participate in sports competitions. (*Who We Are,* n.d.)

The League is governed on both a national and local level. On the national level, the open and women's leagues are governed by two different organizations,

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[11] The difference between the open and women's divisions will be discussed throughout the findings.
[12] The decreasing participation of women will be discussed later in the findings.

the North American Gay Amateur Athletic Association (NAGAAA) and the Amateur Sports Alliance of North America (ASANA). NAGAAA was created in 1977 to encourage the participation of lesbians and gays in organized softball competition (*Let Us Introduce Ourselves,* n.d.). For undisclosed reasons, in 2007, NAGAA split and formed two organizations, creating two separate governing bodies for the open and women's divisions. The NAGAAA open division consists of teams made up of men and women or exclusively men, and the women's division became ASANA.

According to the website, over 800 teams in 45 leagues across the United States and Canada are currently members of NAGAAA (*NAGAAA Now,* n.d.). Within these leagues are five divisions of play – A, B, C, D, and Masters (people that have reached 50 years of age). The division designations indicate the competitive level of play, with "A" being the most skilled and competitive and "D" being the most recreational. Teams representing these leagues participate in the NAGAAA Gay Softball World Series (GSWS) hosted each year in a different member city. At present, 23 leagues are members of ASANA, which includes B, C, and D divisions (*Our History,* n.d.). I was unable to locate the current number of teams, but was told by Linda, who is a member of the ASANA board, that attrition is a problem for the women's league on a national level. ASANA also hosts a tournament each year, the Softball World Series (SWS) (*World Series*, n.d.), which, since the split, is located in a different city than the NAGAAA series.

In addition to being a member of NAGAAA and ASANA, the League is also a member of the Amateur Softball Association (ASA), which is the national softb all governing body that establishes rules of play and regulates competition for slow pitch softball. Each team in the League is required to be registered with the ASA, games are conducted according to the prevailing rules of the ASA, and equipment guidelines are based on ASA regulations (for example, the ASA regulates which bats

are allowed or banned). As will be discussed later, some observers argue that the need to legitimize gay sports competitions by appealing to mainstream governing bodies, such as the ASA, for sanctioning "compromises the transformative potential of gay sport, and necessarily leads to the appropriation of wider oppressive discourses associated with the mainstream that result in the perpetuation of exclusionary practices" (Drury, 2011, p. 423).

On the local level, the League is governed by its commission (commonly referred to as the board) which has overall responsibility for the conduct of the organization. It is made up of officials elected annually by the membership. The open and women's divisions both have a commissioner, assistant commissioner, and national representative, while the divisions alternate terms for treasurer, secretary, and event coordinator.

In the election cycle during the research, the open division had at least two people running for every vacant position, while the women's division was scrambling to find people to fill the openings,[13] and the position of national representative went unfilled. This is a common occurrence, and definitely a source of contention, with the women's side generally not attracting as much participation as the men's.[14] During my research, the board was predominately composed of white, cis-gendered[15] individuals (although one man was a well-known drag queen).

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[13] At one of the board meetings I attended, the board tried to convince me to fill the position of treasurer of the women's division. I declined the offer explaining that it was unwise for me to take on any additional responsibilities with everything going on in my life.

[14] One board member explained that she became involved in the board when she was approached by two women who were members of the board. She recalled the conversation going something like this: the women explained that the men's board was full and the women's board had "two or three open spots" and it's not fair for the men to "carry the weight …when we [the women] don't fill our spots…So, basically, we're pressuring you into doing this." And that is how I "got suckered in" (Lisa, interview).

[15] Cisgender is a term used to describe an individual whose gender identity aligns with the one typically associated with the sex assigned to them at birth

Regulating Competition

In accordance with the League's purpose of fostering sports competition, all of the teams are encouraged "to travel nationally/internationally to complete in ASANA/NAGAAA sanctioned events, especially the Gay Softball World Series (GSWS). Considering the GSWS is the pinnacle achievement of our league, you must earn the right to compete in this annual event by earning a berth within the local league."[16] As indicated earlier, during the spring 2014 season, there were 22 open teams and seven women's teams. The spring season is where teams qualify to participate in the GSWS, therefore, more teams participate and competition is much more formalized, in terms of rules and regulations, than the fall season, which is viewed generally as much more casual.

Research respondents varied greatly in their prior histories with sport. Some people have played sports, including softball, since they were very young children and others had very little sport experience and participation in the League was their first time playing softball. As indicated earlier, there are varying levels of competition (A, B, C, D), going from the highly skilled and experienced player to the novice. Although the skill level varied based on the team and the individual, the emphasis on competition and winning was a consistent theme across all levels of play.[17] The privileging of winning can be seen on the field as well as on the website where the link for "League Accomplishments" leads to a page with a table that lists teams that finished in the top three positions in local and national tournaments. The table's introductory text says,

[16] It is worth noting that the GSWS is the "pinnacle of achievement" in the League and specific to the open side, while the GSW, which is specific to the women's side, is not mentioned.

[17] The first few years were the only time the League attempted to evenly distribute players based on skill throughout the teams. Once there were enough players and teams to form a league, the emphasis was on competition.

> We are very proud to have a league that is competitive on a national level. We continually strive to challenge all of our members to improve themselves on and off the field, travel to tournaments to compete representing their teams, [the League], and themselves, and above all show good sportsmanship. The table below is a short list that highlights some of the accomplishments (top three finishes) of some of the [teams in the League]. Congratulations on all the hard work, accomplishment, and making [our city] a great place to play softball.

The table includes columns for the year, the name of the team, the name of the tournament, the location of the tournament, the league (open, women, "straight"), the division (A, B, C, D), and the place (1st, 2nd, 3rd, and three 4th place finishes). The "accomplishments" of the higher divisions (A being the most competitive) is always listed first, giving primacy to the more competitive teams.

Regardless of the division, competition and winning was a consistent theme across all levels of play. As John said in an interview, "I think there is the same common goal. I think you've got competitive women's teams, and you have recreational. I think you've got competitive men's teams and you have recreational…You're basically working within the system trying to put together the best team you possibly can to win the [World Series]."

One of the women I interviewed, Lisa, started her own recreational team. Previous to starting the team, she and a small group of friends would go and "cheer on" another team on Sundays. After spectating for a few years, she and her best friend decided they wanted to play. When they approached the team about playing they were told the team did not have room. Lisa recalled, "Of course they didn't have room. We had no idea…how competitive this whole thing was." The coach on the team, with whom Lisa was good friends, stated that she did not welcome them on

her team because she assumed that the two of them would not be any good at softball because Lisa "is the clutsy girly-girl" and her best friend "doesn't look athletic." As a result, Lisa decided to form a new team with her best friend, and they recruited friends from outside of the league as players. With a little bit of delight in her voice, she said they "just wanted to have fun, that was all we wanted to do, and we're like, 'We're going to be the cute team that has fun,' but as it turns out, we ended up being pretty good." As a side note, her best friend turned out to be a very good softball player and the players on the team that was "too full" were disgruntled with the coach for not letting her on the team.

Although Lisa's team was established with the goal of fun, during our interview she discussed the importance of competition in successfully preparing for the Softball World Series. She explained that her team is "nationally a really good 'D' team" but they cannot properly prepare themselves with the "D" teams in the League who are far less competitive, and as a result, her team plays "down to their level." To address the lack of competition and prepare for post-season tournaments, they planned on playing in the "C" league in the spring season, although she predicted that they would "probably lose most of our games, but at least we're going to better ourselves." She also discussed having a meeting to establish team priorities because she wanted to understand whether it was more important to her team to be nationally competitive or to have a good time. The former would require playing teams more skilled than them in order to improve their competitiveness.

My field experience and interviews revealed that, at the beginning of each year, most teams hold meetings where they discuss players' commitment levels and the team's financial situation. As a player, I attended a few of these meetings in which the team gathers at a person's house to eat food, drink beer, and talk with the intention of establishing goals for the season, what tournaments (local and national)

people were interesting in entering, and whether the intention was to compete in the Softball World Series. If the SWS was the goal, the season was tailored in a way to meet that objective as it required a large investment of money and time.

One interviewee, Alex, explained that her team has a BBQ every year right before the season and the coach lays out the expectations. The coach says, "Some of you may not play all the time. Some of you may play all the time. Some of you may not play at all." Her team competes at the "B" level, which is currently the highest level of competition for women, since there are no longer any "A" teams nationally.[18] She views winning as the team's preeminent goal: "We just want to go out and win." In order to achieve that objective, the most accomplished and competitive people must be on the field.

Alex's comments clearly reflect the current competitive emphasis. She described the spring season as the most important time in the League "because that's when you go to the World Series and that's when you want to play your best players, the ones that you know can get you to the World Series." She candidly explained that, when spring league comes, a lot of people are going to be kicked off the team because there are some "players that really shouldn't be in the 'B' division. They should actually be in the 'C' division." When the time comes, she and the coach will get together and "wrack our brains and be like, 'Look, dude, the girl can't even hit it out of the infield. She can't run, she can't play defense, why are we playing her?'...It's not trying to be rude towards anybody else on our team, but that's just it, it's competitive."

[18] There were various speculations on why the women are no longer able to sustain an "A" division including lack of overall participation from women, debatable ranking practices whereby players and teams that should be ranked as "A" level are ranked as "B" in order make them more competitive and increase their chances of winning, and the aging out of skilled players who are not being replaced by the younger generation.

Competition is also a prevailing theme for the men. John, a retired "A" player and member of the League Hall of Fame, explained in interview that playing softball at a competitive level was an incredible release for him. He liked being around people who are driven by sports and competition, and said he found it "a lot more entertaining and interesting than going to hang out in a bar, going to a drag show, going to things like that…I'm a very competitive person." Some of the highly competitive men's teams enter into "straight leagues" for potential exposure to enhanced competition. John recalled a story where he was going up to bat in one such game and heard some little kids saying "faggot this, faggot that." He contended that "People like that don't realize that we play at a competitive level and so those are fighting words…we're just going to go out on the field and kick their you-know-whats. And usually, that's what we did (laughs) and just smile on the way out." Implicit in this comment is the gratification John received from challenging the stereotype of gay men not being athletic.

In order to ensure that there are "fair and consistent" levels of play across all leagues and divisions, the League uses a form designed by NAGAAA to rate all players "to determine if a player possesses a skill or skills necessary for softball" (*Player Rating Guidelines*, 2012). Throwing, fielding, base running, and hitting skills are evaluated by the Commission and each player is given a ranking of A to D. This ranking determines the level of team on which the player should participate. Player and team ranking is quite controversial and often an area of contention for players and coaches. In my time as a participant observer, I often heard players complaining about the rankings of other teams. For example, at one tournament, many of the teams were complaining that a specific team had worked the system in order to compete at a lower level to have a better chance of winning. People were calling them "sandbaggers" and expressed open hostility towards this team.

Similarly, there were complaints within the league regarding the rankings of specific players. The rankings were common fodder for gossip and one of the most frequently stated critiques of the board. For instance, one survey respondent stated "ratings drama" was his least favorite part of the League and another said, "The board struggles with consistency and rating systems." In one of my interviews, Natalia, a coach on the women's side, said that she was constantly fighting with the board about how they ranked players on her team. She would ask them, "How can you put my player as an 'A' player? There are no 'A' players…Do you sit out there for every single game for eight weeks? You can't tell me you can sit there for one inning and rate them as an 'A'." She concluded her discussion of the ranking system by saying, with an evident sense of disgust, "The classification system is a joke."

The board recognizes the dissatisfaction of many of its participants, as it is often brought to their attention through the filing of official complaints and the grumbling of unofficial ones. As a result, the ranking systems is perpetually a topic of discussion at the monthly board meetings and sentiments such as, "The board needs to do due diligence to ensure players are rated appropriately in their respective divisions," were commonly found in the board meeting minutes (*Meeting Minutes*, 2014). In interview, Lisa, a commission member, explained that the League is going to create a player classification panel to improve the system. Addressing the women's side, she said, ASANA is changing their ranking system to get a better picture of each player, and "It's going to be interesting to see how this new system changes things, because the 'B' division is getting smaller and smaller nationally. The 'A' division doesn't exist anymore. Everyone is having the same problem. The younger girls aren't playing softball. Where are the girls that played in college? Or it goes to show that more and more softball players aren't lesbians."

Shared Meanings: The Discursive Construction of Community

Participants overwhelmingly perceived the League as a community. One survey respondent wrote "[the League] = community." Because community is a social construct that is created and enacted by people in a particular place and time, it is difficult to define what constitutes a community. According to Leipins (2000), community can be viewed as a form of intentional collectivity in which people construct shared (and/or contested) meanings, "such as commonality, social connection, nurturance and the identification of belonging and otherness" (p. 31). This section explores the ways people discursively created shared meanings about and through the constitution of the League and how this shaped participants' experiences.

In the exploratory study, 91% of the 58 respondents indicated that participating in the League gave them a sense of community (46% strongly agreed, 45% agreed, and 9% neither agreed nor disagreed) (Mertel, 2012). Further exploration of this in the current research found 92% of the survey respondents and 100% of 20 interview respondents specified that the League was a community.[19] Data analysis identified three core elements of the League that led to participants constituting it as community: sharing, doing, and connecting. "Connecting" referred to the relationships developed and maintained in and through the League and was identified in 85% of participant responses. "Sharing" referred to the existence of similar identities, common interests, and mutual understandings and perspectives among members of the League and was included in 85% of participant responses. "Doing" referred to collective action and mutual support and was included in 92% of participant responses. Sixty-four percent of the responses included all three elements, demonstrating the coexisting and interdependent nature of the themes.

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[19] The survey asked the question, "Do you feel the League is a community? What specifically does or does not make it a community?"

Connecting: Relationships Developed and Maintained in and through the League

Connecting was most commonly discussed in terms of the social relationships that represent a core component of community. The theme of connecting to other people was evident in 85% of the responses. The League was perceived as a space where participants developed and maintained new and important interpersonal relationships. The types of relationships cited included friends, teammates, partners, and "family." For example, some survey respondents said:

- The League was great for when I was young and wanted to socialize. It's an instant group of friends (your team), it's great when you are looking for an outlet. (parenthesis in original)
- In my "baby gay" days, I needed that reaffirmation that there were others like me and I also needed the opportunity to develop relationships with a variety of people who had a variety of experiences, while still being part of the community. We are a spectrum within a spectrum. (quotations in original)
- [When I joined the League] I met 100 people or more immediately, which was awesome!
- I have made some very dear and important friendships that will last a lifetime.

Regardless if people had been in the League for a brief period of time or since its inception, many people stated that their teammates and other League members were their "social group of friends." Likewise, it was very common for the majority of League participants' friends to be related in some way to the League. Alex explained,

> I've met mostly, mostly all of my friends, I have met through the [League]. I like that I get to see my friends. Because most times I don't, I don't really get

to see a lot of my friends during the week, because we work. And that's the only time that we have like our, I should say, like, playtime; that we just all meet up and just have fun, and do stuff like here. It's like letting your hair down.

In a similar vein, John explained that "some of the best people I ever met" that "really, really, really bring a smile to my face" came through the League. He continued,

> There were so many people over the years, guys, gals, you name it, deceased people that are long gone…It's one of the few environments that we have in our community that aren't in a bar, that aren't in a 'me, me, me' format. They're not on a pedestal… I think it, it's, it is such a great aspect for our community. And in regards to seeing people outside of an alcohol-induced, you know, bar-filled, social event. It's a social event, but…you're there and you're burning energy and you're thinking together. You're relying on other people around you. They're relying on you, um, and I think, once you get that, that respect that you earn and that love, that just starts to grow for those people in that regard, um, whether you're playing with them or playing against them. You know, especially when you play as many years as I have and you're playing against your archrivals and this and that, and you're damn good friends with your archrivals, too, overtime. Not on the field, but, you know, right afterwards.

Reiterating what John said, many participants viewed the League as a positive and important alternative to meeting people in bars. For example, some survey responses included,

- [It's an] important way to meet other gay and gay-accepting people in a NON-bar setting. (capitalization in original)

- I was a lost puppy and only knew of gay bars to meet people. I am more outgoing and have many friends now because of the league.
- [The League] has become a special place for me. I have become very active within the league and met many wonderful people that I wouldn't have had the opportunity to meet otherwise. Sundays at the ball field is a non-judgmental place. It is so nice to be able to be "myself" in a setting other than a gay-friendly bar.

Over half of the participants indicated that they joined the League when they were new to the area as a way to meet similar people. As one respondent stated, "It was a great experience as a transplant to [a new city] we found instant community." Another survey respondent expressed,

> [The League] is like an extended family to me. I've gotten to know so many people through my playing, but also as a board member. And it's very important because I have truly felt like [this state] has become my home due to the relationships I have built through this league.

One person who joined the League after moving here from another state for work communicated, "I was very isolated before joining [the League]. It was the way I made friends in [the city]. Now, almost all of my friends are other queer people and I feel like I am part of the LGBT community."[20]

These findings corroborate what was found in the exploratory study, where 82% of participants indicated the number of LGBT friends they have has increased (41% increased, 41% greatly increased) since joining the League (Mertel, 2012). Additionally, in a follow-up interview in the exploratory study David said, "[The League] is the only reason I have any good friends in [this city]. I even live with my two teammates" (Mertel, 2012).

[20] An interesting side note about this quote is that was the only time in this study that the word "queer" was used by the participants.

In addition to making connections within the League, many people described the League as a way to connect with the larger LGBT community. As one survey respondent expressed, "I feel that [the League] is a community within a community…I have found that there are lots of links to the entire LGBT community that interconnect through [the League]" In interview Judy said,

> Every single person that I know in [this city] links back to softball. All of them. Everybody. In some way, shape or form. Those are the people that have stuck around your life, who are part of your life, and they all go back to softball. I know people all over the country because of softball. I can go to any city and pick up the phone and know somebody because of softball. I mean it's a different vibe. It's family. It's like [Linda] said, I mean you go and play ball on Tuesdays with straight girls, 'Hey, what's up?' You know, but seriously, you don't invite them into your life the way that we do with each other [in the League]. It's just totally different.

Judy further elaborated that she has gotten involved in and volunteered for other LGBT organizations because of the connections she made in the League; she even met her partner through the League. The importance of the type of connections created and maintained in the League was illustrated in the above quote through the trope of "family." The concept of families of choice was echoed frequently throughout my research. For example, one survey respondent stated, "I love the game and I love the family I have gained playing in this league." Another person wrote, "I have stayed involved in [the League] because [it] introduced me to the people that I consider family."

In two-thirds of my interviews, participants brought up the concept of the League as a chosen family. Family referred to the important networks of emotional and social support built in and through the League. For example, Jessica and Joanne

conceptualized the League as a family because of lifelong friendships developed, support provided, and an environment accepting of their relationship and free of stigma. Joanne said, "[the League] has given us an extended family. Whereas we don't always completely have the support of our immediate family, you know, and raising kids as young as we were, I think that was an invaluable part of our kind of growing as a family, and as a couple, and as people." Jessica added, "And, and with raising kids and doing what we've done, you know, throughout our lives, in the last 20 years, it's… it's been imperative to have that kind of village around us."

Other participants shared similar sentiments. When talking about her team, Alex said, "They are my family, more than my family [back home]." Brian also introduced the trope of family when he said,

> The [League] has really been my family. Much more, unfortunately, than my real family. I've played in seven leagues and while I was in them, they were kind of my family…Each time I was promoted [and needed to move to a new city] with my career, there was a league already there, except for when I came here, and so it became a family part of your community and gave me a lot more quickly a chance to make friends.

One survey respondent said, "[The League] is a place to make friends and gain a family that is 100% accepting of you." This corroborates previous research that has found many LGB people rely extensively on a "family of choice" for support and acceptance, and in some situations "to compensate for a lack of supportive family ties" (Dewaele et al., 2011).

Sharing: Similar Identities, Interests, and Perspectives

A large majority of participant responses, 85%, identified the theme of sharing. They referred to the existence of similar identities, interests, and perspectives that led to a sense of community. The League was described as being

composed of people who shared gay and lesbian identities, interest in sports, love of softball, passions, values, morals, goals, and discriminatory experiences. Sharing contributed to a sense of community by creating a sense of solidarity and connectedness. Put in a very straightforward manner, one survey respondent said, it is a community because "We (gays) feel better with our own."

One survey participant asserted, "There are 2 things that are the basis of [the League] – being GBLT and enjoying softball." Another said, "I see [the League] as a gay sports community." As is evident in the above quotes, the intentional collectivity in the League was based on a shared gay[21] identity and interest in softball. The ability to play softball with other people that shared a lesbian or gay identity was seen as significant, it removed the barriers to participation, gave people a sense of freedom, and allowed them to be themselves. Speaking to the meaning of the League in her life, a retired player, who started playing in the League in 2000, recollected,

> For me, it was a place to go to play my beloved sport, but more importantly, it was a place to be me! As I said, I was newly out. I had experienced some condemnation for being lesbian, so a place to go to meet others like me was critical for my own growth and acceptance. Moving to a larger city and meeting people "like me" was invaluable!! [sic] I cannot explain how important that was for me. It gave me the confidence to be out at work and in life. Additionally, I made some amazing, lasting friendships that I still treasure today. (Quotation marks in original)

The importance of the league providing access to meeting others "like me" was a common narrative among the participants. The identity component of "like me" was specific to being in a sporting environment with other lesbians and gay

[21] I very purposely used the word "gay" as opposed to "LGBT" or "gay and lesbian" to accurately represent the discourse of participants.

men. The solidarity of sharing a non-normative sexuality made individuals feel more comfortable and connected. Stated another way, Carly said people look forward to playing in the League because "they know they're not going to be judged and know that it's just gonna be a community of their own peers. Not just of people and friends, but of their own liking, and that's gay and lesbians" (interview).

