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I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Marie Elizabeth Shaw entitled “Heterosexism and Homonegativism in Sport: A Phenomenological Investigation of Lesbian Athletes.” I have examined the final electronic copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Psychology.

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HETEROSEXISM AND HOMONEGATIVISM IN SPORT: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL
INVESTIGATION OF LESBIAN ATHLETES

A Dissertation
Presented for the
Doctor of Philosophy
Degree
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Abstract

A female athlete who identifies as lesbian possesses multiple identities that exist within a heterosexist and homonegative climate. The primary objective of this research was to provide a voice to a marginalized group by describing and to understand the experiences of athletes who identify as lesbian. Phenomenological interviews were conducted with 11 women who identified as athletes and lesbian. An overall thematic structure containing a ground and three figural themes, supported by participant quotations, was developed to represent the lesbian athletes' experiences. The ground was *my own process*. The three figural themes that emerged were *support*, *homophobia*, and *emotions*. Further research on athletes who identify as lesbian, and each theme presented in the present study, is necessary to combat the heterosexist and homonegative climate of sport. Furthermore, psychologists, coaches, athletic trainers, sport psychology consultants, and others working with athletes who identify as lesbian may utilize this information to enhance their understanding of the experiences of lesbian athletes. Continued professional and personal dialogue, research, and practical recommendations regarding lesbian athletes are encouraged to promote change.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction and Review of the Literature

Although women's sport has improved drastically over the past 30 years in regards to the number and quality of participants, the resources available, and the level of competition, a heterosexist and homonegative climate remains (Krane & Barber, 2003). The standard or prototypical person in American society, as well as in the sub-culture of athletics, is defined as male and heterosexual (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). The intersection among being a woman, an athlete, and a lesbian creates multiple subordinate identities which are non-prototypical. It is essential to understand how these multiple identities intersect, as research has indicated that isolating any single identity overlooks the unique experiences of individuals with multiple identities (Hall, 2001; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990).

Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach's (2008) model of intersectional invisibility postulates that people with subordinate identities (e.g., women lesbian athletes) do not fit the prototypes of their identity groups (e.g., male heterosexual athletes), therefore they will experience a marginalized status that puts them in a position of social invisibility (e.g., historical, political, and/or legal invisibility). For instance, individuals with subordinate identities become invisible as their roles tend to not to be portrayed fully or accurately in historical records (i.e., representation of significant historical figures with subordinate identities may be deemphasized, misrepresented, or not even included in textbooks). A major disadvantage of the invisible status of lesbian women athletes is that their voices are oppressed as they struggle to simply be heard and understood. The primary objective of the present research is to understand the experiences of women who identify as athletes and lesbians by listening to verbal accounts of their lived

experiences. The sole purpose is to describe and thereby to understand their unique perspective. In the ensuing sections, the experiences of women who identify as athletes and lesbians are further discussed related to the following five areas: (a) brief history of women in sport, (b) heterosexism within women's sport, (c) the female apologetic, (d) homonegativism within women's sport, and (e) understanding lesbians in sport from a social identity framework.

Brief History of Women in Sport

Modern sport developed to represent the power and strength of the male body; as the founder of the modern Olympic Games (established in 1896), Baron Pierre de Coubertin envisioned sport as a way to pay tribute to men's physical accomplishments (Plymire & Forman, 2000). In publications by the International Olympic Committee, he described women as incapable of participating in athletic competition and rejected the notion of women in an athletic role. As organized sport experienced tremendous growth in the beginning of the twentieth century, sport participation by males confirmed masculinity, whereas sport participation by females conflicted with femininity, thus resulting in strong societal opposition to women's athleticism (Messner, 1994). Messner described "crises of masculinity" in which the women's movement into sport challenged the basic social conceptions of masculinity and femininity. The first "crisis of masculinity" was marked at the beginning of the twentieth century, and the second occurred from the post- World War II years to the present.

At the beginning of the 20th century, women were discouraged from participating in sport because physical activity was believed to be too strenuous on their bodies because it encouraged behaviors conflicting with traditional femininity (Motley & Levine, 2001). In 1924, the Conference of College Directors of Physical Education banned women's intercollegiate athletic

competition to protect women from the harmful effects of over-exerting their bodies. When women participated in the limited sports programs available, promoters highlighted sex appeal rather than playing skills. For instance, the movie, *A League of Their Own*, depicted the sexual objectification of women in the first professional baseball league, which carefully crafted an image of feminine players.

During the 1960's, an era of change and the civil rights movement, women started demanding the same opportunities as men in sports (Motley & Levine, 2001). At the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation national convention in 1964, the Division for Girls' and Women's Sports focused their program on "Competition for the Highly Skilled Girl," which resulted in the formulation a statement reversing the 1924 position against interscholastic and intercollegiate competition for women. In 1966, a group of women within the Division for Girls' and Women's Sports formed the Commission for Intercollegiate Athletics for Women, which launched national championships in seven women's intercollegiate sports. Additionally, advocates of women's athletics used the Fourteenth Amendment, the Equal Pay Act of 1963, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 to bring law suits against public schools and colleges for gender discrimination in denying equal athletic participation. Finally, in 1972 the federal government passed Title IX, which mandated equal access for girls and women in scholastic sporting opportunities. This pivotal legislation resulted in tremendous growth in women's athletic programs.

In the 1990's (i.e., the Title IX generation), girls and women participated in high school state championships in all 50 states, 17 NCAA national championships in varying sports and divisions, and professional basketball and softball leagues and a track and field circuit (Motley &

Levine, 2001). However, despite the tremendous progress from Title IX, women and men's sports still are not equal. Today, male NCAA collegiate athletes receive 36 percent more scholarship dollars than female NCAA collegiate athletes, as well as more money for recruiting, head coach salaries, and operating expenses than women's athletics (Feminist Majority Foundation and New Media Publishing, 2000). Furthermore, although the law states that schools that violate Title IX will lose their federal funding, no school has ever lost federal funding for not complying with Title IX, thus perpetuating male hegemony. Additionally, there are obvious distinctions between women's and men's sports today (Plymire & Forman, 2000). For example, the Women's National Basketball Association (WNBA) signifies that it is women's basketball (W) while the Men's National Basketball Association is referred to as the NBA rather than MNBA. Also, the players in the WNBA play with a smaller ball than the men and compete in shorter games than the men. Thus, sport culture remains male-dominated despite significant progress made by women over the past century.