According to participants, a gay and lesbian identity was a point of similarity rather than difference, as in other parts of society. In the League it is assumed that everyone is gay rather than straight, and that seemed to engender a sense of solidarity. In interview Kim asserted that the main difference between the League and other softball leagues is that "the assumption is that you're gay, versus the assumption that you're straight." She explained that this makes the League more welcoming. In other leagues with "straighties" (a term she used to refer to heterosexual people), she feels like an outsider, and within this league she feels more comfortable and like she can be herself. She contended that her sense of security within the League is "probably because there's others out there, and I know that they are, and I know that they're not offended. I don't like to offend people by my sexuality." In a similar respect, a survey respondent said, "I have more confidence to know we are a community, our own part of society. There is no shame associated with it."

Throughout my research people expressed gaining a sense of confidence from participating in the League. One person maintained that "Meeting more people like you gives you confidence. Before I was isolated. The exposure to gay people helped with that. I think I came out professionally because of confidence I got from the league" (Survey respondent). Another said, the League "helped me to be more comfortable in my own skin. I am proud to be a gay man and proud to participate in activities that show my true identity" (Survey respondent). A different person

remarked that participating in the League helped to deal with homophobia because "The more gay people you know, the more confidence you have…It's a learning process for most people. People need adjustment time. The league was there during a time that helped me to accept and understand myself" (Survey respondent).

Actual or perceived discrimination based on sexuality was a prominent theme throughout my research. Speaking about a lived experience, one survey respondent recalled,

> During the time I was with the league, it was a bit of a refuge. I'll never forget that a few years after we started playing in the league, several of us decided to play in the city league as well on a week night. So it was a lesbian team in a straight league. One night, we were teased and harassed by the boyfriends of one of the teams for being lesbians. This was just 6-8 years ago. That was brutally eye-opening for us as a team. We did not realize how safe we were [in the League].

The experience of discrimination, such as described in the previous quote, was much less commonly referred to than the *expectation* of discrimination. Because of the shared gay and lesbian identities, the League provided a space where individuals did not a fear that sexual stigma would be enacted. Instead, participants felt that LGBT identities and relationships were valued in a social context in where they felt safe, comfortable, free of judgment, accepted, and welcomed. For example, Judy observed, "That's why you're here [in the League]. It's safe. That's why you want to be in this league. It's a different situation. I can go play ball anywhere" (interview). Another person said, "[The League] is a community. We all share some of the same discriminatory experiences and being a part of [the League] you know you always have a family and a support system" (survey respondent). A different

person maintained that “There is no judgement of anyone. Not sure we would be treated fairly in a straight league” (survey respondent). In interview Carly surmised,

> You want to feel safe in your community and I think that people feel safe when they are playing in this league. You don’t want to feel like every time you go to play softball…that something is going to happen. And I think that people feel that way, I think they have a sort of safe comfort level that when they go out to play softball and they’re around their peers of gays and lesbians, they have that comfort level.

The existence of actual or perceived discrimination was also evident in the exploratory study. Ninety-three percent of the exploratory research participants agreed that there is prejudice about and/or discrimination toward LGBT people in society and 73% indicated that homophobia, discrimination, and exclusion exists in mainstream sports leagues and teams (Mertel, 2012). Similar to previous research (Elling, Knop, and Knoppers, 2003), it is clear that participants were drawn towards the League by positive factors such as a sense of commonality and solidarity, and deterred from joining mainstream leagues by (both real and perceived) negative factors such as stigmatization and judgment. This also corroborates Price and Parker’s (2003) research that found that, for gay and bisexual men, being part of a “gay sports culture” allowed them to enjoy the camaraderie of team membership while experiencing a sense of commonality and community, in contrast to the feelings of estrangement experienced on mainstream teams.

In a group interview with three women (Carrie and Maria, a married couple, and their good friend Anne), I asked why they participate in the League rather than in other leagues. Anne portrayed the League as more comfortable because you know that the people around you are all “pretty much the same…they’re probably all the

same, as opposed to [in straight leagues], you know, you don't know other people's opinions or necessarily how they feel towards you." Maria added to this by saying,

> It's kind of like she said, you don't understand what peoples' perceptions are going to be, you don't understand what their thoughts are going to be, you don't know their beliefs, you don't know. I mean coming from the family where I grew up, I'm a little more cautious about people's judgment, and I guess playing in the [League], you don't have to worry about being lesbian as novelty. You don't have to worry about anyone making off the wall comments that you don't expect. I mean, with lesbians you expect off the wall comments, but it's never anything derogatory and that is kind of just reiterating what [Anne] said. You just don't know what people's expectations are. You don't know what their beliefs are. So I wouldn't just go, "Oh, nice hit, babe," slap her butt, kiss her cheek, on our co-ed team (in a straight league), because we play co-ed as well. Where in the [League] it's just like, "Hey, nice hit, babe," give her a kiss, slap her ass, whatever, it's fine. But in co-ed, people stare.

Anne built on the implicit feeling of connectedness that comes from sharing a gay and lesbian identity by saying, "I think it's also just a comfort thing. Like you know that they're the same as you, so you don't feel that you'll be judged, you don't feel that you'll be looked at any differently." Carrie continued the conversation by saying,

> When I'm with people that have walked a similar path, maybe not the exact same, obviously, because none of us know exactly what anybody else has been through, but if you talk to someone that has walked a similar path as you, you can have a little bit more of that honesty and a little bit more of that forthcoming mentality. Whereas, if just some guy out of our co-ed team is like "Hey, how long have you guys been gay? When did you find out? Do you

> think it's just because you haven't been with the right guy?" "No, I don't think it's because I haven't been with the right guy; this is who I am, this is who I love," you know. Whereas, yeah, sure, maybe in the lesbian community, there is still that intrigue, because people want to know about people that are like them, you know. I don't know.

This part of the conversation concluded with Maria contending that as a lesbian or gay person, "You don't necessarily feel separate from society, but you kinda know you are, in a roundabout way. So you separate yourselves, but you put yourselves together and then you just feel, you know, as if it's like one force." Anne interjected, "It's more of a connection. You just have a different connection" in the League as compared to in straight leagues. Carrie expanded that when they bring their relationship to a co-ed team, they become the focus of the team: "They're fascinated with it." Maria interrupted, "They're fascinated or disgusted. It's one or the other." Then Carrie said, "You know, when you hang out with [the League], you're just, everybody's on the same playing field, basically, so there's no, 'Oh, she's gay. I wonder why or I wonder how.' It's just, 'Oh, that's how she is' or he." Maria added, "And there's still the intrigue, but there's not the disgust."

Doing: Collective Action and Mutual Support

The theme of doing was identified in 92% of participants' responses. The practices and activities in which the collective group partook on a regular basis were seen as naturally leading to the creation of community. Community was described as emerging from the joint action of people who came together, spent time together, played together, and supported each other. However, the interaction between the doing, sharing, and connecting was intertwined so that, as people with similar identities and interests came together to play sport or otherwise spend time

together, a feeling of community developed. This interplay is illustrated in the following survey responses,

- It is a community. People coming together to participate in life with others who share similar interests in life.
- My girlfriend and I decided to join the [League] so we could not only play ball, but play with other lesbians. It gives you a sense of community to play with others that can understand you.
- [The League] is important for the city and was important for me. It gives people a place where they can be comfortable with themselves and enjoy something they love. Its [sic] also a welcoming environment for people who never really experienced sports growing up but are looking for a community.
- The regular gathering of people and the welcoming spirit helped me feel a sense of community.

The importance of "the regular gathering of people" on and off the fields was reiterated throughout my research. Participants talked about people coming together for a wide spectrum of activities such as weekly practices, Sunday games, team meetings, tournaments, fundraisers, LGBT events, birthdays, holidays, and going out to bars.

In the exploratory study, it was found that, on average, participants spent nearly a third of their leisure time and went on half of their vacations with individuals they met through the League[22] (Mertel, 2012). The importance of spending time with people outside the ball fields was supported in the current study. For instance, Maria

[22] Many of those vacations were to out-of-town softball tournaments. For example, when asked if participating in the League impacted him, John responded that participating in the League allowed him to pursue two of his biggest passions in life: "playing sports and traveling." He said, "I probably would have never made it to Toronto's Gay Pride Parade had it not been for playing a tournament up there at the time. Wow, that's a great, great thing to do two things you love to do very much: play sports, compete in the athletic thing, and see a cultural thing I probably never would have seen otherwise." (interview).

explained that, outside of the softball games, she rarely spends time with people from the co-ed (straight) league team on which she plays.

> Whereas in the [League] we're always hanging out together, we're always doing fundraising together, we're always doing the Chili Cookoff, we're always at Pride together…we have the same bar that basically accepts all of us and you know sponsors a lot of us. I mean, shit, we even have our own World Series. I think, for me, that brings a little bit of difference, friendship, and a little bit more camaraderie… I think, humanity has a desire and a need to connect with other people and I think that our sexuality and our lifestyles is one of the biggest connectors that we have.

In comparing her sense of camaraderie with people from the straight league to the (gay and lesbian) League, Maria demonstrated the significance of the interplay of sharing, connecting, and doing. It warrants reminding that there are other softball leagues (for men, women, and co-ed) throughout the geographical area, but people are choosing to participate in this particular league. The doing (the playing sport, the hanging out) is mediated by the sharing and connecting.

As stated earlier, participants understood the League to be a "gay sports community" made up of "people like me." This shared understanding engendered a sense of collectivity and connection. As one survey respondent said, "[The League] is a great place to have fun, socialize with like-minded individuals where you can feel free to be yourself all while playing a sport I love." The opportunity to play softball with other people that shared a gay and lesbian identity was seen as significant because it gave people a sense of freedom and allowed them to be themselves. One survey respondent surmised, "I think we are all looking for acceptance and a sense of belonging. It's not just the exercise and sport we go out there for. I think both men and women alike are looking for friendship and the ability to be themselves."

Another said, “We all have the same motives in playing in the [League]. Men and women we are all out there to win and enjoy doing something we love with people who ultimately love us too. We are all looking to be accepted and loved for the people that we were born to be.”

Playing a sport (doing) with others with similar identities and interests (sharing) led to the formation of friendship networks and, in some cases, families of choice (connecting). These networks provided resources such as functional and emotional support. Some examples I came across throughout my research included people getting help watching their dogs while they were away, getting assistance with emergencies around the house, borrowing a truck or getting a ride, babysitting kids, staying with someone after a tough break up, and using contacts and getting referrals during a period of unemployment.

In interview Alex explained that she could call anyone up on her team and say, “Hey, I need you.” and “They’d be there.” She went on to explain that playing in the League,

> You meet so many different people from so many different states and whatnot. And um, I felt that I was so closed off [before], and I didn’t know how to be a lesbian. And [the League] taught me how to be open and be strong and know my sexuality. Because, other than that, I’d still be hiding...Because I can call up anybody and be like, “Hey, I just need to talk.”

Betty shared the same sentiment when she stated, “My teammates are not just my teammates, they’re my friends. They are people I consider in my life as friends. If I needed something I would go to them.”

These findings corroborate what was discovered in the exploratory study. In the exploratory study, when asked if there was a change in support since joining the League, 40% of respondents indicated that there was an increase in the amount of

functional support to which they had access, such as someone to count on for a ride, financial support, or a place to stay. Additionally, 47% of respondents indicated that there was an increase in the amount of emotional support to which they had access, such as someone to count on when they need advice, guidance, encouragement, or someone with whom to talk (Mertel, 2012). Table four shows the data from questions in the exploratory study that asked people to indicate if they could receive different types of support from someone the met as a result of participating in the League. Eighty-one percent of people indicated they would be able to access someone to hang out or talk with, 77% indicated they could get someone to watch their house while they were away, 62% said they could get someone to lend them money, and 71% said they could get the support of someone to make them feel good, loved, or cared for.

Table 4

Perception of support available through the League

Could you receive the following types of support through someone you met as a result of participating in the League:	Yes	No
Someone to lend you money?	62%	38%
Someone to help in doing things around the house (cooking, cleaning, yard work)?	71%	29%
Someone to give you a ride to someplace you had to go (shopping, post office, airport)?	73%	27%
Someone to help with your daily routine if you were not feeling well?	67%	33%
Someone to watch your house (care for plants/pets) while you were away?	77%	23%
Someone to talk to about something that was bothering you?	79%	21%
Someone to hang out with when you felt lonely or just wanted to talk?	81%	19%
Someone to talk to about a small argument you had with your girlfriend/boyfriend/partner or closest friend?	77%	23%
Someone to make you feel good, loved, or cared for?	71%	29%
Someone to talk to about a series of disappointments or bad days?	77%	23%

The findings are also representative of my personal experience. For example, one teammate helped me tile my bathroom, two others were a great support system through a break-up, and another was an important resource during a medical

emergency. These were only a few of the multiple ways I received support through the people I met in the League. Additionally, in my time participating, I spent Thanksgiving with two of my teammates who hosted an annual Thanksgiving celebration. (They started the tradition after joining the League because many of the friends they met did not celebrate the holiday with their families). I went to a going-away party for a person who was being deployed to Afghanistan, attended a wedding for two women that met through the League, went to drag shows, and went to endless parties and get-togethers celebrating anything and everything. My experience is representative of my research findings: 80% of respondents in the exploratory study indicated that they celebrate holidays and special events with individuals they met through participation in the League (Mertel, 2012).

The findings corroborate other research that has found that leisure can facilitate the development of networks and communities that provide functional and emotional support (Elling, Knopp, & Knoppers, 2003; Jacobson & Samdahl, 1998; Johnson, 2008; Son, Yarnell, & Kerstetter, 2010) and provide opportunities for individuals to explore their identities (Kelly, 1996; Kivel & Kleiber, 2000; Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002; Shaw, Kleiber, & Caldwell, 1995). The findings also reinforce previous research (Kivel, 2008) that found sexual identity is a basis for difference in leisure behaviors as heterosexism and homophobia influence the decisions made by participants. Similar to Kivel's (2008) findings, this research demonstrated that sexual minorities are conspicuously aware of their difference from the dominant culture, and as a result they are frequently excluded or exclude themselves from sport and leisure.

The intentional collectivity in the League was based on a shared gay[23] identity and interest in softball. As one survey participant succinctly put it, "I see [the League] as a gay sports community." Gay was frequently used colloquially as an inclusive and difference-erasing umbrella term to refer to gay and lesbian (and far less frequently, bisexual, transgender, and queer) individuals. Many critiques of community have focused on the universalization of an identity in order to produce unity, on the other hand, many supporters of community point to the resultant effect of enhanced power and belonging. Joseph (2002) believes we should situate community and community discourse "in the social processes in which they are constituted and that they help to constitute" (p. viii).

This section looked at the League's beginning, the League governance, and the regulation of competition. It also explored the ways participants discursively created shared meanings of community and identity about and through the constitution of the League. The next section investigates the ways participants created contested meanings of community and identity and considers whether the League is predominantly assimilationist and/or transformational.

[23] As noted previously, I very purposely use the word "gay" as opposed to "LGBT" or "gay and lesbian" to accurately represent the discourse of the participants Analysis of the data found the prominence of "gay" used as an umbrella term to include all members of the LGBT community (although primarily gays and lesbians). For example, some of the terms participants used included: gay league, gay bars, gay friends, gay community, gay marriage, gay athletics, gay softball, gay sports, gay people, gay men, and gay women. A word frequency query demonstrated the number of times each of the following words were used by participants in the interviews and surveys: Lesbian(s), 143; Gay(s), 353; Bisexual, 1; Transgender, 20; Queer, 1; LGBT/GBLT, 7.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS PART 2:

CONTESTED MEANINGS: IDENTITY POLITICS AND COMMUNITY

Due to the enabling and constraining nature of power, both the strengths and weaknesses of identity politics can be seen in the research data examined in the previous chapter. In contrast to the form in which they are perpetually invoked, identities are constructed through, as opposed to outside of, difference. It is only through the relation to the Other, the constitutive outside, "people not like me," that "people like me" can function. The "people like me" sentiment expressed by so many participants was constructed within "the play of power and exclusion" (Hall, 2000, p. 19) and was the result of existing within a homophobic society.

Participating in the League provided people access to a community and a sense of solidarity and connection. From the previous conversations, it can also be seen that the single identification with a gay and lesbian identity ("you know that they're the same as you") essentializes gay and lesbian identities as uniform and does not take into consideration imbalances of power such as sexism, classism, and racism (Pharr, 2010). It also falsely universalizes and creates overly general assumptions about gay and lesbian people instead of allowing for the full spectrum of LGBT identities and experiences.

The overwhelming sentiment by participants was that the League was inclusive and accepting; "This is our community! Every group that makes up our lgbt community is part of this league. No one is excluded and *we* can all play and participate everyday [sic]! *We* strive for excellence in representation and acceptance and this league makes it happen" (survey respondent, italics added for emphasis). However, as recent scholarship has indicated (for example, Drury, 2011; Elling et al.,

2003; Pronger, 2000; Travers & Deri, 2011, Wellard, 2006), it is problematic to assume that gay sports culture equates to inclusive sporting environments, and it is necessary to examine the complexities and contradictions that operate within gay and lesbian sports leagues to gain a better understanding of the intricate social relations. It is necessary to ask: What is the nature of the *we*? Who is included? Who is marginalized? According to Drury (2011), "The relations of power that exist within sports spaces inexorably construct and disrupt social boundaries, thus creating opportunities for the normalization of certain identities and subjectivities, and the marginalization of others" (p. 422). This section investigates the contested meanings about identity and community created in and through the League.

The Nature of the 'We'

According to the League bylaws, membership in the League "is open to all people who wish to participate in the activities of the organization provided they: A. agree to abide by the rules of [the League] or any rules as designated to govern competition, B. agree to abide by [the League] code of conduct, and C. pay any applicable membership fees" (*Article Three: Membership*, 2012, p. 1). According to the mission, the League is "predominately" but not exclusively for gays and lesbians. In the bylaws, the first and only reference to those who identify as bisexual, transgender or questioning, that is, the BTQ[24] in LGBT, is on page eight (out of nine), when addressing how many non-LGBT players are permitted to participate. Although non-LGBT people participate in the League, one of the rules teams must follow governs how many can compete in a game at once. The rules were changed in February 2012 to allow an unlimited number of "non lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or questioning (collectively referred to as "LGBT") players; however, per

[24] On the League website, under "Who we are" it stated, "[the League] is a primarily LGBT slow pitch softball league…" and otherwise there was no other mention of any identity other than lesbian and gay anywhere.

the most current NAGAAA Bylaws, no more than three (3) non-LGBT rostered players may be on the field or in any batting lineup in any game at any given time" (*Article Seven: Team Membership and Competition*, 2012, p. 8). Prior to February 2012, the League had something called the "80/20 rule" where there was no limit to how many straight players were allowed on a team, but at least 80% of the players on the field during a game at any given time must be identified as "predominately gay" (the new rule is sometimes referred to as the "70/30 rule"). Implementation of this rule is obviously problematic, and the controversy played out very publicly in a federal court.

In the open division, at the Gay Softball World Series in 2008, the limit on non-gay players was brought to the forefront when NAGAAA disqualified a team for exceeding the limit. At the time, each team was allowed a maximum of two non-gay players (this has since changed to the above rule). According to an Associated Press Article (2011), the team in question had three players that claimed to be bisexual, not gay, and "rumors had persisted that the team was stacked with straight ringers, and when they made it all the way to the finals of the 2008 tournament…others filed a protest, accusing [the team] of exceeding the limit of two heterosexual players per team" (Johnson, n.p.). Five players from the team were called into a conference room where they were questioned by a protest committee in front of more than 25 people, most of them strangers. The players were asked questions about their sexual orientations and private lives. The committee then voted on whether the men were gay. Two were determined to be gay, but the committee found three to be straight. According to Johnson,

> [NAGAAA] said that at the time, the men never identified themselves as bisexual, were evasive or refused to answer questions about their sexuality. Minutes of the hearing say that [one man] claimed to be gay but

> acknowledged being married to a woman, and [another man] initially said he was both gay and straight but then acknowledged being more attracted to women. The men said they weren't given the option of stating outright that they were bisexual, even though the organization considered bisexual players to be gay for roster purposes. They and their team were disqualified. One observer at the hearing commented, "This is not a bisexual World Series. This is a gay World Series." (2011, n.p.)

The three disqualified softball players and the National Center for Lesbian Rights (NCLR) filed a federal lawsuit alleging various discrimination and privacy claims against NAGAAA and asked the court to bar NAGAAA from enforcing its roster limit on straight players in the future.

The Judge ruled that, given the history of gay exclusion in sports, “the organization had a constitutional right to limit the number of straight players as a means of promoting their message that openly gay, bisexual and transgendered individuals can thrive in competitive sports” (Johnson, 2011). But the judge said the case could proceed to trial because questions remained about the way NAGAAA applied its rule, including whether the questions asked at the hearing were unnecessarily intrusive. The lawsuit was settled and NAGAAA maintained the Constitutional right to limit the number of straight players on a team, while the players were reinstated, their tournament results were recognized, and they were paid an undisclosed sum. In a press release the NAGAAA Commissioner stated,

> *We* have been vindicated by the judge’s First Amendment rulings…This lawsuit threatened not only the purpose of our organization, but also its future. *We* fought hard to protect ourselves and our core identity and I am relieved this issue is finally behind us….It’s the Gay Softball World Series. It’s important *we* defend our right to maintain that identity. How else could *we*

> send our message that openly LGBT athletes can excel at team sports? *We* are a thriving and vibrant community. *We* compete. *We* socialize. *We* look after each other.[25] (NAGAAA press release, 2011, italics added for emphasis)

This quote clearly demonstrates an embrace of the ethnic minority status, which asserts that clear categories of collective identity are necessary for successful resistance and political gain (Gamson, 1995). It also, again, begs the questions: What is the nature of the *we*? Who is included? Who is marginalized? And, how do *we* relate to each other? The boundary defending, identity protecting, and naming (who are *we)* demonstrates the impulse to create a collective identity with distinct group boundaries. This is in-line with the logic that says, as long as membership in the group is unclear, minority status, and therefore rights and protection, is unavailable. Bisexuality blurs boundaries and challenges clear definitions of identity.

The unfolding of events surrounding this lawsuit illustrates the problematics of identity politics and assumptions that a unified community exists. Boundaries between identities (in this case, whether it is bisexual, gay, lesbian, transgender, heterosexual, etc.) are permeable and constantly changing. Multiple and diverse identities exist based on sexuality, race, gender, class and other divisions of power. The actual consequences of the critiques of identity politics as overly homogenizing, essentialist, conformist, intolerant, and separatist are clearly evident in this case. As Drury (2011) asserts,

> The identity politics approach results in a reinforcement of the essentialism that underpins the homo/hetero binary, which not only represents a failure to interrogate the presumed stability of identity itself, but risks reproducing

[25] This article is from outsports.com, which contains the full press releases from both NAGAAA and the NCLR, and a letter from NAGAAA on its website that addressed the lawsuit and settlement terms.

homosexuality as marginalized Other, thus strengthening the heteronormative status quo. (p. 423)

Every identity has its margin. Every identity operates through exclusion. That is the thing about identities -- they need something against which to identify. They (identities, like conventional communities) can only function because of their capacity to exclude, to other, and to draw boundaries.

This rule regarding the League participation of those who are not LGBT and what it represents came up frequently in the interviews. Brian explained that the rule is officially there to keep "the league from diluting, but it is really for anti-cheating and it only really applies at the World Series." He described open teams being so competitive as to deliberately recruit non-gay players that played semi-professionally. Aside from stopping coaches from "finding straight players to bolster their teams," the rule is also intended to protect the mission of serving a minority community, "On a national level, it's a federal nonprofit reason and…locally we're just a community like the African American baseball leagues. And maybe someday it'll be like the old Black baseball leagues, they just don't exist anymore. But for now this is a big discussion on the guys' side…we still feel like we're an unfairly treated community or minority in many cities…guys are still very closeted when they play and they need to be." In a different interview, Judy explained that the rule is valuable for protecting the mission of the league; she believes you want the league to grow, "but you also don't want to relinquish what it was set up for. And that's a lot of the safe haven." In this group interview, Linda followed up by saying, "You want to protect your own in some ways."

Later, in that same interview, the conversation transitioned to a time when the women's league discussed inviting straight women's teams to participate because of the low number of women's teams in the League. In order to facilitate growth, the

commission proposed the idea to the women's teams and they said "no." Judy found the response interesting because many of the women on the non-League straight teams are gay, but the teams were concerned about the ones that were not and "the baggage of the husbands that would come along with…it was almost like they didn't want to break our little private league. You don't have to worry about it. You go, you have a good time, you do your thing and you don't have to worry about these straight people judging you because they're not there. And no matter how small the league got, they didn't want to do it."

The rule is written in a way that implies that it impacts both the women's and open sides, however, "the women don't have that rule" (Judy, interview). Lisa does not know if "it's because the joke is, well, a lesbian would be better at playing softball than a straight girl [but] a gay guy [would be worse than a straight guy]…What kinds of stereotypes are you putting on gay men and their level of athleticism?" (interview). It seems even with the change in rules, the issue is still controversial. During the 2014 spring season, an open team filed a complaint with the board contending that a different open team in the League (both "B" teams) violated the "70/30 rule." The board reviewed the rosters and asked the coaches how the players on the team identified. According to the board's findings, "based on how the players identified with the coaches, the 70/30 rule was not broken" (*Meeting Minutes*, 2014, p. 3).[26]

Transgender Participants

The precarious position of transgender players in the League was another prominent theme. Transgendered people are becoming an increasingly visible presence in Western society: Lavern Cox, a famous transgender actor, was recently on the cover of TIME magazine with the caption, "The transgender tipping point:

[26] In my experience with the League, nothing like this has ever happened on the women's side.

America's next civil rights frontier" (May, 2014); Bruce Jenner, a former two-time Olympic gold medalist, Associated Press Athlete of the Year, Wheatie's box cover adorner, and current reality TV star just came out on national television as a transgender woman. However, a transgender presence in the League was virtually nonexistent. One survey respondent[27] wrote that it has been "difficult for me to find the right [team] fit for me after I transitioned from female to male, so sadly I stopped playing last year."

Inclusion and participation in the League was organized around binary sex differences. In its bylaws, the League did not have any policies explicitly stating any sex-based criteria or how it would be inclusive of transgender players. In interview, Judy explained that it is likely this omission will change soon in line with leagues in other cities that have rewritten their bylaws to address transgender inclusion. Although she did not explicitly state what those changes would or should be, she did disclose that ASANA bylaws state that, in order to play in the women's division, you have to identify as a female and have a driver's license or documentation that identifies you as a female. These participation policies are similar to what Travers (2006) found in her study of lesbian softball leagues where the majority of leagues that have transgender-inclusive policies have participation provisions that stipulate legal identity, and the requirement of legal identity "provides formal inclusion only to post-operative male to female transsexuals" (p. 441). Thus, Travers (2006) concluded that these participation policies remain gender conforming in that they reify rather than challenge the sex binary.

Because in the open division both men and women were able to play, it was not "controversial" for male-to-female or female-to-male transgender people to participate (Judy, interview). However, little is known about the actual climate for

[27] In both the exploratory research and current study there were a total of two transgender participants, both were survey respondents and neither currently participates in the League.

such participants in the League. Initial insight can be gleaned from a story Brain told about a person transitioning from male to female. In early 2000, his team was at the softball fields holding a practice for new players who had signed up online and were interested in playing. One of the new players they were expecting was a guy named Steve. All the players were sitting on the bleachers and a "kind of women, but very big, like 6'2", hair, makeup like a woman, got out of the car and said, 'I'm Steve,' and nails, makeup, hair. She was transgender and was in the process of becoming a woman, and we ended up usually calling her by her woman's name [Susan]." While recounting this story he was laughing and said, "It was funny. We all had fun with it."

He goes on to tell about a time they all went to an out-of-state tournament and, after the games, the team wanted to go to gay bars, but Susan wanted to go to straight bars, as a woman, to pick up guys. The other team members "were all Oooooooookkk, just make sure you're at the field early tomorrow." After reflecting on the situation for a moment, Brian said, "So that was just an interesting angle, you know. I don't know that other softball teams would've accepted somebody that a couple of times came out, got out of the car in heels and then switched to cleats and white socks (laughs) and said, 'I'm Steve, but I'm going to be Susan in three months.' It's just something that makes you laugh for a second, like oh, ok, 'Do you want to play second base?' And she did. So we had fun with that. And no one, I don't think anyone ever offended her." In this story, although Susan/Steve was included, there is a sense of Othering and, although I did not have an opportunity to speak with Susan/Steve, it is significant to point out that she did not return to play the next season and during my research none of the participants were aware of any active transgender players in the League.

On the women's side, conversations regarding transgendered players centered on the topics of judgment and safety. In one group interview, all five participants agreed that transgender people are more accepted in the open division than they would be in the women's, although no one believed there were currently any transgender participants. Judy even went so far as to say, "I don't know that a women's team, without a hell of a fight, would allow a transgender person to play." In the same conversation Betty, another participant, maintained that women are very petty, and likely to say things such as, "It's oh, well, but he's got the muscles of a man." Linda then related the thoughts that go through her head when she is on the mound and a person that she assumes is transgendered comes to the plate. She thinks, "Are they going to bash out my teeth because they're stronger and I'm pitching? You know…and then I start thinking about safety and then you get competitive and you're like, well, if it's a dude, am I going to have to play on the fence now, you know, is he going to bust open my head?" Lisa echoed similar sentiments in her interview when she said,

> On the open side you can have men and women…but on the women's side, where do those rules fall? What if you have a man, they're stronger than women, they in general are just stronger than we are, and what if you have a man that is newly transitioned to a woman, is that fair for him, now that his pronoun has changed, that he can play against women, but is it fair to exclude her now?...To my knowledge there are not any transgender women in the league. Men, I don't know. I think it would be less of an issue with the strength abilities there…I'm sure at some point it will happen, but a male to female transition person, I can't imagine that she wouldn't be accepted, it would just be a safety issue.

This demonstrates the assumption that men naturally have an "unfair advantage" as athletes (Sykes, 2006) and supports Travers' (2006) research on lesbian softball leagues that found the biggest concerns about transgender inclusion pertained to safety issues. Lisa went on to describe a woman that plays for a team in another city that often wins tournaments; she has always wondered if is she is transgendered because she is really good, strong, and muscular, but on the other side she has very long hair. She wonders how you could determine if she now identifies as a woman "and you can't exclude that" and she does not feel that you should. She explains, "I wouldn't want my team to play a team of guys…There's all these blurry lines...I want Sunday softball with our league to be a place where everyone is included and no one feels like they can't be a part of it. I look at the league, and maybe I'm kind of biased, but I can't imagine what type of person would feel like they don't belong."

Judy expressed a different perspective when she talked about the experiences of a male-to-female transgendered person whom she met outside the softball setting. The woman told Judy she had a good time participating in the League, but Judy said, "It's still the same thing. They do get judged. You know, being out there to play ball. I mean they're a 'D' team. They aren't out there to win or anything, but…you still get judged within the community for being who you are" (interview). Linda followed up by saying, the more transgender people get involved in the league and "the more that people have experiences with them, I mean, like I said, it changes people's perspectives. You know, when you're not used to dealing with a particular type of person, we've all dealt with heterosexual people our entire life and we're gay, so we know what that is. But then you cross those boundaries into drag queens and transgendered and things that you don't see on a regular basis, and I think the more they implement themselves into the league, the more people have an

experience with them, I think it lessens the craziness, the shock value and everything."

Open and Women Split

Money, politics, and participation levels have consistently been issues since the inception of the League and are often cited as sources of tension between the men and women's sides. This conflict has been in existence in some form and to differing degrees since the beginning of the League and came to a head in 2012 when the League voted whether or not to separate the two sides. The separation was initiated by two (out of eleven total) members of the board, the open commissioner and open assistant commissioner (both men), and one woman, not on the board. The open board members who proposed the split felt that participation from the women's division was "lacking" (*Meeting Minutes,* 2012) and the woman felt it could be beneficial to the women's division to separate.[28]

The split was initially introduced as a financial decision because the men bring in more money than the women due to the difference in sheer volume of teams. However, it was brought up that it is all relative and the roster and sponsor fees from the women's teams cover their expenses. As Linda put it, "It's also proportional…what we pay covers our costs just the same as it does theirs. So the whole bullshit money argument they can have until they're blue in the damn face, I don't care" (interview). In the board meeting, someone broke down the financials: women for spring, brought in $13,000 and spent $13,000, breaking even; men for spring, brought in $24,000 and spent a little over $22,000 resulting in a negligible profit. The financial argument was proven fallible. Thus the question was proposed, "If it is not for financial purposes, then why is it proposed that the League split?" (*Meeting Minutes*, 2012).

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[28] Through my research, I was unable to surmise the specific reasons she gave for initiating the split and I was unable to contact her for an interview.

In the board minutes, one of the initiators of the split is recorded as saying, "When do the excuses stop and when do we hold the women accountable? If we move forward [with the split] then the issues are settled and not brought up again. Or a solution could be that we don't split but if there aren't certain goals met by the women's division then the consequence is separation" (*Meeting Minutes*, 2012). The suggested goals included the amount of women's teams that participated in the annual tournament hosted by the League and the number and profitability of fundraisers hosted by the women's side. The conversation continued with people debating the merits of splitting. One person said, "So far the only Pro to splitting is 'community.' Perhaps splitting will allow for growth for Open and Women sides" (*Meeting Minutes*, 2012). According to the meeting minutes, the conversation came to a close with a member of the open side (not a board member) saying, "[Brian Wilson], the founder, did not create the league with the intent to ever split so this has to be treated as an amendment. The league was initially created as an open league then the women's division was added."

It was decided the issue would be put to a vote with every board member and team coach getting a vote. In the end, the majority voted not to split, but the vote "was pretty close" (Lisa, interview). Lisa did not remember the exact number of votes for and against the split, but she did recall that there were two woman's teams that voted to split and she "was really pissed about that." Lisa was in the majority who voted for the two sides to stay together; she felt like it was important for the men and women "to be integrated together."

> We weren't a gay male softball league and lesbian softball league, we were all together. And, you know, we don't have as many woman board members or as many woman teams…but at the end of the day when you look at it financially, we were both holding our own. So in a way, I kind of felt like it

> was a bully move of certain people, I felt like they just wanted to get rid of us. That's just how I felt, whether that was their intention or not. The guys that initiated that split are no longer on the board. Their arguments were mostly financial and they felt that the women didn't contribute as much. Perception being at that time on the board (the men) has a full open board and we (the women) only had a few.

In addition to the emotional argument that Lisa felt the League should be one cohesive community, she also had a very practical reason. She explained,

> It probably would have been a disaster if we did split. How would we divvy up money? Who's to say how much goes to the open division and what goes to the women's? So I'm happy we're together, because that was going to be a lot of work, if no other reason. But it is nice to all play together and see each other and help each other too. It's not...just a women versus men thing.

She expressed resentment regarding the two women's team coaches that voted for the split.

> My opinion is that you're entitled to your opinion, but at least contribute. Do your part. Show up to meetings and volunteer to help because if we do split it's gonna be a lot of work. That's one thing. I do find myself getting irritated; I'm a pretty calm person but it seems like the women complain a lot. They love to complain. It's like we're doing the best we can, we're not getting paid to run this league. In general, lesbians have this whole I don't care attitude. Or I don't need to be involved, someone else will do it for me. That's how I perceive the whole board issue. A lot of the girls take it for granted that "I don't need to get involved or be on the board because someone else will do it. I know they're asking me to do this and I know they say that they need help, but, uh, whatever, it'll get covered." Whereas on the guys' side, we have

elections every May, but on the women's side we don't have enough to actually have elections. But on the guys' side, they have to campaign, because there is competition. If they don't like how one person's been doing the position, they rally together to try to vote that person off.

This quote was representative of what I found in general. In an illustrative survey response, one woman said,

> In the sense of creating a group mentality and socialization, yes it's a community. But in the sense of banding together it definitely lacks in it's [sic] sense of responsibility. A lot of people just want to play softball, they don't want to help raise money, help organize tournaments, or spend their time and money on the league.

In multiple interviews, women expressed disinterest in getting involved in the organization of the League. Without any prompting, Alex spoke specifically to Lisa's point when she almost boasted about not getting involved in the management of the League,

> Our team is never involved in the political side, like being on the board and whatnot. And they always ask us and we're like, "No, why would we want to do that"…because we don't want that burden, for somebody to come up to us and say, "Well, so-and-so did this," you know what I mean? (interview)

This line of thinking was echoed by Joanne when she explained that in recent times, she and her wife disconnected themselves from the League,

> You know, I didn't want to get involved, because I didn't want to be involved in the politics, the drama of it. You know, and my life, you know, I'm old enough to be able to choose what I, what I want, and what not to participate in. And if it's something that's negative, I, I choose not to participate. I play ball because I love to play ball, and I still have that sense of gratification that

> I get from being a part of my team and, you know, it's, they're my family, you know. And it's, it's a huge source of support for me. And when the league wasn't giving that to us, we kind of bubbled ourselves within our team. We got frustrated with the politics of the situation, and didn't do anything necessarily to better it. (interview)

It is interesting to note that, in general, the women disconnected and avoided the drama and conflict, while, as Lisa indicated, the men would challenge each other and actively try to enforce change. Throughout my research I sensed a feeling of exasperation, sometimes to the point of powerlessness, by many of the women and I contend that contributed to the apathy. At the least, there was a clear consensus that the men were prioritized and that led to a prevailing sense of unfairness. In all facets of my research, this was the most frequent critique of the League. Alex complained that although the people in charge may change, it has always been that "They accommodate the men more than the women" (interview). In a survey response a woman who no longer participates asserted that her least favorite parts of the League were "the drama, political maneuvering, and division between men and women." Another commented, "As with any organization, there can be some politics involved. The men generated more revenue and thus had more power, so that could be frustrating" (survey respondent). This mirrors historical tensions in the LGBT community as women have felt their interests and needs were being disregarded to the priorities of the men and resultantly abandoned politics or went as far as advocating lesbian separatism (Eaklor, 2011).

The critique of identity politics as being overly homogenizing and ignoring with-in group differences could be seen frequently in the narrative about the near separation of the League. In interview Linda commented,

> Even with the separation between the men and the women, everybody wants us to be one big happy family and community. But why can't we be separate but still be under [the League]? So why is it such a big deal when we have to separate? I would rather have it that way. It's nothing against the guys. Excuse me, but I would much rather be with all women. You know. So why does it have to be such a huge fight and huge problem…What I like and I think most of the girls like is playing with the girls. I mean, I think the guys like playing with the guys…That's the people I want to hang out with, I don't know a lot of the men…I don't socialize with the guys...I do miss the camaraderie that we had with the men when the league was smaller because I think everybody just mixed and mingled together. But now money and politics and everything else had split it so much that I'd rather just be with the women. I would rather be on our own separate fields and I would rather watch the girls and hang out with them, and you know, than anything. Which is sad because the guys are cool and they're funny, but there's just no intermingling anymore.

Linda is not advocating the creation of two separate leagues -- representing her team as coach, she voted against the split. She is advocating an almost "separate but equal" scenario where the open and women's divisions exist independently within one organization, but play not only on separate fields but at different parks with almost zero interaction. The community she wanted to surround herself with was a community of lesbians and the four other women in her group interview approved her suggestion. Natalia, who was one of the two women to vote in favor of the split, expressed her feeling that the women were being treated unfairly and she personally had no emotional investment in being integrated with the men's teams. She said regarding the separation of men and women,

> It doesn't bother me one bit. It really doesn't…I never watched the men play anyway, I mean, because all we did was make fun of the men playing. "Oh my god, did you see that throw?" (Laughs) Oh, but, yeah, we never watched the men. We would rather watch our own sister team play or something like that.

When considering the above data, there is evidence that there are multiple communities within the League. My findings suggest that the participants perceive the community in a way that is different from how they actually interact with it. That is, even though there was a general consensus of the League being a cohesive community, the reality is that patterns of interaction differ based on sexual and gender identity. This indicates that perceptions of community may be idealized, rather than based on what is actually experienced in routine interactions. Alternatively, when asked about perceptions about the community, participants were actually referencing their perceptions of cohesion within open or women's side, rather than with all LGBT people. This possibility is likely, as my data indicate, the lesbians mostly socialized with lesbians, gay men mostly socialized with gay men, and transgender and bisexual participants, well, that is hard to say given their invisibility.

Homerun for Homonormativity?

In this section, I draw on my research to situate the intersection of community, identity, and sport within the contemporary (and age-old) LGBT debate over assimilation and transformation as framed by the logics of homonormativity (assimilation) and queer futurity (transformation). This debate elicits familiar arguments over who is considered "us," what that means, and who gets to decide. Gamson (1995) contends that, in this respect, it bears similarities to arguments in ethnic communities in which "boundaries, identities, and cultures, are negotiated,

defined, and produced" (Nagel, 1994, p. 152, in Gamson, p. 390). The mainstream gay and lesbian movement argues that clear categories of identity with exclusive and secure boundaries are necessary for political gain. From the queer perspective, it is contended that the production of this identity "is purchased at the price of hierarchy, normalization, and exclusion" (Seidman,1993, p. 130, in Gamson, p. 400). Queerness questions the very foundation upon which lesbian and gay politics has been built, "taking apart the ideas of a 'sexual minority' and a 'gay community,' indeed of 'gay' and 'lesbian' and even 'man' and 'woman'" (Gamson, p. 390).