Heterosexism Within Women's Sport

In addition to the historical male-domination in sport, heterosexism is a significant underlying principle that is prominent in women's sport (Krane, 2001). Heterosexism is the belief that heterosexuality is the standard, accepted mode of social interactions and sexuality, which thereby stigmatizes non-heterosexual social interactions and sexuality. In the context of heterosexism, women who appear heterosexually feminine (i.e., feminine body, demeanor, or dress) are privileged over women perceived as masculine. Female athletes are expected to abide by the unspoken norms established by the male-dominated, heterosexist culture of sport and society (Hall, 2001). There is a narrow margin between too muscular and too feminine that fits

the acceptable standard of hegemonic femininity. Many women who do not fit the established feminine norms are derogatorily labeled as “lesbians” or “dykes.” Being a female athlete who identifies as a lesbian is a “double whammy” against the accepted male-dominated, heterosexist norms for sport. Lesbians are a marginalized group who are perceived as bad for the image of women’s sport (Krane, 2001). The stigma associated with being a lesbian athlete has created an “image problem” (i.e., that all female athletes are lesbian) resulting in a negative connotation of lesbians in sport that many athletes and the media have attempted to de-emphasize (Knight & Giuliano, 2003).

Female Apologetic

In response to the heterosexist sport environment many athletes, both lesbian and heterosexual, attempt to distance themselves from the lesbian stigma (Knight & Giuliano, 2003; Krane, 2001; Plymire & Forman, 2000). Athletics and femininity are considered contradictory; therefore women present a female apologetic in which they maintain a feminine, heterosexual appearance to counteract the association between lesbians and sport. For example, the 1990 Canadian national hockey team wore pink uniforms to send out a more feminine image of women’s hockey (Krane, 2001). Lesbian college athletes also have reported emphasizing a feminine appearance through wearing makeup, bows in their long hair, and wearing skirts and heels to games and media appearances. Likewise, in the 1990’s, the Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) hired an image consultant to assist each golfer to portray a more feminine appearance (i.e., styled hair, manicured nails, fresh makeup, and radiant skin). After the more feminine images were created, there was a significant increase in sponsorship and prize money, a 50 percent gain in revenue, and twice as much television coverage of the LPGA. Unlike male

athlete counterparts who are judged based on their abilities, female athletes who are physically beautiful as well as athletically talented tend to receive more endorsements and media attention. Likewise, the media also portrays female athletes as adhering to the standards of hegemonic femininity by representing them as feminine women first (i.e., referring to a female athlete's attractiveness, emotionality, femininity, and heterosexuality) and as athletes second (Knight & Giuliano, 2003). The pressure to conform to an acceptable feminine image and the subsequent concerns about athletes' femininity or lack thereof creates a homonegativistic climate, which develops and maintains negative attitudes toward non-heterosexuals (Krane, 1996).

Homonegativism

Unfortunately, in American society, sport is often a social agent that perpetuates negative attitudes and images about lesbians rather than promoting pride (Krane, 1996). For instance, anti-lesbian jokes and comments directed at female athletes, such as being called butch and dykes, are common (Krane, 2001). Lesbian coaches are discriminated against in employment (Krane, 1996; Lenskyj, 1990; Plymire & Forman, 2000). It is often implied that lesbian coaches are sexual predators who sexually harass their athletes (Women's Sport Foundation, 2008). Athletes also have been removed or threatened to be removed from teams because they are lesbian (Brownworth, 1994; Krane, 1996; Monifa, 2006). For example, in 2005, the National Center for Lesbian Rights filed a lawsuit on behalf of Penn State star basketball player, Jennifer Harris, who reported that her coach threatened to kick her off the team if she found out she was a lesbian (Monifa, 2006). Sports also promote heterosexual images through endorsing traditionally feminine athletes, highlighting husbands and children, and accentuating feminine sexuality in provocative calendars and magazine depictions (Krane, 1996; Krane, 2001; Plymire

& Forman, 2000). There is an absence of media attention, images, and endorsements for lesbian athletes (Hall, 2001). Furthermore, negative recruiting, in which coaches advise potential athletes against attending rival universities by telling them that the athletes and/or coaches are lesbians, is an approach that continues to be employed (Krane, 1996; Krane & Barber, 2005). Thus, homonegativism is still tolerated and perpetuated in many female athletic environments today. It is necessary to examine the socialization process of lesbian athletes to understand how lesbian athletes experience the heterosexist and homonegative context of sport.

Understanding Lesbians in Sport from a Social Identity Framework

As described above, athletes who identify as lesbian are socialized within a homonegative and heterosexist culture (Krane, 1996). Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981) provides a framework to understand the socialized experiences of lesbians in sport (Krane & Barber, 2003; Krane, Barber, & McClung, 2002). A social identity perspective explains the process of identity development through social and self-categorizations. According to the social identity framework, identity development begins with the process of self-categorizations. First, individuals define themselves as members of social categories with whom they feel similar (lesbian, athlete, etc). Then, they learn the stereotypic norms and values that are accepted within their identified social categories. Finally, individuals internalize the accepted values and behaviors of the group norm or social categorization. For instance, Krane and Barber (2003) applied a social identity framework to examine the experiences of lesbians in sport. They described silence as the social norm due to prejudiced attitudes toward non-heterosexuals. Silence was specifically evidenced by concealing lesbian identities, invisibility, and lack of open conversation regarding issues related to lesbians in sport. A social identity framework predicts

that new group members (i.e., lesbians in sport) learn, internalize, and perpetuate this norm of silence. Thus, heterosexism and homonegativism in women's sport is maintained throughout the cycle of silence.

According to social identity theory, individuals attach value and emotional significance to their self- and social-categorizations (Krane & Barber, 2003; Tajfel, 1981). Thus, social identity impacts self-worth. Generally, individuals in high status groups will experience positive self-worth due to their valued group membership, whereas individuals in marginalized groups may experience a less positive self-worth due to their devalued group membership. However, many individuals in devalued social groups do not internalize a negative self-concept. Krane (1996) proposed a conceptual model examining the socialization of lesbians in sport within a heterosexist and homonegative context, which may lead to either positive or negative self-concepts. She asserted that lesbians' personal internalized reactions to homonegativism may lead to negative manifestations, such as hiding their sexual orientation, tolerating discrimination towards lesbians, being uncomfortable with open lesbians, decreased athletic performance, depression, feelings of inferiority, self-defeating behaviors, decreased self-esteem, under- or over-achievement, alcohol and drug abuse, distrust, loneliness, self-hatred, shame, and anger. Yet, she also asserted that lesbians' may embrace a positive lesbian identity from their personal reactions to homonegativism. Positive identity formation in lesbian athletes may be impacted by strong social support from both lesbian and heterosexual communities as well as having visible, positive role models. For instance, Krane, Barber, & McClung (2002) examined lesbian and bisexual athletes who competed in the Gay Games and found enhanced personal and social identity and collective esteem from a positive sport environment. Thus, pride in group

membership (e.g., lesbian athletes) and a positive lesbian community which provides support and role models may strengthen collective esteem of a marginalized group.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to describe and thereby understand the experiences of lesbian athletes. Research on lesbian athletes is the first step toward reducing homonegativism in sport (Krane, 1996). Silence about sexual identity has been a dominant norm among lesbian athletes and coaches that has perpetuated negative attitudes (Krane & Barber, 2005; Plymire & Forman, 2001). This study provides a voice to a marginalized population of athletes who identify as lesbian to describe their experiences to someone who is solely trying to understand. This project aims to enhance the understanding of psychologists, sport psychology consultants, coaches, and athletic personnel working with athletes who identify as lesbian.

CHAPTER II

Method

The current study was designed to explore experiences of being an athlete who identifies as lesbian. A phenomenological research method was implemented to obtain an understanding of lesbian athletes' experiences from their unique perspectives. Phenomenological research is a qualitative research method that inquires about and then describes lived human experiences based on the methodological principle that scientific knowledge begins with unbiased descriptions of the subject matter (Polkinghorne, 2005; Wertz, 2005). The purpose of phenomenological research is to understand the meaning or essence of a phenomenon, such as being an athlete who identifies as lesbian, via an interview (Valle, King, & Halling, 1989). Merleau-Ponty (1962) referred to phenomenology as, "the study of essences; and according to it, all problems amount to defining essences (p. vii)...It is a matter of describing, not of explaining or analyzing" (p. viii). Merleau-Ponty asserted that phenomenology captures the essence of particular experiences (e.g., being a lesbian athlete) because, "The phenomenological world is not the bringing to explicit expression of a pre-existing being, but the laying down of being. Philosophy is not the reflection of a pre-existing truth, but, like art, the act of bringing, truth into being" (p.xx). To clarify the phenomenological approach that has been written about extensively by Merleau-Ponty and other philosophers (e.g., Edmund Husserl, Hannah Arendt, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Martin Heidegger, Adolf Reinach, Jean-Paul Sarte, Max Scheler, and Edith Stein), Moran (2000) identified five basic philosophical tenets of the phenomenological method: (a) phenomenological interviews should begin with a presuppositionless starting point to ensure that no theories or hypotheses are incorporated into the interviews, (b) the researcher

should suspend her natural attitude through bracketing, (c) the phenomenological approach attempts to understand each participant's unique experiences of being-in-the-world, (d) phenomenology is a method of description, not explanation or analysis, (e) phenomenology examines intentionality, as the experience the researcher is attempting to understand must be *about* something. Since much of a psychological experience is not directly observable (i.e., such as how women ascribe meaning to being lesbians and athletes) the participants' descriptions of their experience provides valuable evidence that may not be attainable from quantitative methods. A qualitative approach, and more specifically a phenomenological approach, was the most suitable approach because the field of psychology and sport needs complex, detailed understanding of the common experience of women who identify as lesbian athletes (Creswell, 2007).

Managing Subjectivity

Bracketing Statement. In phenomenological research, the researcher ideally has no theoretical perspectives or preconceptions about the experience that is being studied (Moran, 2000; Pollio, Thompson, & Henley, 1997). For that reason, the researcher completed a bracketing interview about the research topic in order to acknowledge and become aware of her own biases in the ensuing interviews and interpretations. Also, by suspending her own perspective through bracketing, the researcher was more fully able to empathetically listen to, reflect upon, and apprehend the meaning of the participants' narratives (Wertz, 2005).

The bracketing interview was conducted by an advanced female doctoral student who has had previous experience with several phenomenological studies. The interview was audio-recorded and began with the open-ended question, "Tell me, in as much detail as possible, your experience

of being an athlete who identifies as lesbian.” The audio-recording was transcribed verbatim and then analyzed by a research team to provide a thematic description of the researcher’s perspective. A ground (context) and four main themes emerged from the analysis. The ground for the researcher was her *personal experience*, in which she reported she is *not a lesbian* but does identify as a *former athlete*. Within the context of her *personal experience* (as *not a lesbian* and a *former athlete*), the main themes were her *athletic identity*, the *power differential* she recognized between men and women’s sports, *different culture* among different sport teams and the athletic community, and finding *derogatory comments* about anything against the norm *upsetting* (e.g., muscular body, sexuality).

Paradigm. In addition to the bracketing statement, underlying philosophical beliefs and frameworks also were made explicit because they impact the current inquiry. The researcher’s underlying assumptions about research are most consistent with a constructivist paradigm (Hatch, 2002). According to Hatch, constructivists believe there are no universal, absolute realities, but rather multiple realities exist. Moustakas (1994) noted that the constructivist paradigm complements phenomenology. Phenomenology is aligned with the ontology of the constructivist paradigm because phenomenological interviews attempt to understand individuals’ perspectives based on their experiences and unique constructions of reality. The in-depth and open-ended questions from phenomenological interviews allow the researcher to listen carefully and attempt to understand the participants from their perspectives (Creswell, 2007). In fact, the purpose of the phenomenological study is to describe the meaning of a lived experience from an individuals’ own perspective or reality.

Furthermore, according to Hatch's (2002) definition of constructivists, the relationship between the knower and the known is collaborative. The phenomenological approach also is aligned with the epistemology of the constructivist paradigm as the researcher and participant co-construct meaning through the phenomenological interview. In the present study, the researcher asked open-ended and clarifying questions in the interview to allow the participant to construct meaning of the experience. Then, in the data analysis, the researcher attempted to make sense and construct meaning from the participant's interview via themes. Although the researcher bracketed her biases prior to the interviews and ensuing interpretation, it is impossible to fully suspend all biases; therefore the data analysis may be considered her co-construction of the reality the participant presented.