Duggan (2002) advances the term "homonormativity" to signal a hegemonic gay and lesbian culture completely removed from its roots in the radical liberationist politics of the 1970s. This debate highlights the complexities of identity-based organizing: individual and collective identities are made-up (they are historically situated, socially constructed, only exist in interpretation, and are constantly in motion) yet necessary (they are fictions necessary for any mobilization and collective action). The manner in which the current debate has been portrayed, while essential, is far too simplistic and sets up a binary opposition of assimilationist/ transformational. This section attempts to situate the League in this debate and examines whether it could be considered a site that strengthens and/or challenges existing identity categories and forecloses and/or creates possibilities for transformation and change.

Sanctioning Sport

Sport is a highly homophobic and heteronormative institution (Eng, 2006) and a powerful site for the construction and reproduction of gender and sexuality (Mean & Cassing, 2008). The mutable nature of sport, identity, and community, and the dialectic relationship between them, offers possibilities for reproduction, resistance, reworking, and transgression of dominant power relations (Aitchison, 2007). While

Eng (2006) contends that gay and lesbian sports clubs constitute a queer alternative to mainstream sports, Pronger (2006) argues that gay community sport practices a politics of inclusion, which "tries to bring the other into a system while requiring them to manifest themselves within the structures of the system" (p. 230).

As stated multiple times throughout this analysis, the purpose of the League was to foster softball competition primarily for gays and lesbians. Put slightly differently, the purpose of the League was to gain access to the highly homophobic and heteronormative institution of sport. As Symons (2007) asserts, and my research supports, "The most open and inclusive sports environments for lesbians and gay men are those created by gay people" (p. 155). However, the founder and organizers of the League were not from the radical feminist or gay liberation movements, had no large scale political change motivations, and were not trying to contest the heteronormative hegemony of sport. As quoted earlier, the founder explicitly expressed in conversation (and it is written under the "History" section of the website) that he "thought it was important that we always stayed away from politics and being too out" (Brian, interview). John, who also was among the first members, said, "From our standpoint, it had nothing to do with our lifestyle, we just loved to play ball" (interview). A survey respondent said, "I look at it as a good, competitive league where we can play softball. I don't ever look at it as the 'gay' league."

In the exploratory study I found 96% of respondents, *all but two* people, indicated that playing softball was a reason they joined the League and 71% of participants indicated meeting more LGBT people was a reason. In contrast, only 4%, *only two* people, indicated that flexible gender roles were a motivating factor. Further, 50% percent of the survey respondents agreed with the statement "I feel uneasy around people who are very open in public about being LGBT." Similarly,

over 40% agreed with the statement "I worry a lot about what others think about my being LGBT" (Mertel, 2012). These findings were corroborated with the current data.

The participants in my study did not come from a queer[29] background, that is, they did not seek societal transformation; rather, they sought access to mainstream culture and institutions. Reinforcing what other researchers of gay sport have found (Symons, 2007; Jarvis, 2006), transforming the cultural practice of sport was not a motivating factor in the founding of or participation in the League. It was intended to give gays and lesbians interested in sports a place to meet and play softball. These were also motivating factors for the participants to join and continue participating in the League. General statements about sport were common, such as "I love sports," as were specific statements about softball, such as "I love softball," "love of the game," and "my beloved sport." In all of my research, I never once heard anyone critique sports as an institution or the game of softball. There was no evidence of imagining alternatives or questioning epistemological certainties (Foucault, 1997). On the contrary, the institution of sport and function of competition were revered and seen as inevitable by the participants.

In the League, emphasis was placed on being a nationally competitive organization that was fiscally sound, organizationally well run, and compliant with officially recognized rules and procedures. As mentioned earlier, the League appealed to governing bodies, both the ASA and NAGAAA/ASANA, for legitimacy and worked within the established system of sport. The importance of being part of the governing body of NAGAAA could be seen on the website under the "League History" section where one of only six "little known facts" written by the founder was, "We are one of

[29] It is also noteworthy that only one participant, out of 73 total, indicated they identified as queer. In the exploratory study only one participant, out of 58 total, identified as queer. Combined, that is two out of 131 or 1.5%.

the VERY FEW, quite possibly three leagues elected to join NAGAAA unanimously, which occurred in 1994" (emphasis in original). Additionally, the importance of following officially recognized rules was evident in participation in the League, and it was especially evident in the spring season, which is considered the more competitive season when teams are vying for a spot at the GSWS and SWS.

During the fall season, the rules of the game are followed and umpires, who are paid by the League, officiate games, enforce rules, and arbitrate various disputes. However, it is far more casual than the spring season and uniforms and lineup cards are not required. The spring season, in contrast, is far more formalized and the League is run according to the prevailing NAGAAA rules. For example, umpires enforce uniform rules: Every player must properly wear uniforms that are alike in style and color and have a number on the back. Also, lineup cards must be submitted to the umpire before the game, and they must include the players' names, positions, and numbers listed in the order they will bat. In addition to the umpire, teams police each other. For example, during multiple games in which I played, my team challenged the batting order of the other team. If the defensive team notifies the umpire that a batting order infraction has occurred, the umpire enforces the rule based on the batting order received. If there has been an infraction and a player has batted out of order, the batting team is charged with an out. On multiple occasions I also witnessed a team challenge a particular bat being used by the opposition, accusing the team of playing with a bat from the ASA banned bat list.

According to Pronger (2006), sanctioning is viewed as important because it "legitimizes the event as a sport: Records and results become 'official' because the competition was held in accordance with the rules of the sport's governing body. Officially sanctioned events prove that lesbian and gay sports are conducted in strict accordance with the norms of sport" (p. 232). Thus, Pronger contends, instead of

problematizing the mainstream values that are required to obtain sport sanctioning, legitimizing gay sports competitions compromises the transformative potential of gay sport. On the other side of the argument, Symons (2007) maintains that, as a result of this legitimation, "bridges of co-operation and understanding can be built with mainstream civic and sporting authorities and homophobia can be reduced" (p. 150). Legitimating the competition also provides a comparable platform across which gays and lesbians can challenge stereotypes and demonstrate that gay people are just-like-everybody-else: They play sports, and they play them in the way everyone else plays them (Symons, 2007).

I would add that the legitimizing of sport also makes it familiar to people who are looking for an entrée to the gay and lesbian community, like it did for me and many of the participants. When I first came out I was 25 years old, had no LGBT friends, and did not identify as a lesbian up until that point. Although I had very newly identified as a lesbian, my entire life I had identified as an athlete. Something incredibly significant had changed in my understanding of myself, but externally, nothing had changed, and I needed *that* to change. I knew that I needed to meet other LGBT people but I did not know how. Gay bars were the only option I knew existed and I was not interested in pursuing that avenue to meet people.

Like many times when I have looked for answers, I turned to the internet. With a Google search, I found there were nearly a hundred different types of LGBT organizations such as support groups, church groups, bear groups,[30] adventure groups, and sports groups, just to name a few. Playing sports was something I was always comfortable doing and I saw it as a good vehicle to explore a different part of my identity with which I felt less comfortable. I had played softball in college, although I had never played slow-pitch, and of all the LGBT organizations the League

[30] I did not know what that was at the time, but now understand that a bear is a larger, hairier man often viewed as embodying rugged masculinity.

seemed like the most obvious choice for me. With great nervousness, and not totally sure what I was putting in motion, I sent an email through the website saying I was interested in playing. In the next three days, different coaches contacted me by phone and essentially conducted informal interviews. Our shared knowledge and understanding of the game of softball provided a sense of connection and comfort. After speaking with a few coaches, I found a team that seemed like the right fit for me. The coach invited me to come out and practice with the team and see what I thought. I said I would. After hanging up the phone, I was terrified and exhilarated. I had actually taken a step towards meeting other LGBT people and exploring this new part of my identity.

My experience was frequently echoed by other participants. For example, a survey respondent said, "I didn't have much experience hanging around other gay men. It was a way to meet people in a setting I was used to. I played sports my entire life." In a magazine article about the League, a player is quoted as saying, "Softball played a big role in my coming out. Being a part of the [League] made me think, 'It is OK. I can be a gay man and play sports…the [League] gave me a chance to meet men and women who loved the sport as much as I did'" (Latzko, 2013). As the above data suggest, sport can act as a vehicle to explore and affirm a lesbian or gay identity, meet others with similar interests, and gather in a space free of heterosexist prejudice. However, as has been discussed, the creation of a sports community that seeks legitimation rewards lesbians and gays who most closely impersonate the norms of heteronormativity and hegemonic masculinity and excludes those who do not. Rather than the distinction between gay and straight, a new distinction is drawn between more and less legitimate LGBT lives (Butler, 2004). Correspondingly, those LGBT individuals at the bottom of the hierarchy are seen as a threat to the just-like-everybody-else class of homonormative individuals and are

excluded. The conspicuous absence of transgender participants illustrates the troubling politics of normalization.

Border Skirmishes

As discussed earlier, the existence of the League is a direct result of an identity politics in which sexuality functions as the distinct organizing principle. As Patty bluntly stated in interview, "[The League] is limited to one group. Other groups don't feel welcome to come in…" As demonstrated by this quote, the creation of a collective identity requires distinct boundaries that mark differences between "us" and "them." This logic has been challenged by the logic of queer futurity that maintains identity categories should be deconstructed and group boundaries should be blurred (Gamson, 1995). The League is clearly organized around a collective identity, or ethnicity model, which is based upon the fundamental belief that what gays and lesbians share is the same fixed, natural essence (Esterberg, 2002 & Gamson, 1995). This can be seen not only in how the League is organized, but also in the discourse of participants, many of whom explicitly stated that being gay is "the way you were born" (Brian, interview). It is also evident that League members believe that well-defined categories are necessary for successful resistance and political gain. As the NAGAAA commissioner ardently stated regarding the aforementioned lawsuit, "It's important we defend our right to maintain [our gay] identity" (NAGAAA press release, 2011). In many regards, identity politics has proven to be a powerful tool for marginalized people in term of mobilization and politics gain. However, collective identity formation plays a role in the formation and consolidation of unequal binary divisions (hetero/homo, man/woman) that can create false dichotomies and be experienced as restrictive (Moorhead, 1999).

In examining the extent to which the League is consolidating, challenging, or undermining binary divisions, it is telling to revisit the positioning of bisexual and

transgender participants. Bisexual and transgender participants challenge the viability of lesbian and gay sexual identity as based on a solid knowing and identification of sexuality and gender. As openly stated on the website, the League is "primarily for gays and lesbians," and my research affirmed that in the actual composition of participants. Of the 131 combined participants in the exploratory study and current project, only one-and-a half percent (two people) identified as transgender and two percent (people) identified as bisexual. As discussed earlier, transgender participants held a precarious position in the League, which is organized around binary sex categories. At the time of the research, there were no official guidelines for transgender inclusion, however, it was assumed that the women's side would follow the lead of ASANA which required transmen to compete in their reassigned sex categories and provide documented proof. This policy reified rather than challenged binary sex categories and was "consistent with *gender conforming* as opposed to *gender transforming* transgender inclusion" (Travers & Deri, 2011, p. 489, italics in original). In contrast, a gender transforming policy would allow for gender ambiguity by enabling transgender participants to play in whichever league they felt most comfortable. This policy also opened up the possibility for people to participate while in transition.

The topic of bisexuality was nearly absent from survey responses and interview conversations. Its most visible presence in my research was in the lawsuit which was seen by NAGAAA as a challenge to the "core identity" of being gay (NAGAAA press release, 2011). Bisexuality challenges the notion that sexual identities are fixed, essential, and unchanging, and NAGAAA clearly felt they had to protect the definition of a gay identity. For gays and lesbians, developing a community depends above all on adopting an identity based on sexuality (Taylor, Kaminski, & Dugan, 2002). The lawsuit and precarious position of transgender

players raise questions concerning the boundaries of the community and the assumption that a unified community exists.

In addition to the limited participation of transgender and bisexual individuals, the logic of a collective identity could be seen most blatantly in the times the League was specifically compared to ethnic minorities. For example, in the context of discussing the limit on "non-gay" players, Brian discussed how the League is a nonprofit specifically for a "minority community": "We're just a community like the African American basketball leagues or baseball leagues, and maybe someday it'll be like the old black baseball leagues, they just don't exist anymore. But for now this is a big discussion on the guys' side, on our side we still feel like we're an unfairly treated community or minority in many, many cities" (interview).

The comparison to African Americans played out in a very similar fashion in the group interview with Anne, Carrie, and Maria. Discussing heterosexual players in the League, Anne brought up that there is a straight player on her team. Maria volunteered how great that woman and her husband are, that they love hanging out with them, and that the husband "has no issues with her playing on a lesbian team." Anne added, "And neither does she." The conversation continued:

> Maria: And nobody on [Anne's team] has an issue with the fact that she's straight. And I think that that's something, an issue, you might run into on a co-ed team. Where if it's a co-ed team, and say Anne goes to play on that, there might be people with issues, maybe not outwardly, but maybe issues with the fact that she's not gay. But in the lesbian community if you have somebody straight come play on your team I don't think there's as many issues. There's not as much judgment, I don't think.
>
> Anne: I think we're just more accepting, too.
>
> Maria: Because we've walked hard roads.

> Sara (me): What about the rules about straight players?
>
> Anne: What rules?
>
> Sara: Are there rules about how many straight players can play?
>
> Anne: I think so. I don't know what they are.
>
> Maria: I do think that there is a certain number each team can have in order to consider them a NAGAAA or ASANA team.
>
> Sara: What do you think about that rule?
>
> Carrie: I think it's there in order to hold up the integrity of what the league stands for. Otherwise, you're just another league. You can't call yourself the gay league if you have a totally mixed crowd. Obviously you don't want to segregate yourself and say, "Nope you're straight, you can't play at all," but it's to uphold it and to have what it stands for stay, rather than "Hey, we'll just get a bunch of people that are gay friendly and call it the gay league." Well, you can't really call it that and have" --
>
> Maria: And, well, that's like when I was playing [where I used to live], I got invited to play at a World Series in [a nearby city]. Well, when I showed up to this World Series, I didn't know that it was the Black World Series, but there could only be a certain number of people that weren't of that nationality on a team. It's kind of the same thing…Everyone has a right to their own specifications and their own rights, really.

The juxtaposition of acceptance and exclusion that is displayed in this discussion highlights the seemingly contradictory drives in community and identity. The creation and maintenance of distinct boundaries is illustrated in the above conversations and was demonstrated throughout my research. This policing of borders conflicts with a queer approach that problematizes sexual and identity classifications and sees distinct, collective categories as obstacles to resistance and change (Gamson, 1995).

Personal Politics

Brian explained that, for him, to be gay meant "to be different from others in a way that you can't help. It's the way you were born and it gives you a couple of extra hurdles in life, coming out, which people do not understand" (interview). Another participant said, "It is a community. We all share some of the same discriminatory experiences and being a part of [the League] you know that you always have a family and a support system" (survey respondent). From these experiences of discrimination and isolation, a sense of common values and like-mindedness emerged. Participation in the League led to the supposition that community members shared certain beliefs, and these beliefs or "values" were referred to frequently in amorphous and ambiguous ways. For example, one survey respondent said, "What makes it a community is the sharing of value and morals." Kim said, "We have the same values, or, not even the same values, but, I mean, in the current lesbian/gay community, you have the same outlook, but yet you're coming together with different ideas, and then you, you come together" (interview).

This demonstrates the basic tenet of identity politics, the assumption that those who share one's identity will be most likely to share one's politics. The most radical identity politics, like that advocated by the Combahee River Collective (1977),[31] articulated complex identities as the basis for multi-issue politics. In my research, participants did not discuss, or seemingly recognize, the interrelation of various social identities and there was no indication that participants had any interest in interrogating the "unity, stability, viability, and political utility" of sexual identities (Gamson, 1995, p. 397). Instead, they found comfort and safety in the assumptions made regarding identity. As opposed to the radical and complex vision of identity

[31] A collective of black feminists and lesbians formed in 1974 that explored the intersection of multiple oppressions including racism and heterosexism.

politics put forth by the Combahee River Collective, the identity politics present in the League are better classified as single-issue and assimilationist.

The transformation versus assimilation debate in the current LGBT movement is epitomized and defined by the emphasis on gay marriage. The Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the largest lesbian and gay civil rights advocacy group and political lobbying organization in the United States, leads the fight for marriage equality and believes "Only marriage can provide true equality" (hrc.org). In sharp contrast, queer activists argue that same-sex marriage is part of an assimilationist politics that upholds and maintains "dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions" (Duggan, 2002, p. 189). Those who hold this position believe marriage equality is being emphasized at the expense of larger social justice issues such as racial, gender, and economic inequalities. According to Vaid,

> This impoverishment of ambition and idealism is a strategic error. It misunderstands the challenge queer people pose to the status quo. It shamefully avoids the responsibility that a queer movement must take to advocate for all segments of LGBT communities. And it is deluded in its belief that legal, deeply symbolic acts of recognition—like admission into traditional institutions such as marriage—are actually acts of transformation that will end the rejection and marginalization of LGBT people. Without a broader definition of equality, the LGBT politics currently pursued will yield only a conditional equality, one that will always be contingent upon "good behavior." (2012, paragraphs 9-11)

Although the survey and interviews did not include explicit questions directly addressing the topic, participants frequently brought up gay marriage in a range of contexts from elucidating how being lesbian or gay has changed in society, to explaining what it means to be lesbian and gay, to describing what makes the

League a community. Gay marriage was frequently depicted as a positive indicator that homosexuality was more accepted in society. One survey respondent wrote, "Just in two years the marriage equality dialogue has opened up so much. So much change has happened politically favoring our community in such [a]short span of time. It's very promising and hopeful." Another said,

> In 2009 when I moved [here] the 'Gay Rights Movement' was starting to pick up full steam. We lost marriage [where I lived before] but 4 or 5 other states like Iowa supported it. Much has changed in the last 4-5 years. Being gay is being part of a larger family that the bond has really grown since we started 'talking' about gay marriage in the news and such.

Discussing how being a lesbian impacts her, Carly explained that,

> The only reason why it affects me, I think, mentally and emotionally, not physically, but mentally and emotionally, it affects me because I live [in this state] and can't get married and I can't have a child and have my partner legally adopt. That's really the only way it affects me…I think really just the norm, getting married and having a family, and being able to know that if something happens my partner can make a decision without them saying, 'Well, you're not the biological mother.' Makes me want to punch them in the face" (Laughs) (interview).

In explaining why she believes the League is community, Maria said,

> Common interests, common goals. You know, I think one of our common goals is to, not necessarily vocally and forcefully, spread the word about tolerance and acceptance but to kind of do it silently…And kind of a sense of what direction to head to go forward…I think in a bigger picture it will be to push forward with the Human Rights Campaign. I think the smaller picture is our [League] community, I think we do play a part in that Human Rights

Campaign, and I think that every Gay Games that we go to and every World Series and everything like that, it is a step towards encompassing the whole nation in tolerance and acceptance. I guess, just equal rights, you know, because every, it's just like our whole country is made up of different states, the states are made up of different cities, that's what the [League] is, it's like a little city in the whole scheme of things. You know, it's pretty sad, because when we lived in [in a smaller city] there wasn't even a women's league, much less a gay league. So it's nice to be a part of a bigger city that can share in spreading the word. That's why we have the World Series in different places. That's why it's been in Philadelphia, that's why it's been in Phoenix, that's why it's been in Portland. (interview)

The perception of a unified community with shared values and politics can be seen in the above quotes in the trope of family, the essentialized "community," and idea of "Common interests, common goals." Maria speculates that the shared goals of "tolerance and acceptance" will be pursued "silently," which is in direct opposition to an in-your-face queer approach which asserts difference with an edge of defiant separatism (Gamson, 1995). Maria demonstrated a belief in the effectiveness of the just-like-everybody-else homosexual strategy where rights are gained by demonstrating similarity to heterosexual people in a nonthreatening manner. She appreciated having the opportunity to "spread the word" that gay people play sports just-like-everybody-else. In referring to the Human Rights Campaign, she addressed the campaign for same-sex marriage and a desire for full participation in the institution of marriage, which the above quotes also demonstrated. At the time of the research, gay marriage was not legal in the state the participants lived and it did not seem as though it would be legalized in the near future. At one point in the interview Maria said, "And who knows how long it will take for [this state] to

recognize civil unions, to recognize gay marriage, to recognize any of that thing." Speaking about their marriage, Carrie (Maria's wife)[32] said, that a lot of straight people have a sense that their relationships are "totally different" than gay peoples',

> …when in reality, it's the exact same, it just happens to be two girls or two guys…They think theirs is, well, it's a guy and a girl and we're married, it's totally different than the two of you being married. NO! In actuality, it's not. We're all the same, we have the same values, the same traditions, you know the ground that we stand on is the same, it's just viewed different.

The theme of the just-like-everybody-else homosexual also came up in regards to the importance of the League facilitating access to a certain type of gay male, one who enjoys sports and most closely approximates heteronormative standards. In my interview with John, he expressed the view that people are most comfortable when they have similar people around them.