Interview Procedure

A phenomenological interview obtains a first-person description of a specified experience in the words of an individual who had that experience. Phenomenological interviews were conducted by the author to attain first-person accounts regarding the experience of an athlete who identifies as lesbian. Each interview was audio-recorded. Each interview lasted between 15 and 45 minutes. All participation was voluntary, and the content of the interviews was kept confidential. The researcher began the interview by asking the individual one open-ended question: "Please describe for me in as much detail as possible your experience of being an athlete who identifies as lesbian." All additional questions emerged from the dialogue as it unfolded, and there were no predetermined questions (Pollio et al., 1997). The interviewer attempted not to introduce any new concepts or phrases into the interview and only responded to the participant's previous statements. For example, the interviewer said, "Please tell me more

about that,” or “How did you feel when that happened?” The interviewer also tried to avoid asking “Why?” questions because such questions shift the discussion away from the description of the experience to a more abstract, cognitive reasoning. Thus, the statements, questions, and summaries that the interviewer used were intended to promote and encourage the research participant’s description of her experience. The researcher also provided a summary at the end of each interview and asked if there was anything else the participant wanted to add or correct.

Participants

Phenomenological research typically uses multiple participants in order to focus on core meanings across the experiences of different individuals. Since the goal of phenomenological research is to enrich the understanding of a particular experience, participants were sought out and chosen purposefully (Polkinghorne, 2005). The researcher sought out women who identified as being athletes and lesbian and were willing to describe those experiences in an audio-recorded interview.

According to the phenomenological approach, there are not a set number of participants necessary to provide a sufficient description of a particular experience (Wertz, 2005). The researcher intentionally recruits participants until saturation, which is when the findings are redundant enough for the researcher to recognize core meanings. Morrow (2005) suggested 12 participants as an adequate sample size, yet Pollio et al. (1997) suggested that often only three to five interviews are necessary to identify common themes. In this study, participants who identified as both lesbians and athletes were recruited via the snowball method until redundancy occurred. The snowball method consists of a two-phase process (Huck, 2000). First, participants who were easily accessible to the researcher and who have had the experience being

studied were contacted. Second, the researcher asked those participants if they knew anyone else who has had the experience being studied and if they would like to participate. At the time of the initial contact with the participant, informed consent, audio taping, and confidentiality were explained so the participant had time to consider her participation before the actual interview. The contents of the informed consent are included in Appendix A.

Twelve participants were interviewed in the current study; however, only 11 interviews were analyzed because one participant's audio-recording was inaudible and unable to be transcribed. Each participant was a collegiate athlete or former collegiate athlete and identified as a lesbian. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 35 years old. Table 1 provides a brief profile of a pseudonym, age, race, sport, and geographic region and athletic division of the participant's university. The researcher's relationship with participants varied, and included strangers, a professional colleague, and a friend.

Data Analysis

Audio recordings were made of each interview. Verbatim transcripts then were made from the audio recordings (Refer to Appendix B for interview transcripts). The interview transcripts were interpreted using a phenomenological hermeneutic approach. A hermeneutic circle is a procedure in which the researchers look for meaning units within the transcripts. In this study, first, the verbatim transcripts were read in their entirety by the researcher. Next, an open phenomenological data analysis group read each transcript aloud and paused frequently to discuss potential meanings in the text (Wertz, 2005). The group was an open group of graduate and undergraduate students and faculty trained in the phenomenological research method. The group met regularly and ranged from 3 to 12 members. The group reflected upon any meaning

Table 1

Research Participant Profiles

Participant	Age	Race	Sport	Region	NCAA Division
Anna	28	Caucasian	Tennis	Midwest	I
Bella	30	Caucasian	Tennis	West	I
Cara	23	Biracial	Softball	Southeast	I
Dee	29	Caucasian	Volleyball	Northeast	I, transfer to III
Elle	18	Hispanic	Volleyball	Southeast	I
Fay	35	Caucasian	Softball	Southeast	NAIA
Gina	34	Caucasian	Basketball	Southeast	NAIA
Halle	26	Caucasian	Softball	Midwest	I
Ida	23	Caucasian	Softball	Midwest	I
Jan	20	Caucasian	Softball	Southeast	I
Kit	22	Caucasian	Basketball	Northeast	II, transfer to III

units in the text to discern if any significant meanings were revealed about the experience. To protect confidentiality, each group member signed a pledge of confidentiality agreement (refer to Appendix C). The group interpretation served to minimize the researcher's theoretical biases and also to provide alternate perspectives of the transcript (Pollio et al., 1997). The group's reflections and insights for each interview yielded a tentative thematic summary that they agreed to be the best description of that specific participant's experience. Then the hermeneutic circle broadened to interpret each interview in the context of all of the other interviews. Finally, the group proposed a tentative thematic summary of all of the interviews. The interpretations and ensuing themes contain the language used by the participants, to minimize meanings that the researchers imposed onto the participant's experiences. This phenomenological hermeneutic analysis is described extensively in Pollio et al. (1997) and in Wertz (2005). The overall goal of this data analysis procedure is to create a thematic structure which describes the research participants' experience and perspective using the research participants' own words and phrases. After the transcripts were analyzed, the researcher presented each participant with a tentative thematic structure to allow her to examine the findings and reflect upon the accuracy, as well as to inform the researcher if she felt like any important information was omitted (i.e., member checking).

Standards of Validation and Evaluation

To establish the accuracy of the qualitative findings from the present research project, the researcher utilized three validation strategies that each has been briefly mentioned above (Creswell, 2007). First, the researcher bracketed her biases and assumptions. The reader was aware of her past experiences and worldview that impacted her interpretation of the study.

Second, a research team served as an external check of the data analysis process to help construct a description that was most accurate to the participants' perspectives. The researcher primarily worked with one research team, however, one transcript was analyzed by a different research team to serve as an extra external check. Third, member checking ensured credibility. The researcher provided a summary at the end of each interview and asked if there was anything else the participant wanted to add or correct to serve as an initial member check. After the summary at the end of each interview, some of the participants spoke about something they felt they left out, others emphasized what they felt was most important, and others simply agreed with the summary. Then, after the data analysis, the researcher emailed each participant a tentative thematic structure and findings to allow her judge the accuracy of the researcher's interpretation. The participants were encouraged to examine the findings and reflect upon the accuracy as well as to inform the researcher if any important information was omitted. All of the participants who responded to the email reported that the findings fit with their experience. The member check is especially important to the constructivist paradigm with which the researcher is aligned because it involves a collaborative relationship in which the researcher and participant agree upon the construction of the meaning of the participant's experience.

CHAPTER III

Results

The results of the phenomenological interviews were organized into a thematic structure that contained a ground (context) and three figural themes. The ground provided a context for understanding each of the three figural themes. All of the themes and the ground appeared repeatedly throughout all the interviews, and they were intertwined.

The ground and three figural themes described the 11 research participants' experiences of being athletes who identified as lesbian. The ground in all the interviews was *my own process*. *Support*, *homophobia*, and *emotions* emerged as the figural themes. All of the themes are presented and discussed via direct quotes from the participants. An illustration of the ground and three figural themes are depicted in Figure 1.

Ground

The ground was identified as *my own process*. All 11 of the participants described their experiences of being athletes who identified as lesbian in terms of *my own process*. The participants described *my own process* of forming their identity or "who I am." The participants' athletic identity was pivotal in shaping their sexual identity development in *my own process*. For instance, Fay stated, "[My teammates] helped shape the image of who I am...realize it was okay to be who I was." Anna summarized *my own process* as a long process which took time to realize herself and also courage to share with her teammates:

It was sort of a long process I guess. Um, when I first arrived at college, it was, I was in the closet. I don't think I was fully out to myself then...it was between my third and fourth year where I fully was like, yup I'm gay, this is who I am. And then, was out, you know, honestly, to myself. I guess which is the biggest thing, and then to one or two girls on the team that I knew could be some allies. But for that first year, I wasn't out to anybody. It was pretty long, pretty long I guess...It took more courage to come out.

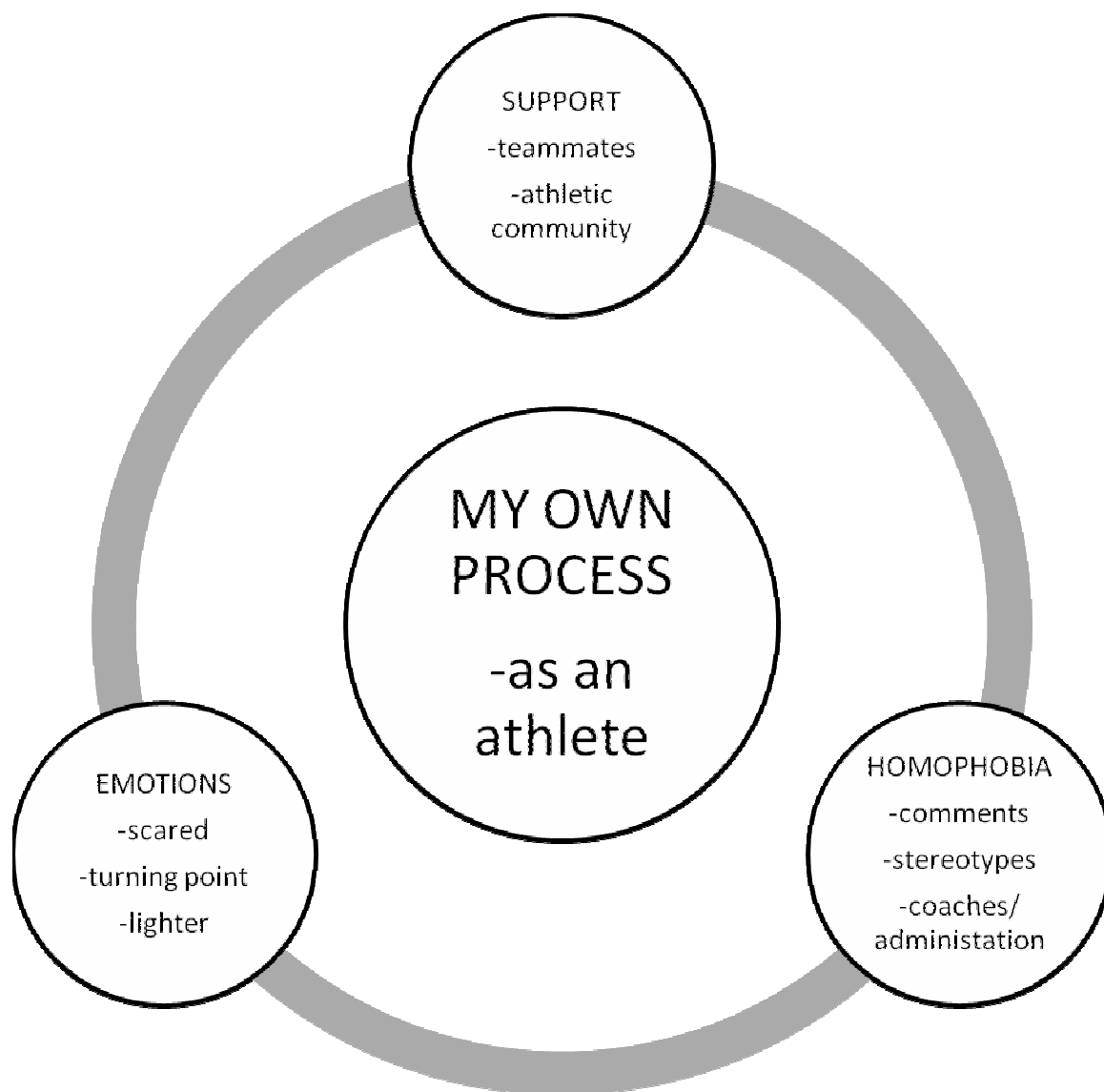


Figure 1. Thematic structure of the experiences of athletes who identify as lesbian.

Each participant's process was unique, as they varied in being closeted, out and open, abruptly outted, and gradually coming out to their team. Some participants described how *my own process* was influenced by other people sharing their sexual orientation with others. For instance, Bella described how part of *my own process* involved her team being identified as the gay team, and untrue rumors were started about a threesome between her and her teammates. She described being outted to her campus community: "I need to, you know, go through *my own process*, it was scary because all of the sudden I was outted to everyone so I wasn't ready for it." Somewhat similarly, Kit described being openly gay and accepted by her college teammates after being closeted in high school, but described tension between her coach who outted her to many people with whom she was not yet open:

That [being a lesbian] really became my identity to her [coach] and it uh it was it ended up causing tension with my family um my family didn't know my first year there and so uh my coach I later I found out that my coach ended up talking to my parents about it uh in a phone conversation that I didn't know anything about um and ended up talking about my sexual preference and uh my parents ended up finding out before I even told them...so that, that was hard for me to swallow confidentiality was definitely not there...It became hard when it came to the administration aspect of it as far as athletic directors uh tutors uh for our classes uh it was a well known fact that there were two lesbians on the basketball team...Although I mean at the same time it outted me to a lot of people I didn't even need to be outted out to. And I made...friends in gay community a lot easier, but that was really the only good part to it.