> One thing I learned from softball is, boy, there are a lot more people out there like me than I realized. Because I never really did fit…[I] realized there were a lot of guys out there like me that just liked doing regular guy things. They could function in the real world and were more happier doing that. I find that so much more fun than a drag show…I'm sorry, my just overall and general bounds are far beyond that. So [softball] fit the role for me, but that's just where I'm at or how I am. It doesn't [fit] for other people...I think you're most comfortable when you have people that are similarly around you. It's your own support system. It's your own friendships that you build from…I like going to mainstream cultural and sporting events. I feel more comfortable when I'm around guys that can function in the real world…From my own standpoint, I don't see the purpose of running up to

[32] They were legal married in another state.

> somebody and going, 'I'm gay, you'd better love me. Get used to it.' Blah, blah, blah…Why does that person care anyway? So what? Great, you are. And that's kind of the same way I learned out here, somebody comes up to you and says, "I'm Hispanic, damn it! And you better get used to it." Okay. I mean, you know, I mean that does not (trails off) …I think I've been a good role model for it and I think a lot of people that I've played ball with have been too, because you take the stereotypes. I've been to San Francisco's Pride Parade many times, 90% of the people there are just like you and me. They're in jeans and a shirt, this and that. But what makes it on tv? It's the dykes on bikes, it's the guys in the big Carmen Miranda hats, it's the leather this and that. Why? Because it's the shock value, it's the exotic…

For John, like so many other people in the research, softball was a place where he could meet "people like me." "People like me" were constructed as the normal, "regular guy" and juxtaposed with the "exotic" gender-blurring queer. John revealed a just-like-everybody-else mentality that pushes for full gay inclusion in the "real world," that is, inclusion in traditional normative neoliberal institutions. John does not want an expansion of gender and sexual expression or to contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, he wants to participate in them. He feels more comfortable around "regular guys," those that mimic heteronormative standards, than flamboyant men and masculine women, and softball helped to provide access to those guys.

Along the lines of John's opinion, the following quote also illustrates the construction of the "regular guy,"

> [Participating in the league] has really been a life-changing experience for me. I had always been somewhat active in sports growing up, and it was a fluke that I found the [League] since it had been years since I had played

> baseball, and I was curious if there was a gay sports organization, specifically baseball/softball, that I could get involved in. At the time, I contacted the gay and lesbian 'hotline' to find out. Coincidentally, THERE WAS! I was 23, in a relationship, with no outside connection to the community. That was almost 20 years ago. Guys I've played with have come and gone, but the friendships have remained. I can't imagine any other way to have those connections with a group of guys who were just like me. Sporty, not flamboyant (ok, somewhat flamboyant. LOL), and just 'a regular guy.' As I'm writing this, I am tearing up as I think back to all the good times and good people I have gotten to know since playing ball." (survey response, quotations in original)

Both of these quotes regarding the "regular guy" illustrate the view of homosexuality as a "minor variation on an essential sameness." Sport is a particularly powerful setting for the construction of masculinity (e.g., Connell, 1987; Hargreaves, 1994; Messner & Sabo, 1990) and a core value in the sport institution is its construction of a form of masculinity that elevates male experience over female (Kay, 2003). Sport has become "the main public and popular arena of bodily display, in which the complexities of sex, gender and sexuality are simplified and naturalised" (Symons, 2007, p. 141).

Summary

The League was not intended to be a transformative model of sport. This can be seen through the sanctioning of sport, assimilationist single-identity politics, and gender-conforming practices and policies. The unity and stability of identities was not problematized by participants or through the structure of the League. Instead, the binary oppositions of socially constructed identities such as man/woman and gay/straight were reproduced and policed. This resulted in an uncertain position for bisexual and transgender participants and led to a community fractured between the

open and women's sides. However, because the League is not looking to transform the institution of sport, does not imply that it is furthering the complete assimilation of gay and lesbian bodies into the mainstream.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This ethnography came out of a call from researchers to include queer theory in the study of sexuality and sport (Aitchison, 2007; Johnson & Kivel, 2007, Pronger, 2000). Informed by the perennial debate between assimilation and transformation strategies in the LGBT movement, I explored how community and identity were constituted, practiced, negotiated, and problematized in a LGBT softball league. LGBT identified sports clubs, formed as a result of identity politics, are understood to be potential sites of transformation and/or assimilation. The constantly changing and mutually informing relationship between sport and identity provides opportunities for the resistance and/or reproduction of the normative standards of gender and sexuality (Aitchison, 2007). Situating an LGBT softball league within the logic of homonormativity and queer futurity, I focused on how participants perceived community and identity in the context of the league. My work was guided by the questions: What is the meaning and significance of community for League participants? To what extent and how does participation in the League affect gender and sexual identity discourse and practice? And, in the context of the League, how are dominant ideologies and power structures reinforced, disrupted, and produced?

One League, Many Communities

Sport and leisure reflect and shape cultural values (Kraus, 1994) and, correspondingly, the discourse of a homogenous LGBT community was manifested in the League. Competitive sport, like identity politics, requires a unified subject (team) with distinct group boundaries (uniforms) for successful political gain (winning). In

the League, the structure of competition with opposing sides made explicit the dichotomies between us/them, winner/ loser, men/women, and competitive/recreational. As evidenced by the data, competition was a central factor in participation. Although the League was imbued with the discourses of inclusion and acceptance, the valorizing of competition and normalization led to the creation of hierarchies and a politics of exclusion. The need to problematize the assumption of a stable, unified LGBT community was highlighted in my findings. Collective identity boundary construction takes place not only in terms of outsiders, but also with those inside. According to Gamson (1997), the *us* constructed through the creation of a collective identity, "is solidified not just against an external *them* but also against *thems* inside, as particular subgroups battle to gain or retain legitimate *us* standing" (p. 180, emphasis in original).

Overwhelmingly, the League was constituted as a community. However, there was no greater attempt to define or articulate its meaning. The themes of sharing, doing, and connecting are huge, amorphous themes that came out of endless hours of pouring over the research data and coming to terms with the fact that this community was based on a longing for answers to the questions: Who am I? Where do I belong? Who is like me? And, importantly, who is not like me? Community was a social construction based on unarticulated assumptions and defined by what it was not. The people in this community were not-heterosexual. I use the word heterosexual intentionally. If it were truly an LGBT inclusive environment, rather than the LG inclusive environment my data suggests, it would be defined by being not-heteronormative. However, to claim the League is defined by being not-heteronormative would require evidence that the normative assumptions of male and female as socially constructed dichotomies were being challenged, and I found no

existence of that challenge. In contrast, I found evidence of the reification of that binary.

Thus, the League as an identity-based community was defined by what it was not, by what it lacked, by its constitutive outside. The League was defined as being not-heterosexual, but, and importantly, it was also defined by being not-that-different-than-heterosexual. The construction of a not-heterosexual that is also not-that-different-than-heterosexual requires marginalizing identities that could destabilize the binary. Additionally, within the logic of homonormativity only a certain type of not-heterosexual diversity is encouraged: "a narrow range of expression, displayed within the already-narrow parameters of 'normal,' that is palatable to heterosexuals and that contributes to the goal of assimilation" (Ghaziani, 2011, p. 104). It is possible to learn a great deal about community by looking at what and who is left out. Every community, like every identity, "has at its 'margin,' an excess, something more" (Hall, 2000, p. 18).

The conspicuous absence of transgender and bisexual participants in the League highlights a form of closure, a limit to the accepting and inclusive nature of the League. Bisexual and transgender identities subvert the notions of two naturally fixed sexual orientations and gendered categories. Bisexuals destabilize the essentialized identities of gay and straight, while transgender individuals transgress the binary opposition of the male/female gendered discourse. King (2008) contends that "one of the most powerful challenges to heteronormativity over the past two decades has come from the transgender movement which has argued that sexual orientation is not the only way to differ from and challenge heteronormativity"(p. 425). Rather than building an identity around sexual object choice, which is the concept used to distinguish "hetero" from "homo" sexuality (Stryker, 2006), persons who consider themselves transgender see the incongruity between their personal

perception of their gender and the perceptions of others as central to their identity (Taylor, Kaminski, & Dugan, 2002). Transgender inclusion in sport challenges the traditional organization of sport around the two-sex system (Travers, 2011). Additionally, the "genuine inclusion of transgender and bisexual people requires not simply an expansion of an identity, but a subversion of it." This is the challenge of queer futurity: If gay/lesbian and man/woman are unstable categories, where does that leave sexual identity politics? (Gamson, 1995, p. 399).

It is noteworthy that, in my conversations with participants, the question was not whether to include transgender people, the question was *how*. There was an inability to imagine a system different from the one that exists. The limits of the prevailing conditions were not questioned, impossibilities were not interrogated, and therefore alternative possibilities were not explored (Foucault, 1997). In a discussion about transgender (or the lack of transgender) participants, Linda closed the conversation by saying,

> I think the more that they [transgender people] bring themselves in and the more the people have experience with them, I mean like I said, it changes people's perception. You know, when you're not used to dealing with a particular type of person, we've all dealt with heterosexual people our entire life. You know and then we're gay so we know what that is. But then you cross those boundaries into you know, drag queens and transgendered and things that you don't see on a regular basis, and I think the more they implement themselves into the league, the more people have an experience with them. I think it lessens the craziness. Yeah, the shock value and everything.

This conversation demonstrated the perception of the present system as inevitable and change as only possible if transgender people enter the existing

system and conform to the existing norms. It also illustrated the impact of the assumed unification of the LGBT community, which does not encourage the exploration of the various meanings of identities in people's lives. The impact of this is not only seen in the absence of transgender and bisexual participants in the League, but also in the tension, misunderstanding, and disunity between the open and women's sides. It is worth revisiting Natalia's declaration, which is representative of my overall findings,

> In the league, you still have people that judge you. You do. You know, people make fun of the transgenders, or the, the, the women that don't like the men coming into their bar, or, or things like…It's still the same. People are still the same, you know, in how they judge people. It's just you're a different in sexuality, right? It's just, to me, it's just, it's such a close-knit community, you know, but still people still judge you, no matter what. They do, you know, in all honesty, they still do, you know. Lesbians make fun of the other lesbians. Lesbians make fun of the flaming queens, and stuff like that. And flaming queens make fun of the kings, you know? Everybody does it. It doesn't matter who you are. We all do it.

Although differences are viewed as posing a danger to "alliance, unity, communication, and true understanding," Alcoff (2006) argued that it is, in fact, "the refusal to acknowledge the importance of the differences in our identities that has led to distrust, miscommunication, and thus disunity" (p. 43). As its founder Brian told me, the League formed in a time that was completely different from how society is now. People's hearts were broken from the AIDS crisis, blatant homophobia was present almost everywhere, and identifying as gay and lesbian was enough to unite people. Among the people that had been in the League a long time, both men and women, there was very much a romantic ideal of "back in the day" when everyone

was one big happy community, but over time things have changed. When communities emerge in times of crisis or tragedy, it is easy to imagine a common belonging based on grief. What happens to that sense of connection when the community stops grieving?

The Impact of Assimilation

"While there is little disagreement that gay life in America is changing, there is little agreement about what this means" (Seidman, 2002, p. 2). Ghaziani (2011) argues that recent political gains and societal acceptance challenge theoretical accounts of collective identity. In the past, LGBT politics had a distinctive and defiant edge, strategically highlighted differences from heterosexuality, and employed an oppositional "us versus them" formation. In contrast, the homonormative contemporary movement has an assimilationist approach, focuses on more conservative issues, and seeks to emphasize similarities to heterosexuals by using an inclusive, distinction-muting "us and them" formation. This approach has led to increasing and ongoing assimilation and integration into the mainstream. This raises the important question, what happens to identity based movements and communities when they are assimilated into the mainstream? From the "post-gay" and "beyond the closet" perspectives, the increase in assimilation and decentering of lesbian and gay identity makes gay institutions less culturally, politically, and personally significant. People would rather integrate into the mainstream than remain on the LGBT margin.

My findings clearly demonstrate that participants in the League do not view society as post-gay. Their identities were sufficiently significant to them that they chose to participate in a softball league that was organized around gay and lesbian identities. Lesbian and gay-specific organizations are not completely assimilationist in that they exist on the margin of the mainstream. So then the question becomes what

role do LGBT specific organizations play in the process of assimilation? Are they a vehicle for normalization, and as such, a stepping stone to complete assimilation? While assimilation was a goal, mainstream society was not perceived as a space where LGBT people were fully able to be themselves free from the fear of stigmatization and discrimination. Although people in the League did not view themselves as different, they perceived themselves as being viewed differently by others. But what about people that used to participate and no longer do? Or people that choose not to participate at all? Do they not view lesbian and gay organizations as necessary? Also, why can the open league, made up of primarily men, sustain a robust and vibrant league, while the women struggle to find enough teams to form a division?

The decline in women's teams is a national trend not isolated to the League. It is possible that this is related to the national trend of lesbians moving away from lesbian enclaves and into the suburbs. This migration is attributed to the gender wage gap and more lesbians raising children. Studies have found that LGBT women are as likely as non-LGBT women to be raising children. In my time at the fields, I overheard many conversations on the women's side about the increase of kids; one of my favorite comments was, "We used to come here and everyone would bring their dogs, now everyone brings their kids. Look they're everywhere!" Another factor might be that softball has long been the province of lesbians who found sport to be a receptive site for forming relationships and creating a shared culture (Cahn, 1994). Because of that historical trend, coupled with the hostility of sports to gay men, it may be that lesbians are more easily able to assimilate into mainstream sports culture. In interview with Joanne she explained that she felt most comfortable in her skin "on the ball field, no matter where we are, as long as I'm on the field."

There are many questions that, while outside the scope of my study, are very important for future research to explore. According to the "beyond the closet" and "post-gay" logics, as the significance of LGBT identity recedes so will LGBT specific organizations, enclaves, and institutions, and some research has supported this assertion (see Rosser, West, & Weinmeyer, 2007; Ghaziani, 2014). Speaking to the impact of assimilation, in a magazine article about the Gay Games, the author stated, "Ironically, the growing acceptance of gay athletes in the United States has made the Games a victim of its own success." He then quoted the organization's co-president addressing the difficulty of recruiting young athletes, "The youth don't know the history – what the Gay Games have gone through; what we've accomplished over the last 30-plus years – so they don't understand what the Gay Games are, and that's what we need to focus on. (Dahl quoted in Scrugs, 2014). When assimilation is taking place to such a degree that LGBT youth are homogenized into the mainstream and the gay and lesbian institutions no longer exist, where do they learn about gay culture and history? Most people are not raised with gay and lesbian parents. Therefore, historically, the neighborhoods, bars, and organizations were the places of socialization where one learned the history of the LGBT movement and what it meant to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. Stories were told and histories were remembered by bartenders, regulars, and old-timers rather than parents or grandparents. If these institutions disappear, how are those histories remembered and passed on? As LGBT people assimilate into the mainstream, does the otherness of those identities vanish with them?

In Closing

The League delivered what it promised. Its purpose was to foster sports participation predominately for gay and lesbians, and that is exactly what it did. The League, as an institution created by and reflective of its participants, did not have

social change aspirations, it never said anything about a politics of possibility. I imposed that structure and analysis on the organization. The critique of the League is a critique of us all. Being lesbian or gay does not make you a social change agent: Most people in the League wanted nothing more than to be treated as ordinary people with the same access to rights, institutions, and opportunities as their straight counterparts. They wanted to play a sport they loved in an environment free from stigmatization. They did not want or see the need to change the sport that they loved and revered. They wanted to find a sense of connection and belonging. They wanted to do all of this in an environment where a mark of difference became a mark of sameness. They wanted their non-normative sexuality to be normalized.

My data unequivocally demonstrate that the League aligned itself more with the logic of homonormativity than the logic of queer futurity. Both logics of queer futurity and homonormativity make sense and both are necessary. The dialectical tension between lived experience and future ideality creates a politics informed but not blinded by reality. The League was not an organization of "revolutionary" gays and lesbians, it was an organization for "primarily gays and lesbians" that wanted to "foster" competition through the normalizing institution of sport. The League did not alter the gender order. It did not challenge the existing power structures that created the need for an LGBT specific sports league in the first place. At the same time, the formation of collective identities with exclusive and secure boundaries was politically effective in achieving their objectives. The League created a space where people felt safe, comfortable, free of judgement, accepted, and welcome. The very real and significant impact of that in people's lives should not be discounted. They opened a space where people could just be. With space comes breathe. "With breath comes imagination. With breath comes possibility. If queer politics is about freedom, it

might simply mean the freedom to breathe" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 120). Maybe the League is queer after all.

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APPENDIX A

EXPLORATORY STUDY

The purpose of the exploratory study was to examine the extent to which participation in the League lead to the development of positive social capital as well as counteracted negative social capital. Three questions informed the research including: (1) Does participation in a LGBT sports organization lead to increased social capital? (2) Does an increase in social capital lead to positive outcomes and what are the positive outcomes? (3) Do the positive outcomes counteract minority stress and the negative effects of social capital?

Background

Social Capital

Since the mid-1990s the terms social capital and leisure have been connected in good part due to the work of Robert Putnam. However, in addition to popularizing the term, Putnam pretty much redefined it. The concept was originally developed by Pierre Bourdieu and James Coleman, although it essentially repackages an understanding that's been in existence since sociology's nascent days: involvement and participation in groups can have positive consequences for the individual and the community (Portes, 1998). Its roots can be traced back to Durkheim's "value introjection," Marx's "bounded solidarity," Simmel's "reciprocity exchanges," and Weber's "enforceable trust" (Macinko & Starfield, 2001; Portes). The positive outcomes of social capital include increased trust, network mediated benefits, and norm observance. However, negative consequences include exclusion, oppression, and downward leveling norms. Portes (1998) refers to negative effects of social capital as its "dark side."

The Dark Side of Social Capital

The exclusion of outsiders, demands for conformity, and persecution of difference underscore the dark side of social capital. The collective assets of social

capital that can integrate people into a group can also alienate those who do not fall within the defined set of norms and values. For people who exist outside the "dominative model of sexual correctness" (Rubin, 1992) the dark side of social capital can result in oppression, marginalization, and stigmatization. Correspondingly, research has found lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBT) people have a higher prevalence of mental health disorders including depression, anxiety, substance use disorders, affective disorders, and suicide compared with their heterosexual peers (Cochran, 2001 & Mayer et al., 2008). Mental health disorders are not inherent to being a member of LGBT population, rather they can result from the stigma, prejudice and discrimination experienced by members of minority groups; researchers explain the phenomenon as minority stress (Mayer et al, 2008 & Meyer, 2003).

Stress and Resilience

Stress and resilience interact to determine the effect of minority stress. Research has found that LGBT people rely primarily on their friendship network for social support which acts as a buffer for minority stress (Dewaele, A, 2008). Frable, Wortman, and Joseph (1997) found that having gay friends and attending gay social events are associated with a positive gay identity, and that positive group identity is then related to high self-esteem, high well-being, and low distress. LGBT people counteract minority stress by establishing alternative structures and values that enhance their group (Crocker & Major, 1989; D'Emilio, 1983).

LGBT Leisure and Sports Clubs

Research has found a tremendous growth in LGBT leisure and sports organizations founded to actively promote the creation of welcoming, safe, and supportive environments. An example is the League, which is an adult slow pitch

softball founded in 1992 as a healthy outlet for the LGBT community and a way to foster sports competition "predominately for gays, lesbians and anyone dedicated to promotion of the amateur athletic experience for persons of all skill level and abilities regardless of sexual orientation, gender, race, creed, religion or national origin" (League bylaws).

Sport clubs and events, like the League, are founded as a result of both the negative and positive effects of social capital. Positive outcomes of social capital such as a safe and welcoming environment, likeminded people, and feelings of belonging promote the joining of LGBT organizations; negative products of social capital such as discrimination and exclusivity encourage individuals not to participate in mainstream organizations (Elling, Knopp & Knoppers, 2003). Research has explored LGBT leisure and sport (albeit, much more needs to be done) and leisure and social capital. However, there exists a gap in the research on LGBT leisure and social capital. No studies have asked if alternative structures, like the the League, where marginalized people converge, facilitate the development of social capital and counteract the dark side.

Network Theory of Social Capital

This study utilized the Network Theory of Social Capital because of its attention to the structures which reproduce power and inequality, as well as its focus on the individual. Lin defines Social capital as "investment in social relations by individuals through which they gain access to embedded resources to enhance expected returns of instrumental or expressive actions" (Lin, *Building a Theory of Social Capital*, 1999, p. 38).

Three processes can be identified for modeling:

1. Investment in social capital: Preconditions and precursors of social capital: the factors in the social structure and each individual's position in the social structure which facilitate or constrain the investment of social capital

2. Access and mobilization: These are resources embedded in social networks and ties. Accessibility represents the network resources to which an individual has access. Mobilization signifies the actual use of contact resources in the context of specific actions.

3. Returns: Lin proposes two major types of outcomes – returns to instrumental action and returns to expressive action. For instrumental action there are three main returns: economic, political, and social. For expressive action the three types of returns are physical health, mental health, and life satisfaction.