In contrast, Gina reported being closeted athletically: "My experience being an athlete who identifies as lesbian, the word that probably comes to my mind most of all is closeted." Gina was the only participant who remained closeted to her team for her entire athletic career, except to one teammate in her last year. She reported keeping *my own process* away from her athletics experience because it didn't feel safe. Gina revealed *my own process* of identity

development occurred during critical moments with other significant people on her campus outside of athletics:

It would have been nice to have been able to talk to the coach or some of my teammates to get support and I didn't feel like I could. Um fortunately I had an amazing psych professor who was very compassionate and made that a whole lot easier...I never came out to him but it also seemed like wouldn't didn't matter if I did...I didn't feel pressure to hide either it just was. Um I think that was one critical thing then the other was the end of my sophomore year um somebody that I had a couple classes with came out to me and we ended up coming out to each other.

Many participants indicated college as a time they began to identify as lesbian or experience *my own process* and their athletic careers to be significant in their development. For instance, Dee responded to the interview question by saying, "I would probably begin in college because that's when I began to personally identify as lesbian." Dee's college experiences of *my own process* differed as she transferred from a NCAA Division I athletic school to Division III, as she reported:

My experiences in D1 were less than welcoming in terms of um just exploring your sexuality. Um and then after I transferred to the D3 environment which was an all women's college um it was very very open and very welcoming and I think that um a lot more women were exploring their sexuality...I found um being an athlete a wonderful way to form the communities and continue to be an important part of my life.

Likewise Cara stated how she first identified as a lesbian in college as she stated, "It's a gradual thing...it never crossed my mind really until I was in college." Cara reported that she grew up in a very Christian area where everyone was the same and she didn't know any gay people, but at college she was exposed to an entirely different culture. She described, "the underground [athletic conference]," which was a strong lesbian athletic culture which is unique from both the "gay world" and "straight world." Similarly, Elle described how the athletic culture made *my own process* easier as she first came out in college:

It's just easier for someone who's an athlete, I guess. Because it's just um, you do have teammates, and they know you. Like, if you haven't come out, like, they knew you before and after; so it's not like your character has changed at all...being an athlete definitely like, establishes that safe um, stability part of communicating.

Jan reported how *my own process* was initially difficult because she carried the burden of knowing she was a lesbian, but keeping it a secret from her team and everybody else when she first arrived at college. Jan described feeling lighter once everyone knew and reported that being an athlete facilitated *my own process*:

I think like being like in athletics especially in college, it's not so much like a big deal anymore. I think um, especially in talking about lesbian athletes...especially like when the girls don't really like care at all about it...so I think last year was just me kind of getting over my own nerves, never like having told anybody, never seeing anyone react to it, learning how it was type of thing.

On the other hand, Ida described how *my own process* was more difficult for her as a student-athlete. She revealed that she stopped playing softball after two years because of the pressure and rules she received when her coach found out she was dating the graduate assistant coach's roommate. She described an atmosphere of silence around sexual orientation that impacted *my own process*, combined with the additional pressure and scrutiny that student-athletes receive in general:

I was trying to figure things out and then as stressful as it is playing college sports and you already have a bunch of rules and all when you get told who you can see and when you can and can't go...I think the biggest thing about being...a college athlete, it's just that here you kinda live in a microscope, or uh live under a microscope as an athlete. You know everybody watching you, what you do, especially at the bigger university where you're at.

Thus, *my own process* was unique for each participant and also impacted by their athletic experiences and vice versa.

Figural Themes

The interview data was organized relative to the three figural themes (*support*, *homophobia*, and *emotions*), which were understood in the context of *my own process*. All of the themes appeared repeatedly throughout all the interviews.

Support. The first figural theme was support. All 11 of the participants described the *support* they received and/or wished they had during *my own process*. When participants talked about *support*, they mentioned support on their team and/or the athletic environment as the most significant form of *support*. Every participant discussed the importance of gaining *support* and acceptance from their teammates or wishing they had. For instance, Jan described initially feeling burdened by the secret of none of her teammates knowing she was lesbian, but also nervous about how her team would react. She highlighted the significance of her team's *support* above any other *support* as she stated:

Not knowing like what's my team gonna, and they were okay with it, like that was like to me like the biggest comfort. Like anyone else outside that was just like, well they'll deal with it or they won't deal with it, you know. But especially the team, like this is who you're around, you know, all the time...and then once I got like that *support* like from my team and those people that I would be around, like I said then it was just like anyone else I didn't really care.

Cara expressed the strength of having a supportive team as she stated, "Being on a team is like great *support*...it's like a family." Cara also compared the *support* of her teammates as more accepting than the rest of the world:

My teammates were great and I think that you forget that when you play sports, especially when you come out to public, you forget that the whole world is not, your whole world is not the world. So my teammates were cool with it...you forget that the whole world's not like that. The whole world's not that inviting.

Elle also described how she felt supported by her teammates, which made *my own process* easier to deal with. “It was definitely hard at first, like, I came out this year...My teammates, I mean, they were just like really accepting.” Kit had a difficult time coming out to her teammates being at a private school that explicitly asked her not to be open with her sexuality. However, once Kit revealed herself to her teammates, she was pleasantly surprised by their *support*, which she reported made her experience there positive despite the overall discrimination by the administration:

My teammates uh they didn't know about the piece of paper that I had to sign or the meetings that my coach had with the team and the athletic administrator and the president, they didn't know any of that until the following year. And when they knew about that um my teammates were a lot more um actually protective of me they were uh they thought that was crazy they didn't agree with that, they wanted me to know that they were on my side um they were, they were great and um I kinda wish I would have done that the first year.

The *support* of Kit's teammates also positively impacted their performance as a team, because “Not having that trust kind of put a stop on our success that year.”

Participants also commented on the *support* of having other lesbian athletes on the team who openly identified as lesbian. For instance, Fay reported how it was her lesbian softball teammates who made her realize it was okay to be lesbian. She stated: “I felt like it was okay to be who I was because I was a lot like them, and they were okay.” Elle also described a special type of *support* from someone who understands: “And then, um, we also have someone who's bisexual on the team, and um, she kind of like, helped me through things too...So she just like, you know, kind of like, got me to understand everything.”

In contrast to receiving *support* from teammates, Anna described how she didn't feel as though she had *support* or allies as she went through *my own process*: “You always sort of look

for an ally, and there wasn't anybody there...My definition of an ally. Like *supportive*...stick up for you...somebody to talk to...like a mentor really." Anna reported that it took her almost a year and a half to build the courage to come out to her teammate, and how she wishes she hadn't been too scared to seek *support* sooner: "Looking back, I wish I did have the guts to do that [come out]...Because that's how change happens." Bella similarly reported that she initially didn't feel as though she could be open with her team or anybody. She also expressed how important *support* from teammates is to an athlete who is lesbian: "I wish I had a role model...I wanted to be out and I wanted to be proud of myself and I wanted to...try to be that person for someone else." Bella also described a shift between receiving very little *support* from her teammates to a lot as other teammates also came out and were more open:

So it really turned into this powerful experience I think kind of come junior or senior year. People could give voice to that and I remember one teammate saying she makes the point where she was like no these are my sisters these are my teammates and I am going to be with them, I'm going to *support* them. She was straight and she kind of finally the light went on and she realized that this was all a part of her maybe her own homophobia.

Gina never came out to her team, and wished that she had her teammates' *support*. Gina described some of her daily athletic experiences as uncomfortable, and she never fully connected with or felt supported by her teammates throughout *my own process*.

There's an intimacy that occurs on an athletic team because you spend so much time together and you know you do see each other walking around in socks and bras and panties and changing clothes and stuff and because the last thing in the world I wanted to do was be accused of taking advantage of that...that was very uncomfortable.

Gina was the only participant who did not share *my own process* with her team, but she found a *support* system outside of athletics:

It would have been nice to have been able to talk to the coach or some of my teammates to get *support* and I didn't feel like I could. Um, fortunately, I had an amazing psych professor who was very compassionate and made that a whole lot easier.

Some participants also described the importance of gaining *support* in the larger athletic community. Dee described a very welcoming college athletics environment to explore *my own process* and stated, “I had quite a community of gay women around me of primarily athletes.”

Elle similarly described her athletic community as supportive:

And so I’m glad like here in [Southeastern state], like there’s definitely like a big community of like gay people, so yeah...Um, yeah I mean I found out, I found out, through one of my good friends, who’s also a lesbian. Um, like, it was like [club name] around here, and it was like a club, and we go there and then, just like a lot of the athletes who are out like, we just like know each other, and like we’re, it just like really open and friendly, and very just like, very like, really accepting. And like if you’re going through a rough time, like they’ll help you out so, yeah.

Ida also described feeling supported and accepted by her teammates and also the larger community of athletes, even after quitting the softball team due to issues with her coach: “The inner circle of athletes...it was a lot of fun to be around a lot of other people that were just like you.” Likewise, Cara described how she felt safe and supported by her teammates and her athletic community, but not outside in the university community where she experienced *homophobia*:

My teammates were great and I think that you forget that when you play sports...you forget that the whole world’s not like that. The whole world’s not that inviting...When I was playing ball, you know, if I wanted to hold my girlfriend’s hand in front of my teammates, no one would have ever looked. But you can’t do that on the [main street on campus] or somewhere like that, it’s just different.

Homophobia. The second figural theme was *homophobia*. All 11 participants described experiencing *homophobia* in some manner, such as with homophobic comments or rumors, stereotypes, and/or coaches and the university or athletic administrators.

Many of the participants described experiencing *homophobia* through various comments. For instance, Bella stated, “It’s just comments, more like *homophobic* comments. You know like

the lesbian factory.” Bella also remarked on how rumors about her sexuality impacted the *homophobia* she experienced: “All this drama started with rumors and it just felt really unsafe. I remember kind of thinking I don’t know who I could trust.” Cara described frustration in how people don’t accept who she is by making *homophobic* comments that she wouldn’t get if she were in a straight relationship, such as: “What are you doing, you’re not really gay...Just stupid, ignorant comments...You just really need some dick in your life.” Similarly, Anna expressed how she didn’t feeling safe to identify as lesbian: “You hear comments that your teammates make, the comments that your coaches make, and you just sort of register them as, ooh this isn’t a safe environment.” Dee also described how the media contributed to making negative comments and a *homophobic* portrayal of athletes who came out as lesbian on her campus:

Stories of women who had come out more who weren’t um pursuing very hetero-normative um kind of uh lifestyles and my freshman year of college and thinking ooh that doesn’t sound fun and wow they really um the press got a hold of things and it was not um not exactly a welcoming thing...it made me really uncomfortable.

Many of the participants also described the presence of *homophobia* through stereotypes. For instance, softball player Cara described how her sport is stereotyped as lesbian, and is thus considered more undesirable sport:

Guys will watch volleyball but most guys are like softball is more dirty, it’s not flattering as far as the way we look when we get done after we play. I guess it’s just the stereotype that gets picked up that a lot of lesbians play, which is partly true but I don’t, I think from my experience, at school, like here at [Southeastern University] there are more lesbians on the basketball team than there are on the softball team.

Jan reported how she felt targeted because of stereotypes. She explained that her team commented about how they all knew she was a lesbian before she came out because of what the stereotypical lesbian looks like: “I guess the big like stereotype that they all had. Like because I

had a like hat on and I wore it sideways, that I was like a lesbian.” Ida described how she didn’t want to fit the stereotype of a lesbian athlete because of the associated negative judgments:

They call all us softball players dikes and you don’t want to fit into the stereotype but yeah you’re gay but you’re not at all you know have that short hair cut and I don’t weight you know 200 pounds and I just I didn’t want to fit into that stereotype and I didn’t want anybody to judge me because you know that I was gay.

Ida also described how athletes on other teams experienced homophobia through stereotypes:

Some of the basketball players...were almost more forced into the closet just because you know their face is all over the place. You turn on a TV and there’s you know commercials about come to the women’s basketball game. And it was almost worse, and especially for the football players that were gay you really never talked about it with them.

Elle, on the other hand, described how she decided not to follow stereotypical guidelines for females as she identified as lesbian:

I had kind of followed along with society’s guidelines, and like almost like, gender-rolled, I guess. Like, I used to dress for them, and then, um once I got here, like, I just was like, I want to dress the way I want to dress. Like, I don’t care about the stereotypical guidelines. And so I just dressed, I mean, I guess more loosely, or like sporty.

Many of the participants also described experiencing *homophobia* through their coaches and university or athletic department administration. For instance, Anna discussed how unsafe she felt on her team because of the *homophobic* comments one of her coaches often made against gay players and coaches. After Anna graduated, she found out that particular coach came out as gay too and struggled with how it felt worse to experience *homophobia* from not only a coach, but also one that was lesbian:

It was very disappointing and disheartening to hear like somebody that I respect so much, sort of say things about that. Not knowing that I was identifying myself as a lesbian because I didn’t say it out loud to anybody...That was the worst thing you can do. To be a gay-closeted coach and make your athletes who are gay feel like crap.