Research Design

Sampling Strategy

The study utilized non-random, purposive sampling, which deliberately selects individuals based on their ability to provide the needed information (Padgett, 2008). Convenience and snowball sampling strategies targeted all current and former members of the The League. Convenience sampling involves selecting locations, groups, or people that are conveniently available and willing to participate (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007). This included posting a link to the survey questionnaire on the league's Facebook page, creating a Facebook page for the study, and getting a brief write-up about the study in a local gay magazine. Snowball sampling, which asks participants to recruit individuals to join the study, was used by identifying gatekeepers who were well connected with the The League and asking them to send the information to their contacts. During May 2012, 68 surveys were

started through the online computer program Qualtrics. Of those, 58 questionnaires were completed and will be used for the present analysis. Due to the unwillingness of the board to grant me access to league documents, as well as poor record keeping, the total population number of current and former participants was unavailable.

Data Collection Strategy

The questionnaire contained 41 questions, some with multiple parts. The first section of the survey included demographic questions that covered issues such as sex/gender, race/ethnicity, age, education level, sexual identity, and length of participation in the The League. The next section asked about leisure behaviors including time spent pursuing leisure activities and time spent participating in leisure activities with individuals met through participation in the The League. Questions were then asked in regards to experiences with mainstream sports leagues and reasons individuals joined the The League. Next, the Sexual Identity Distress Scale from Wright & Perry (2006) was used to examine minority stress, a variation of The Berkman-Syme Social Network Index (SNI) (1979) was used to measure support structures, and measures constructed by Lin and Ye (1999) were used to assess functional and emotional support.

The Sexual Identity Distress Scale from Wright & Perry (2006) is a seven item scale that measures sexual identity distress. The seven items are: I have a positive attitude about being LGBT; I feel uneasy around people who are very open in public about being LGBT*; I often feel ashamed that I am LGBT*; For the most part, I enjoy being LGBT; I worry a lot about what others think about my being LGBT*; I feel proud that I am LGBT; I wish I weren't attracted to the same sex*. Sexual identity distress was measured on a five point scale: 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = disagree, 5 = strongly disagree. Items marked with an asterisk were reverse coded such that higher values indicated higher

distress. The next section examined if self-reported levels of sexual identity distress have changed since joining the The League, using the same five point scale. For example, Since joining the The League, I have a more positive attitude about being LGBT. Three additional questions were then asked: Has your level of stress, sadness, loneliness, or depression changed since joining the The League; Has your level of happiness, pride, and satisfaction changed since joining the The League; and Has your sense of belonging in the LGBT community changed since joining the The League. Change was measured on a five point scale: 5 = greatly increased, 4 = increased, 3 = stayed the same, 2 = decreased, 1 = greatly decreased.

The SNI (1979) is intended to assess social connectedness and isolation through a self-reported questionnaire that probes four types of social ties: marital status, sociability, church group membership, and membership in other community organizations. The variation used in this study asked about sociability, membership in community organizations, and sexual orientation. The questions included: How many close friends do you have, people you feel at ease with, can talk to about private matters* ; How many of these close friends do you see at least once a month*; How many of these close friends are aware of your sexual orientation; How many relatives are you close to, people you feel at ease with, can talk to about private matters*; How many of these relatives do you see at least once a month*; How many of these relatives are aware of your sexual orientation; How many friends do you have that are LGBT; (Aside from The League) Do you participate in any groups, such as a social or work groups, religious-connected groups, self-help groups, or charity, public service, or community groups*; Is there someone available to you whom you can count on when you need emotional support (advice, guidance, encouragement, or someone to talk to); Is there someone available to you whom you can count on when you need functional support (a ride, financial place to stay)?.

Respondents select from the options: none, 1 or 2, 3 to 5, 6 to 9, 10 or more, unknown*. The next section asked if these support structures have changed since joining the The League. For example, How many close friends do you have, people you feel at ease with, can talk to about private matters.* Change in support structure was measured on a five point scale: 5 = greatly increased, 4 = increased, 3 = stayed the same, 2 = decreased, 1 = greatly decreased.

Lin, Ye, & Ensel (1999) developed measures corresponding to various dimensions of support functions and designed items for perceived functional and emotional support. Respondents were asked if they could get help in ten hypothetical situations, items incorporated both functional and emotional support. The perception of support availability was measured on a three point scale: 3 = yes, 2 = yes but with difficulty, and 1 = no. The situations included: Someone to lend you money to pay bills or help you get along; Someone to help in doing things around the house (i.e., cooking, cleaning); Someone to give you a ride to someplace you had to go (shopping, post office, airport); Someone to help with your daily routine if you were not feeling well; Someone to watch your house (care for plants/pets) while you were away; Someone to talk to about something that was bothering you; Company when you felt lonely or just wanted to talk; Someone to talk to about a small argument you had with your husband/wife or closest friend; Someone to make you feel good, loved, or cared for; Someone to talk to about a series of disappointments or bad days.

Descriptive statistics were generated from the data to understand the sample as a whole. Additionally, the data were cross-tabulated to identify and categorize key themes for different cross-sections of participants. Particular attention was paid to gender, age, amount of time participating in the league, and the amount of time an individual has been “out” to close friends as LGBT.

At the end of the survey, 22 participants provided contact information indicating their willingness to be interviewed about their experience. Due to time constraints, stratified purposeful sampling was used to select participants by perceived gender (based upon first names) and 11 individual, semi-structured interviews consisting of open-ended questions were conducted. The interviews were intended to obtain follow-up information, from the perspective of the individuals, about the concepts and themes that emerged from the survey. The interviews were scheduled in advance at a prearranged time, based upon the participants' requests and availability. Due to logistical constraints the interviews were conducted over the phone. The interview guide included 11 questions and other questions emerged from the dialogue between interviewer and interviewee; each interview lasted between 25 and 45 minutes. Examples of questions include: Why did you join the The League? Overall, what has your experience been like participating in the The League? What is your favorite part of the league? What is your least favorite part? (Or something that you wish you could change). Before participating in the The League, what was your experience with organized sports? Why did you choose The League over a mainstream organization? Do you feel there is homophobia in society? How does it manifest itself? Does it affect you? What kind of relationships have you developed as a result of your participation in the The League? Do you feel like the The League is a community? Do you think participation in the The League has led to positive outcomes and what are the positive outcomes? Has there been an increase in emotional support? Functional support? The interviews were audio-recorded and important quotes were identified and transcribed.

Presentation of Findings

Demographics (N = 58)

Variable	Mean or %	Standard Deviation	Range
Gender	54% female, 44% male, 2% transgender		
Race/Ethnicity	80% white, 11% Hispanic, 7% Asian, 2% Native American		
Age	39.91 years	7.85 years	25-60 years
Education	42% college degree, 35% advanced college degree, 20% some college, 3% high school diploma		
Current Income	$50,000		$10,000-$80,000+
Sexual Identity	52% lesbian, 42% gay, 4% bisexual, 2% queer, 5% straight		
Age out to self	20.87 years	6.08 years	8-35 years
Time in League	6.98 years	4.37 years	1-18 years
Current Team's Division	39% "C", 29% "B," 22% Do not currently participate, 9% "D,", 2% "A"		

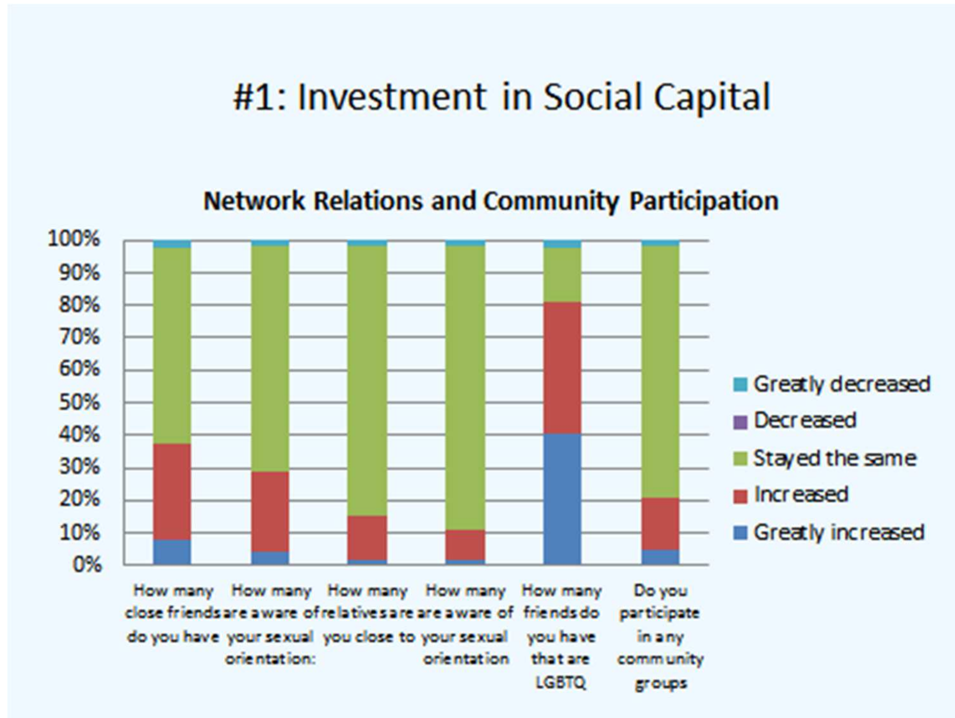
Sexual Identity Distress Scale

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range
I have a positive attitude about being LGBTQ	1.69	.63	1-3
I feel uneasy around people who are very open in public about being LGBTQ*	2.38	1.16	5-1
I often feel ashamed that I am LGBTQ*	1.62	.65	5-3
For the most part, I enjoy being LGBTQ	1.84	.71	1-4
I worry a lot about what others think about my being LGBTQ*	2.40	.99	5-2
I feel proud that I am LGBTQ	1.89	.84	1-4
I wish I weren't attracted to the same sex*	1.56	.76	5-2
Total Sexual Identity Distress (Range: 7-35)	13.38	5.74	

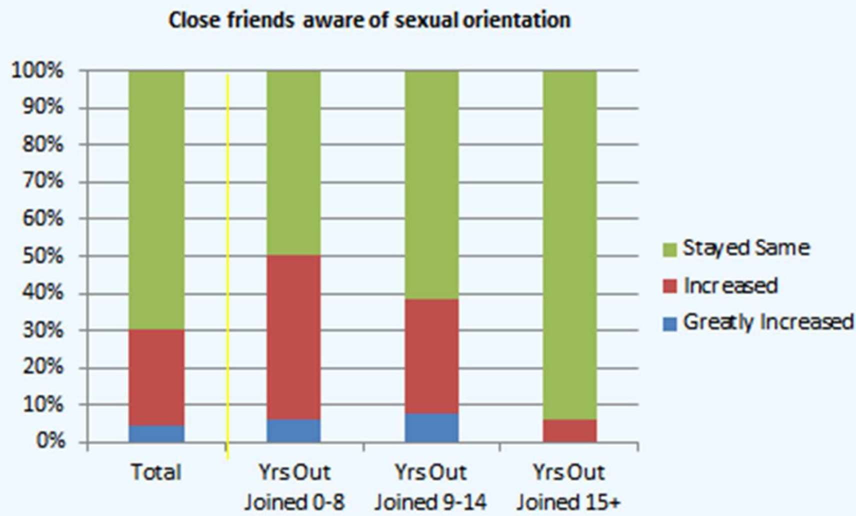
1	2	3	4	5
Strongly agree	Agree	Neither/nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Strongly disagree*	Disagree*	Neither/nor*	Agree*	Strongly agree*

Table presents the individual items and descriptive statistics for the sexual identity distress scale. Items marked with an asterisk were recoded such that

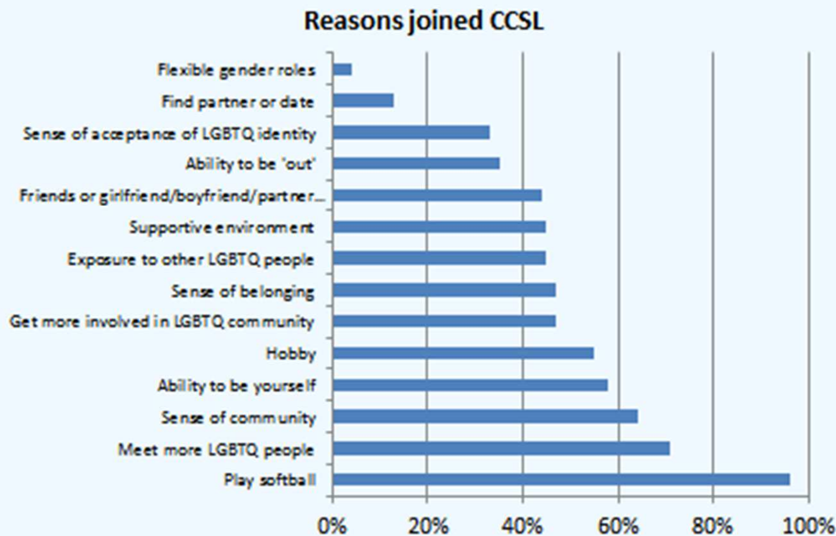
higher values indicated higher levels of internalized homophobia. Overall, the average score on the scale was 13.38 (SD = 5.74), below the absolute midpoint of the scale (21).



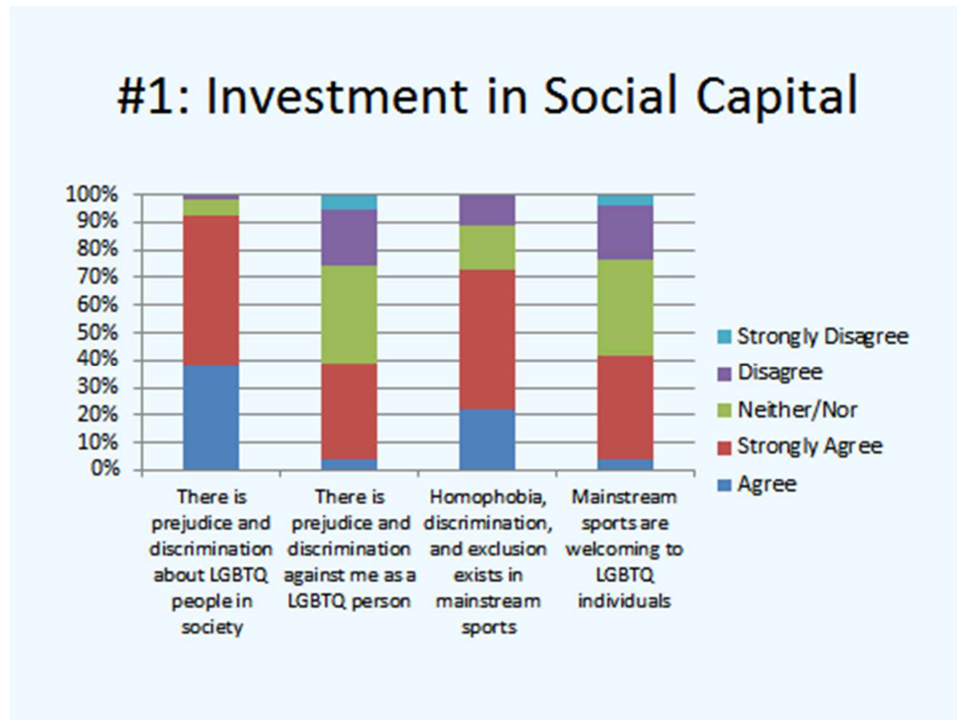
This addresses the change in an individual's network since participating in the League. In over half of the interviews, I heard that the majority of friends are due in some part to the league. One person said, regarding participating in the League, "This is the only reason I have any good friends in Phoenix. I live with my two teammates." Another person said, "I met 100 people or more immediately, which was awesome." A different person said that participating in League was a way to connect with other communities. Also, it benefits other relationships. He gave an example of it being a talking point at work when someone will say, "I saw on Facebook, you hit a homerun." Then they will talk about playing sports and it helps to build a connection.



This is the change in close friends aware of sexual orientation crosstabulated by the number of years a person had been out to themselves before they joined the league.



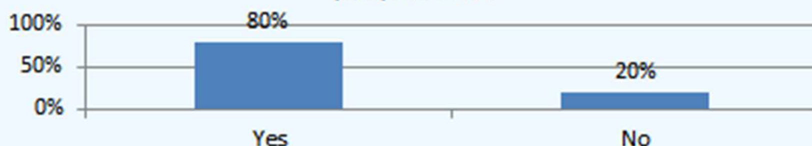
In the interviews people indicated that they joined the league to play softball, passion for sport, for camaraderie (the idea of being with others that are gay), for kinship, and to be part of a community.



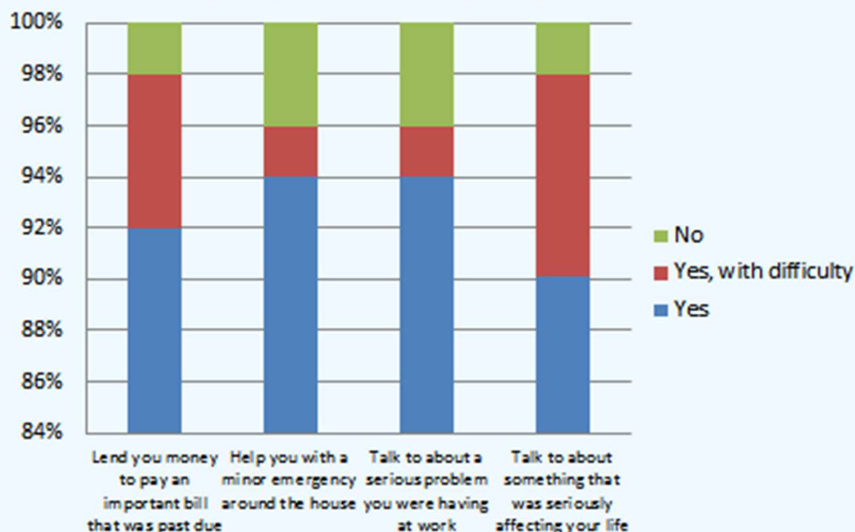
In interviews people were really positive about the change society is undergoing. Everyone interviewed thought that homophobia exists, but the majority of people indicated that society is becoming more open-minded

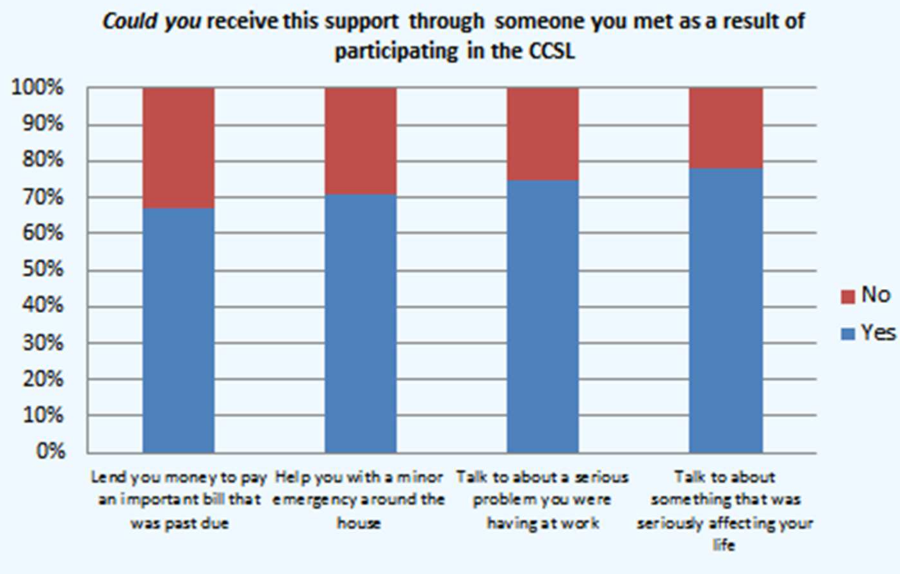
#2: Access to and Mobilization of Social Capital

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Range
On average, how many hours a week do you participate in leisure activities	17.00 hours	14.38 hours	3-70 hours
On average, how many hours a week do you participate in leisure activities with individuals you met through CCSL	5.22 hours	5.39 hours	0-30 hours
On average, how many vacations do you go on a year (this includes softball tournaments)	4.35 vacations	2.71 vacations	1-15 vacations
On average, how many of those vacations are with individuals you met through your participation in CCSL	2.15 vacations	1.56 vacations	0-7 vacations

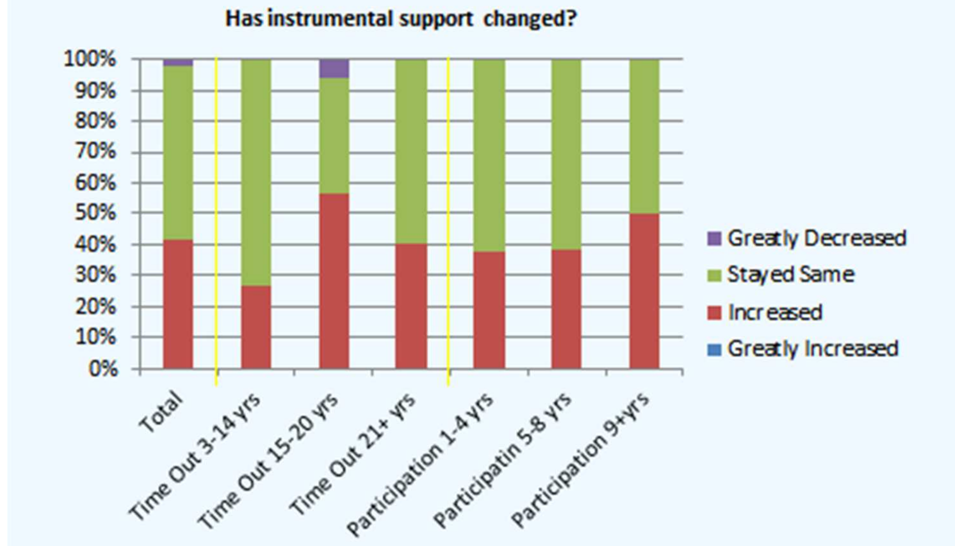


#2: Access to and Mobilization of Social Capital



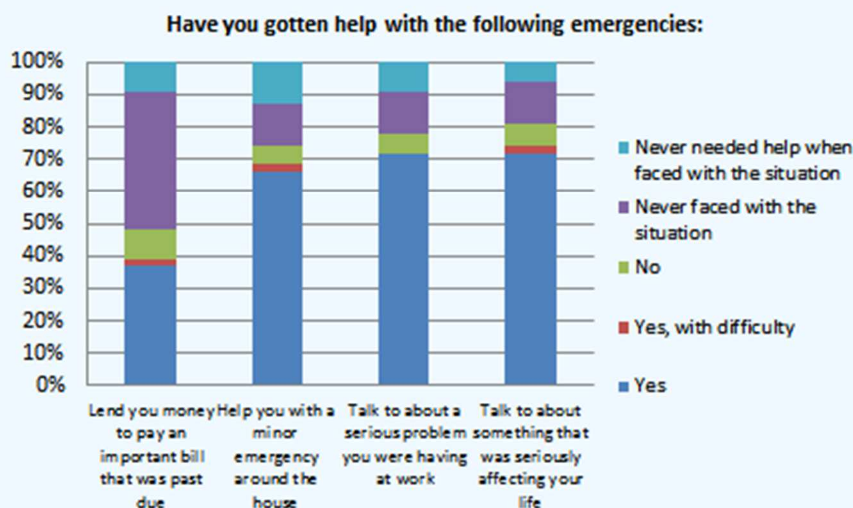


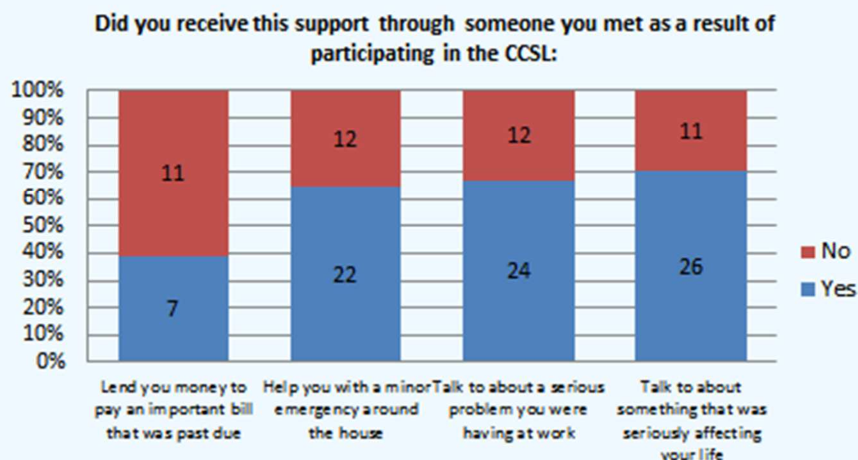
All of the people that were interviewed expressed an increase in access to and mobilization of social capital. One person said that he is a very independent person and doesn't ask for a lot of things. However, he knows if he needed something, friends he met through the CCSL would be there. Another person said that he hasn't used it or needed it, but he knows it's there.

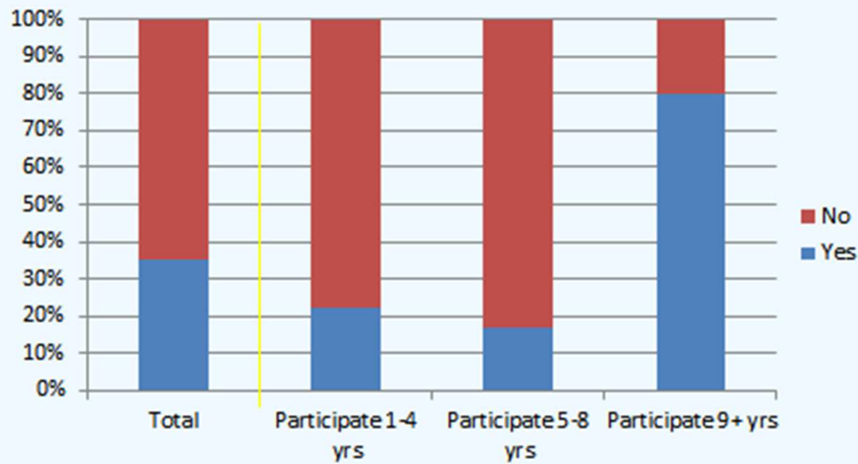


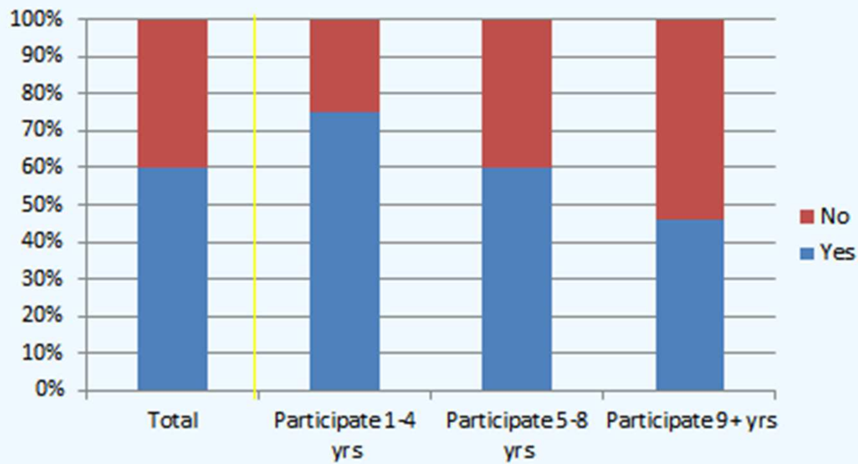
When asked: Is there someone available to you whom you can count on when you need functional support (a ride, financial assistance, a place to stay)? Has that changed since you joined CCSL? This is crosstabulated by time they have been out to themselves and then separately the number of years they have participated.

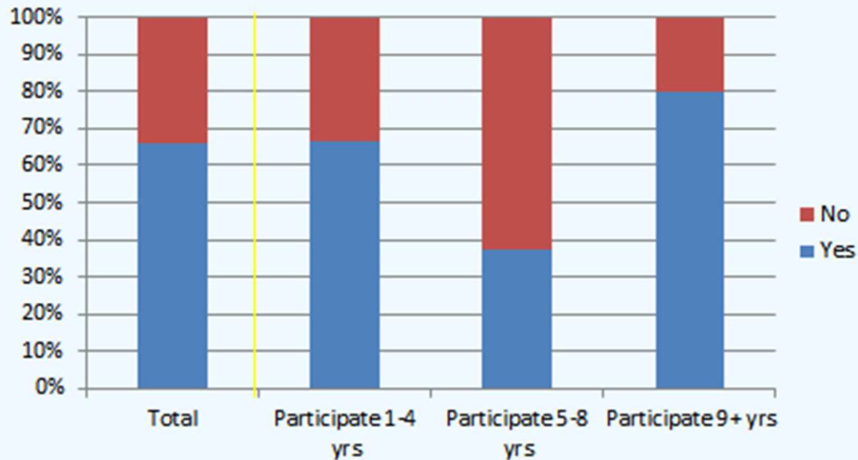
At the end of the survey, one person wrote. "CCSL is a great avenue to meet people; [for] personal and professional networking." In interviews both the person and professional component came up frequently as well.

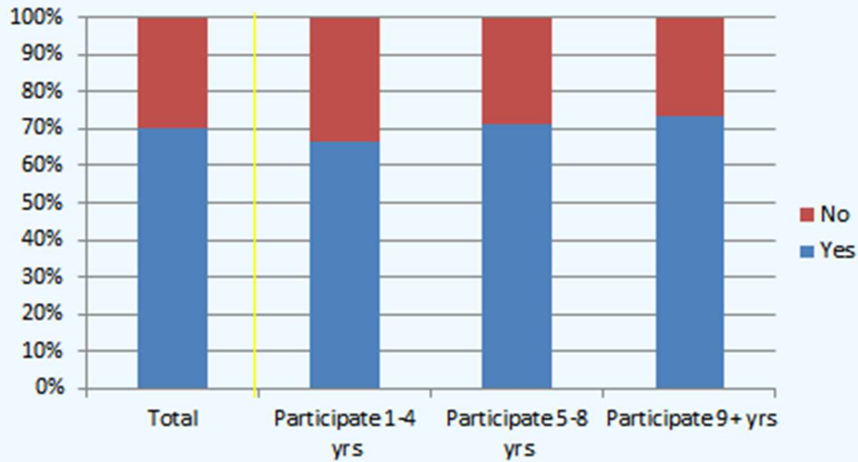

#3: Instrumental Returns
Have you gotten help with the following emergencies:
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Lend you money to pay an important bill that was past due
Help you with a minor emergency around the house
Talk to about a serious problem you were having at work
Talk to about something that was seriously affecting your life
Never needed help when faced with the situation
Never faced with the situation
No
Yes, with difficulty
Yes

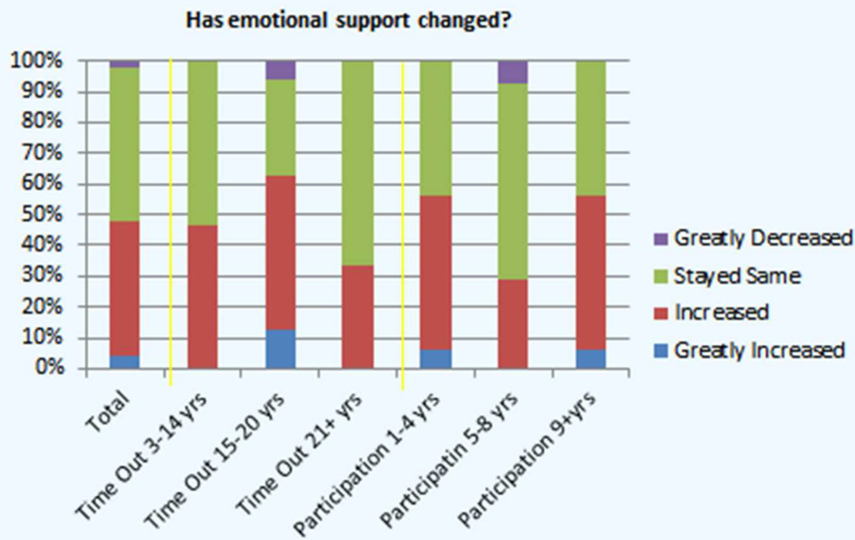

#3: Instrumental Returns
Did you receive this support through someone you met as a result of participating in the CCSL:
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
11
12
12
11
7
22
24
26
Lend you money to pay an important bill that was past due
Help you with a minor emergency around the house
Talk to about a serious problem you were having at work
Talk to about something that was seriously affecting your life
No
Yes


#3: Instrumental Returns
Did you receive this support through someone you met as a result of participating in the CCSL:
Someone to lend you money
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Total
Participate 1-4 yrs
Participate 5-8 yrs
Participate 9+ yrs
No
Yes

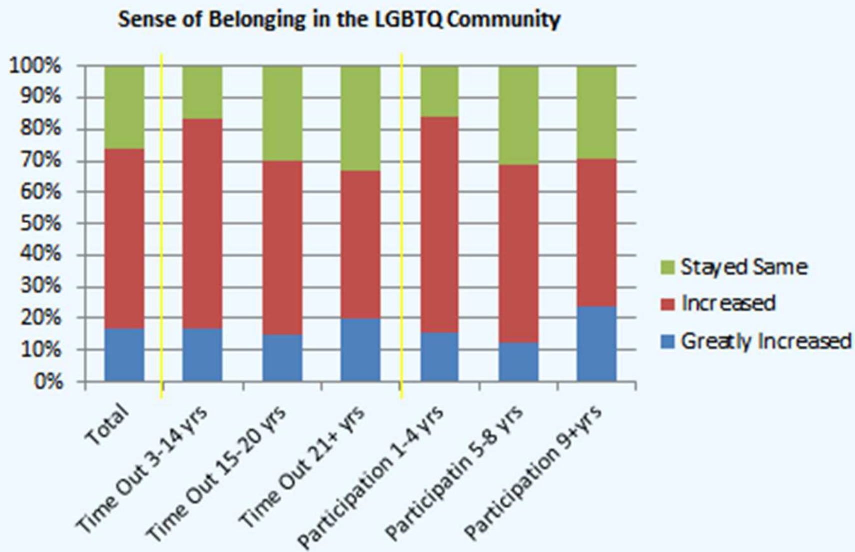

#3: Instrumental Returns
Did you receive this support through someone you met as a result of participating in the CCSL:
Someone to help with a minor emergency around the house
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Total
Participate 1-4 yrs
Participate 5-8 yrs
Participate 9+ yrs
No
Yes

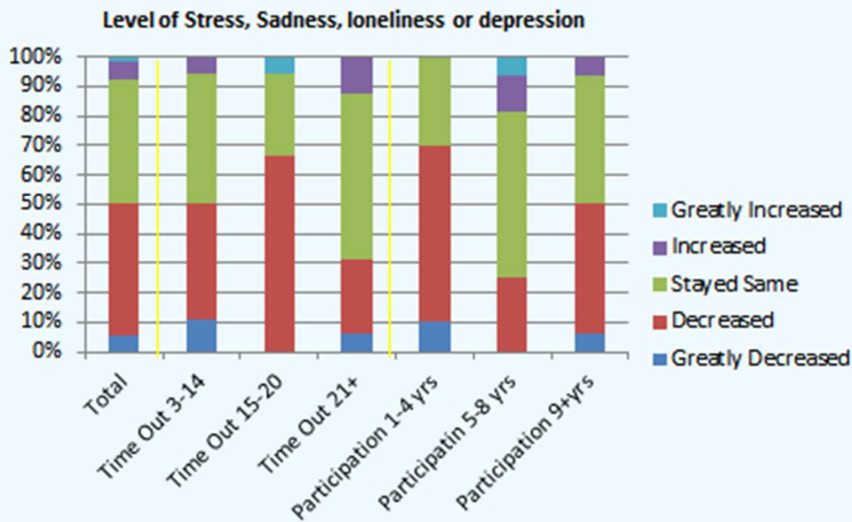

#3: Instrumental Returns
Did you receive this support through someone you met as a result of participating in the CCSL:
Someone to talk about a serious problem you were having at work
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Total
Participate 1-4 yrs
Participate 5-8 yrs
Participate 9+ yrs
No
Yes


#3: Instrumental Returns
Did you receive this support through someone you met as a result of participating in the CCSL:
Someone to talk about something that was seriously affecting you
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Total
Participate 1-4 yrs
Participate 5-8 yrs
Participate 9+ yrs
No
Yes



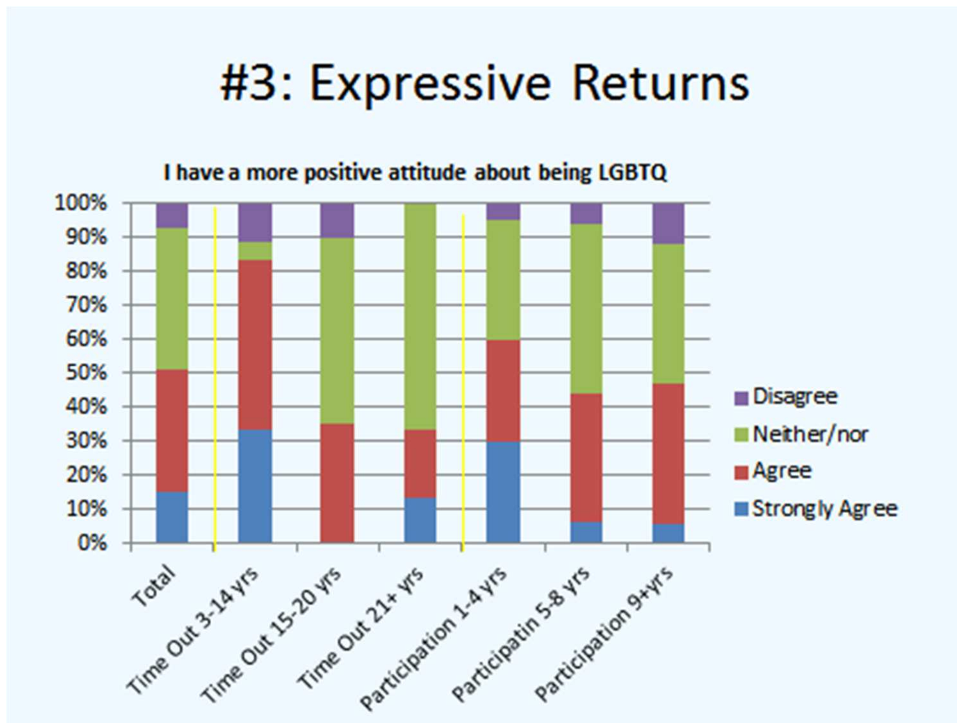
Since you've participated in the CCSL, have the number of people available for emotional support (advice, guidance, encouragement, someone to talk to) changed?





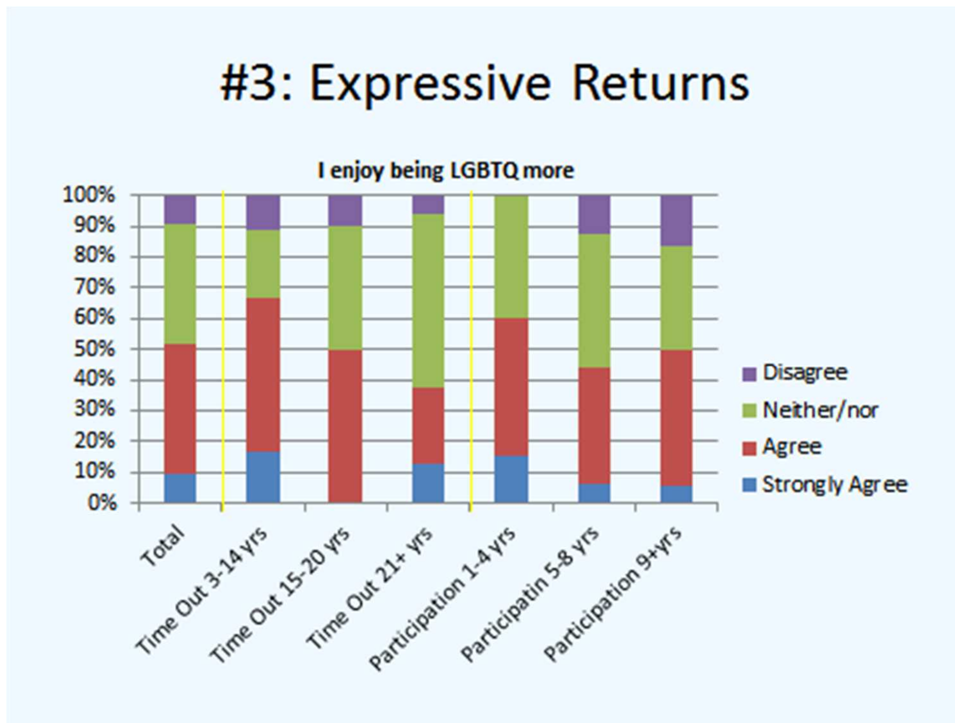
One person indicated that they suffer from depression and the interaction from the league helped greatly with that.

At the end of the survey, one person wrote: CCSL has been a "Great experience, helped me grow as a person, not just being gay." In an interview one person said, Participating in the CCSL gives you automatic connections, there is a "Good social cohort and friend based. Support and friendships make for a happier person and better disposition in life."

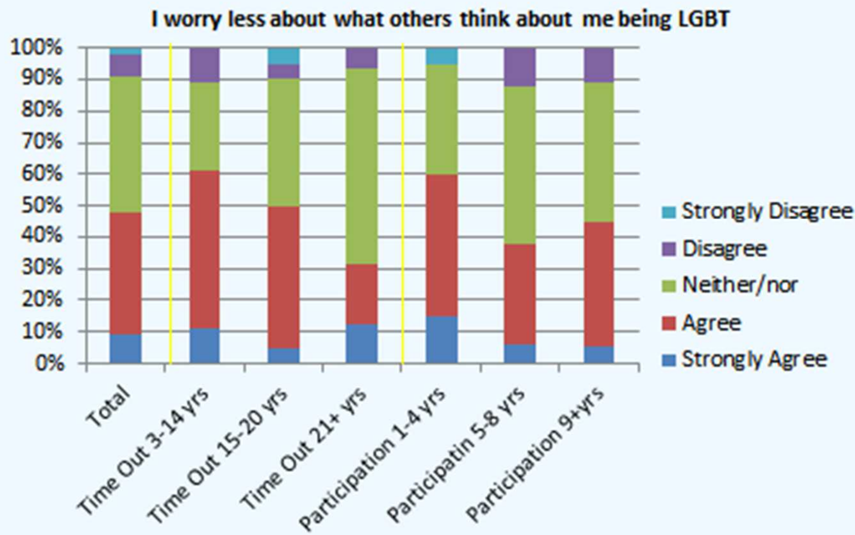


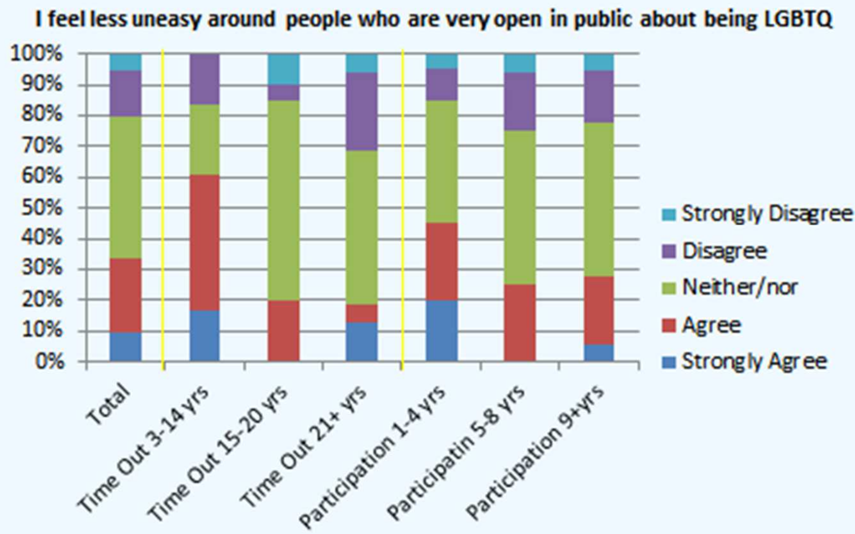
These are questions on the Sexual Identity Distress scale and how participating in CCSL has effected one's internalized homophobia and personal identity as a LGBT person. In these questions we start to the trends change in terms of time out.

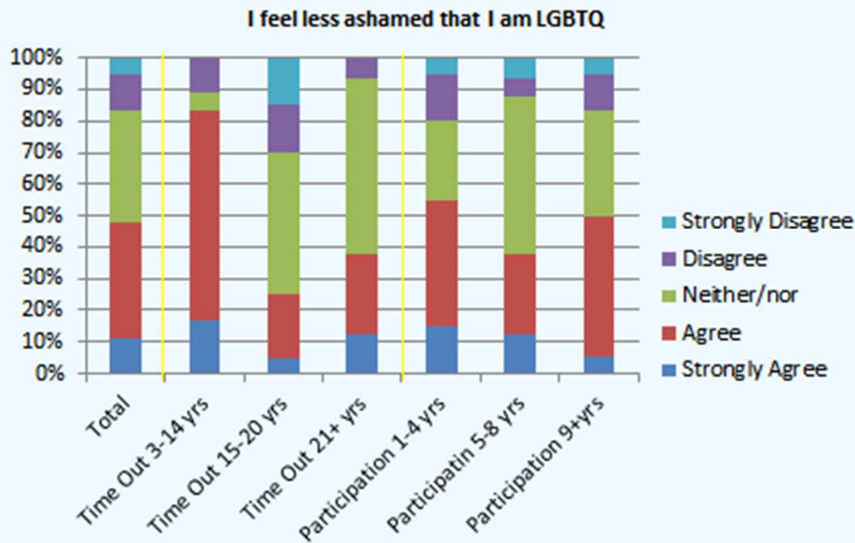
Many people spoke of participation in CCSL being a self-esteem builder. One person said that CCSL has helped me to be "more comfortable in my own skin. I am proud to be a gay man and proud to participate in activities that show my true identity."



In one interview I was speaking with a woman that had participated in the league for one year. She said that she'd been military for 24 yrs and had to hide her life. It was very significant to her to be able to be around people that are open and be able to show affection in public. She said it helped her to realize who she is. She said, "I learned myself and accepted myself. I am ok with me and I know other people are ok. That's what the league did." This is a really common sentiment. In the interviews everyone expressed the importance of being able to be themselves and not having to hide or worry about a part of their identity.

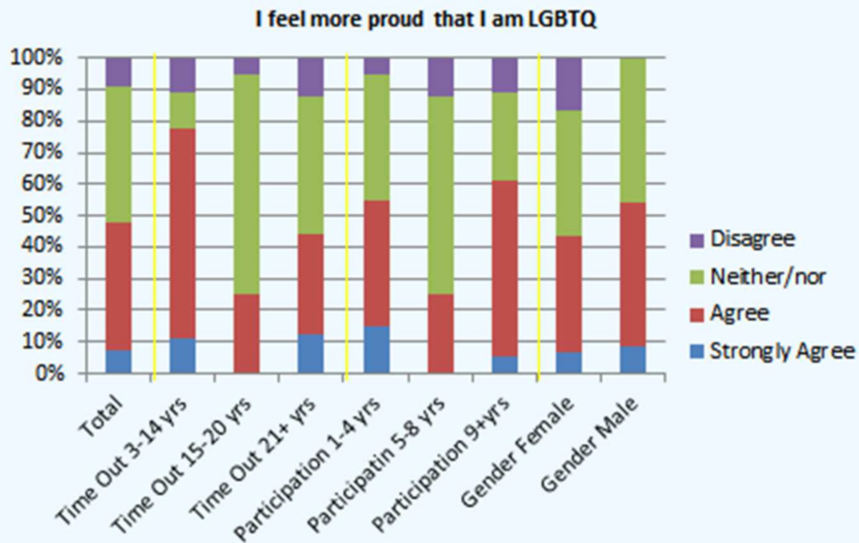

#3: Expressive Returns
I worry less about what others think about me being LGBT
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Total
Time Out 3-14 yrs
Time Out 15-20 yrs
Time Out 21+ yrs
Participation 1-4 yrs
Participatin 5-8 yrs
Participation 9+yrs
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neither/nor
Agree
Strongly Agree


#3: Expressive Returns
I feel less uneasy around people who are very open in public about being LGBTQ
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
Total
Time Out 3-14 yrs
Time Out 15-20 yrs
Time Out 21+ yrs
Participation 1-4 yrs
Participatin 5-8 yrs
Participation 9+yrs
Strongly Disagree
Disagree
Neither/nor
Agree
Strongly Agree

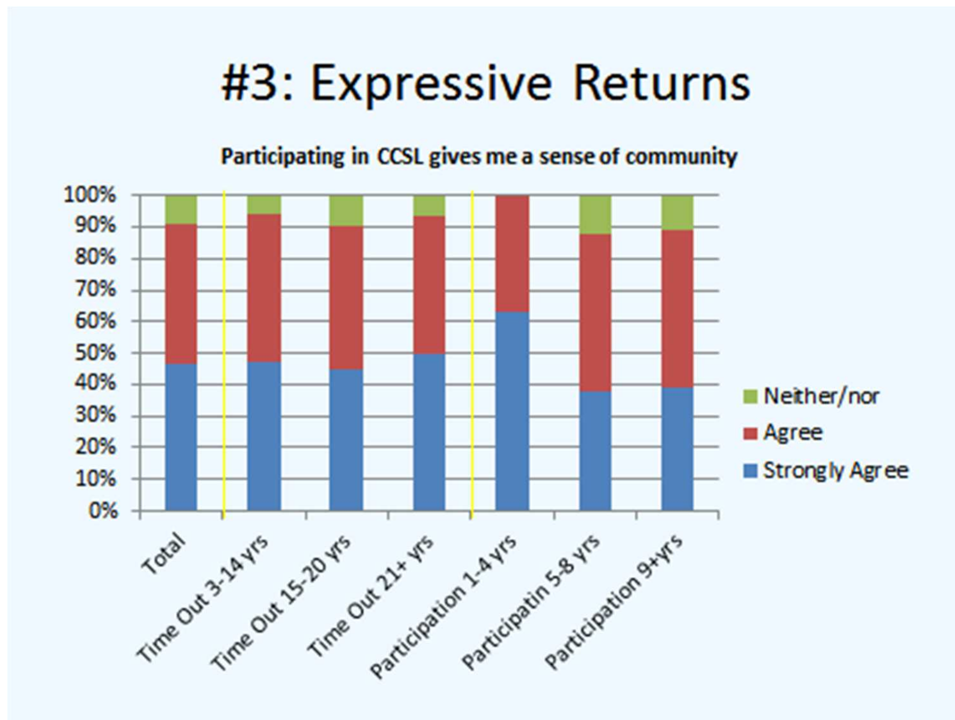


One person said that participating in the CCSL helps to deal with homophobia because "the more gay people you know, the more confidence you have…It's a learning process for most people. People need adjustment time. The league was there during a time that helped to accept and understand myself."

Another person said, "I have more confidence to know we are a community, our own part of society, there is no shame associated with it."



Many people in the interviews expressed gaining a sense of confidence from participating in the league. One person said "Meeting more people like you gives you confidence. Before I was isolated. The exposure to gay people helped with that. I think that I came out professionally because of confidence I got from the league."



The main frustrations that were voiced in the research were regarding the politics of the league and the cliques. One person wrote at the end of the survey, "Even though it is a community with something in common the goals of the community are different and at times competing, impacting the effectiveness of the community." Another person wrote, "Sometimes I felt that the teams and the players in the league were very "clicky" and not welcoming. There is lack of encouragement and support amongst some of the teams. I find that a lot of the people in the league have the tendency to have a bad attitude and are not always very friendly. I think that this is common in the LGBT community."

The exploratory findings indicated that participation in the League increased access and mobilization of social capital which created positive outcomes. The positive outcomes appeared to be immediate and stronger in terms of expressive returns. New participants and people who have been out for the shortest amount

of time seemed to be most positively impacted in terms of their identity as LGBT individuals.

APPENDIX B

RECRUITMENT EMAIL TO LOCAL LGBT CENTER

Subject: Participants needed for research project about LGBT people and sport

My name is Sara Mertel and I am a current member of CCSL, and a PhD candidate at Arizona State University in the School of Community Resources and Development, under the direction of Peg Bortner. I am conducting research to document and understand more about how participating in an LGBT sports league affects people's sense of community and identity. **If you are a current or former CCSL member, share your experience by participating in an interview or a short survey prior to February 28th.**

Interviews are preferred to collect data to further understand the experience of the LGBT community in sport. In-person interviews are conducted that last approximately one hour. The interviews are scheduled at your convenience, voluntary and confidential, and used for the sole purpose of research for my PhD candidacy. Likewise, a short survey is available (http://asupublicprograms.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_25bHkz8BAAfe0rr), and will also provide me with important data related to my research.

Our experiences make our story. I appreciate the opportunity to hear yours as a current or former member of CCSL and LGBT community.

Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sara Mertel
PhD candidate
Arizona State University
School of Community Resources and Development
602-390-2652
smertel@asu.edu

APPENDIX C

MESSAGE POSTED LEAGUE’S FACEBOOK PAGE

Current and former CCSL participants,

My name is Sara Mertel. I am in the last stages of finishing my PhD at Arizona State University under the direction of Dr. Peg Bortner. I am also a participant in the CCSL and have been for the past 10 years. This research, my dissertation, looks at how participating in an LGBT sports league (specifically the CCSL) impacts people's sense of community and identity. I could really use your help! Your experiences and insights are very important if we are to learn more about LGBT people and sport. Please contact me if you are interested in an interview or complete the survey (http://www.facebook.com/…/asupublicprograms.co1.qualtr…/SE/…)

Also, spread the word about this project.

If you have any questions, contact me at sara.mertel@asu.edu or 602.390.2652.
Thank you and I hope to speak with you soon!
Sara

http://www.facebook.com/l/8AQGj48g9AQHRNc9NMeIUCKaVl4MX5wlqGfQv5JHVEWAyfQ/asupublicprograms.co1.qual
FACEBOOK.COM

APPENDIX D

EMAIL OR FACEBOOK MESSAGE TO MY CONTACTS

Dear _____,

As you may know, I am in the last stages of finishing my PhD at Arizona State University, under the direction of Peg Bortner. I am conducting research to document and understand more about how participating in an LGBT sports league affects people's sense of community and identity. I am looking for people to participate in interviews or complete a survey. **If you are a current or former CCSL member, share your experience by participating in an interview or a short survey prior to February 28th.**

In-person interviews will last approximately one hour and are scheduled at your convenience. They are voluntary and confidential and used for the sole purpose of research for my PhD candidacy. Likewise, a short survey is available (http://asupublicprograms.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_25bHkz8BAAfe0rr), and will also provide me with important data related to my research.

If you have any questions concerning the research, please contact me (Sara Mertel, PhD candidate at ASU School of Community Resources and Development, at sara.mertel@gmail.com or 602-390-2652).
Also, if you know others that have participated in the CCSL, please share this project.
Thank you for your time and your consideration.

Sincerely,

Sara Mertel

APPENDIX E

FLIERS

Are you a current or former

Cactus Cities Softball League (CCSL) player?

Share your experience!

Take me OUT to the ballpark

- ***Who:*** Share your softball stories! My name is Sara Mertel, I am a PhD candidate at ASU under the direction of Dr. Peg Bortner. I am looking for current and former members of the Cactus Cities Softball League (CCSL) who are interested in sharing their experiences.
- ***What:*** I am looking for individuals interested in participating in an interview or completing a survey. Your participation is voluntary and confidential.
- ***When:*** Anytime that is convenient for you, between now and September 30th.
- ***Why:*** To understand more about how participating in an LGBT sports league affects people's sense of community and identity.
- ***How:*** Please contact me at: sara.mertel@asu.edu or (602) 390-2652 for additional information.

  Also, if you know others that have participated in the CCSL, please share this project.

APPENDIX F

APPROVAL FOR EXEMPTION FOR RESEARCH

ASU Knowledge Enterprise Development

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance

To:	M Bortner UCENT
From:	Mark Roosa, Chair Soc Beh IRB
Date:	04/24/2013
Committee Action:	**Exemption Granted**
IRB Action Date:	04/24/2013
IRB Protocol #:	1304009084
Study Title:	Take me OUT to the ballpark: community, identity, and empowerment in an LGBTQ sporting comm

The above-referenced protocol is considered exempt after review by the Institutional Review Board pursuant to Federal regulations, 45 CFR Part 46.101(b)(2) .

This part of the federal regulations requires that the information be recorded by investigators in such a manner that subjects cannot be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects. It is necessary that the information obtained not be such that if disclosed outside the research, it could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability, or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation.

You should retain a copy of this letter for your records.

APPENDIX G

CONSENT FORM

Take me OUT to the ballpark:

Community, identity, and empowerment in an LGBT sports league

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Peg Bortner in the College of Public Programs at Arizona State University. As a current or former member of the Cactus Cities Softball League (CCSL), you have the unique experience of participating in a LGBT softball league. I am conducting a study to better understand how participating in the CCSL impacts your experience with identity and community.

I am inviting your participation, which will involve an interview that will last approximately one hour. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. There are no direct benefits for study participants nor are there any foreseeable risks or discomforts to your participation. However, if you find a question to be upsetting or stressful, you may elect to skip it, and there is no penalty for lack of participation or withdrawing from the study at any time. You must be 18 or older to participate in this study.

Your responses will be confidential. You will be given a pseudonym and your real name will not be used at any time. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, or publications but no names or identifying information will be used.

I would like to audiotape this interview. The interview will not be recorded without your permission. Please let me know if you do not want the interview to be taped; you also can change your mind after the interview starts, just let me know. Audio files will be kept on a thumb drive in a locked filing cabinet in my office for four years, after that time they will be permanently deleted.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Sara Mertel at: sara.mertel@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU

Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences.

Your signature below indicates that you consent to participate in the above study.

____________________________	__________________________	____________
Subject's Signature	Printed Name	Date

APPENDIX H

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Questions (questions with asterisk were focused on in the group interviews)

- How did you come to join the CCSL? Why? When? What was going on in your life?*
- What's your sports history?
- Why have you stayed involved in the CCSL? *Or* Why did you stop participating in the CCSL?*
- What are the differences between the CCSL and other mainstream (straight) softball leagues?*
- What kinds of things do you think you contribute to the league?
- Do you think there is an ideal player in the league (in terms of skill, gender, sexuality, etc)?
    - Do you strive to meet those ideals? Do you think others do? Why? Why not?
- Do you feel that the League is a community? What specifically makes it a community?*
- Do you think certain people are excluded or less welcome? How do you think the League could be more inclusive?*
- What changes have you observed in the League since you joined?
- What, if any, new relationships or connections have you developed as a result of your participation in the League?*
- What does the League mean to you? Is the League important to you? Has it impacted your life? Is it a major influence?*
- Do you identify as LGBT? Can you tell me how you self-identify? (In terms of class, gender, race, ableness, sexuality.) How do you think your identities influence your life? How would you describe yourself in terms of how out or open you are about your sexuality?
- Do you think participation in the League has influenced your various identities?
- Do you think that you emphasize different parts of your identity in different spaces of the league (fields, social events, tournaments, etc)?
- What do you think the main differences are between the women's side and the men's side? Do you think men and women are looking for different things when playing in the League? Why do you think there are twice as many men's teams?
- Is there anything you think is unique about this league and your participation in it?*
- What do you like about the league? Why? What do you dislike? Why? What changes would you make? Why?*
- What is your most vivid memory of softball?
- Do you think the CCSL has influenced your sense of connection and belonging?*
- What else, that we haven't yet discussed about your experience with the CCSL, can you tell me so I can understand better?

APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE

qualtrics.com

Thank you for choosing to participate in this questionnaire to help us better understand your experience participating in the Cactus Cities Softball League (CCSL). I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Peg Bortner in the College of Public Programs at Arizona State University. This study is looking to understand more about the experience of LGBTQ people in sport. The questionnaire asks about your experiences participating in CCSL, your understanding of community, and your sense of identity.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Your responses will be anonymous as it will not be possible to connect any one person with their responses.

If you wish to participate in the study, please click the forward arrows below to begin the survey. Clicking on the forward arrow will be considered your consent to participate.

Thank you for your time and sharing your experiences. Also, if you know others for whom this questionnaire is appropriate, please feel free to share this link: http://asupublicprograms.us.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_246AhspplofXrF2

Sara Mertel, M.Ed.
PhD Student
School of Community Resources and Development
Arizona State University

0% 100%

What sex/gender do you primarily identify as:

[ ]

How do you identify your race/ethnicity:

[ ]

Please enter your current age:

[ ]

What is the highest level of education you have completed:

- Some high school
- High school diploma or GED
- Some college or technical school
- College degree (B.A., B.S., or equivalent)
- Advanced college degree (M.A., M.S.,PhD, JD, MD, or equivalent)

Which comes closest to how you describe your sexual identity or orientation right now:

- Lesbian
- Gay man
- Bisexual
- Transgender
- Queer
- Straight or heterosexual
- Other (please specify) [ ]

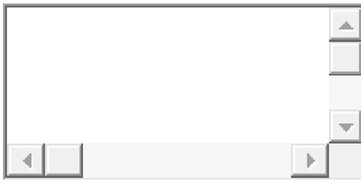
How many years have you participated (or did you participate) in the Cactus City Softball League:

[ ]

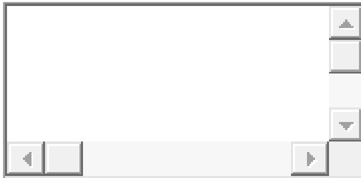
Do you currently play in Cactus Cities?

- Yes
- No
- Other (please specify)

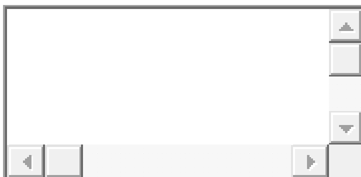
What year did you join the CCSL? What was it like to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender in society? Has anything changed? If so, how?:



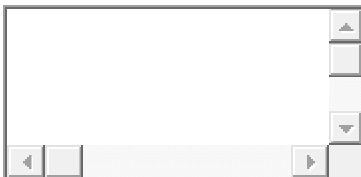
How and why did you join the CCSL? What was your previous experience with sports?



What does the CCSL mean to you? Is it important to you? Why or why not?



Do you feel that the CCSL is a community? What specifically does or does not make it a community?



Why have you stayed involved in the CCSL? ***Or*** Why did you stop participating in the CCSL?

What is your favorite and least favorite part of the league?

Has participating in the CCSL changed or affected how you view LGBT people and/or yourself? If so, how?

Do you think men and women are looking for different things or have different experiences when playing in the CCSL? If yes, what are the differences?

Is there anything else you would add to help me understand your experience with the CCSL?

If you would be willing to be interviewed about your experience participating in the CCSL, please leave your contact information below:

Name

Email

Phone Number

Thank you for completing the survey.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact Sara Mertel at: sara.mertel@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

Please click the forward arrows below to submit your survey.

APPENDIX J

ARIEL VIEW OF FIELDS

From Google Maps