Similarly, Bella described how her coaches were gay but not out, and how that may have contributed to the *homophobic* atmosphere of silence: “We all knew our coach was gay um and we thought our assistant coach was but we weren’t for sure um and they weren’t out so I thought, I always thought that sent out such a strong message.” Gina, who remained closeted athletically, described her experience of *homophobia* as stemming from the general attitudes of the administration and her coaches:

I was acutely aware of *homophobia* I think in women’s sports and I think for me what I thought was that was really a top down process that you know my coaches attitude you know those first two years really set the tone for some of the players that I played with for four years. I imagine that had what I perceived as *homophobia* to be less um that might have been different. And I might have been more likely to stick around and talk or something like that instead of just change and leave.

Likewise, Kit described a top down process as she reported experiencing *homophobia* through blatant discrimination by the athletic department and her university:

Talking to the athletic director and the president and the dean of that school on getting permission to allow myself to be a part of this campus and this team [because of my sexual orientation]...I had to sign that committing myself to, uh, respect their wishes, and respect their rules, and respect their community by not leading an out and proud and practicing gay lifestyle. So that was that and that was a little bit more um discriminating.

Fay was unique in that she described her teams and athletic communities as the safest environment, and described experiencing homophobia outside of athletics. She reported being accepted by her teammates and athletic community, but experienced *homophobia* from her church and family: “I remember hearing about it at church...they [gay people] were going to hell and it’s wrong.” Conversely, Fay explained that she enjoys to play on a gay softball league because, “You know that there is not going to be...discrimination...there is not going to be anyone rude to you because of sexual orientation.”

Emotions. The third figural theme that emerged was *emotions*. All 11 participants described their *emotions* throughout *my own process* as an athlete. Dee described positive feelings as she stated, “The first experiences were very, very good.” However other participants described much stronger feelings, both positive and negative. For instance, Ida reported how reflecting back on her experience as an athlete who identifies as a lesbian was emotional because she quit playing softball due to issues with her coach regarding who she was dating: “I was thinking about it [her scheduled interview] last night and um it was kind of strange because it brought up a bunch of feelings...it was a really confusing time for me...I was embarrassed I quit.” Similarly, Gina reported being surprised by her emotions as she cried during her interview, “I wasn’t expecting to feel the impact of that.” Gina cried as she described a “turning point” in which she met a significant mentor in *my own process* who helped her realize, “I wouldn’t have to sacrifice one for the other [e.g., being an athlete or being a lesbian]...maybe there were ways I could start expressing myself a little more forward. Um and during that year what I found was I did start coming out more, still not athletically.” Anna expressed current frustration and disappointment towards her coach. She indicated that she recently found out that her former coach, who had made homophobic comments that made her feel unsafe, turned out to be lesbian and violated her power by dating a player: “It was like, the most disappointing news I’ve probably, like top five in my life to hear....And that was like, super frustrating.”

Many of the participants described a “turning point” in their emotional process. Initially, many participants reported that they didn’t identify as lesbian or they were keeping their lesbian identity a secret. This appeared to be the most difficult emotional period for the participants, as they first struggled to identify themselves as lesbian and then to share it with their teammates

with whom they have a special bond and trust. For instance, Elle expressed how unbearable it felt to be open to her team about her lesbian identity:

Emotionally, like I knew how I felt, and it was like almost like a...an unbearable feeling, because like, you want to like tell people, and you want to like have support, and like tell your best friends. But I feel like it was one of the hardest things to do, because you have to be like, completely open with them, and just like completely hopeful that like, they'll just understand. And so I think that's probably the thing I had to like overcome, was the fear of not being accepted.

Bella similarly reported, "I went through a lot of turmoil because of my sexuality." Bella explained how her *emotions* negatively impacted her performance before she was open and supported by her teammates:

With all your *emotions*, like everything, you can really read a lot I think into people by watching them play a game of tennis cause it's just them and their *emotions* for two or three hours and I remember feeling when all these rumors [about her sexual orientation] and things were going on just feeling really small like I wanted to hide...A pretty awful consequence of um, my performance.

Many participants described initially feeling scared of revealing their lesbian identity, to both themselves and others. For instance, before Bella was open and felt supported, she described: "Fear of being labeled." Fay stated that she was, "Scared to be one [lesbian]." She had never met another lesbian and was scared to have issues with her family thinking she was a bad person or going to hell. Kit, who was at a school that openly disapproved of the gay lifestyle, reported how she was more distant from her teammates because she was scared that her identity as a lesbian would get her kicked out of school: "I was really hesitant because of course I didn't want to get expelled. I didn't want to have a reputation...that was hard for me to closet my relationship...I was a little scared when I first came." Kit described how she wasn't able to fully connect with her teammates when she closeted her lesbian relationship and indicated that, "Not having that trust kind of put a stop on our success that year." Likewise, Jan stated, "Last year

was uncomfortable...Made me scared kind of because it was like, if these people don't like accept, or my team doesn't, like I can't like do anything...made me nervous." Cara also described how it was stressful before coming out and being concerned with how others will react: "Trying to keep it a secret and I mean, and you never know what kind of reaction, you kinda have an idea of how people are going to react, but you have no idea until it happens."

Many participants also explained a turning point in which their *emotions* transformed from being scared as their identity was a secret to being proud and open with their teammates. For instance, Anna described how she finally came out to her teammate after her teammate asked why she was being so secretive, and it wasn't as scary as she expected: "It took more courage to come out...and I got that feeling of you know what, I can do this, I can come out to her, I can come out to my teammates, and hopefully it won't be the scariest thing ever. And it wasn't." Jan described feeling lighter as she let go of her secret and revealed her identity as a lesbian to her teammates: "Carried this burden of nobody knowing...like this annoyance...So like once everybody kind of knew, it was kind of like this like, everything felt lighter." Gina explained how she has grown emotionally as she became able to express herself more outside of athletics: "*Emotionally* I've outgrown that too in some way." Bella described how her experience, "turned into this powerful experience," as she felt supported and she expressed a transformation:

How are you, you know going to kick someone's ass when you feel like you would rather be hiding somewhere instead of out on the tennis court. And that, so that's how it...helped me be aware of who I wanted to be and like pride...I wanted to be proud of myself.

CHAPTER IV

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe and thereby understand the experiences of lesbian athletes. Eleven athletes who identified as lesbian shared their experiences in open-ended phenomenological interviews. A ground (*my own process*) and three figural themes (*support*, *homophobia*, and *emotions*) emerged; the themes were distinctive yet related, thus mirroring the complicated, lived experiences of lesbian athletes.

This study gave voice to the experiences of a marginalized group. These findings provided a deeper understanding of what it is like to be an athlete who identifies as lesbian in a heterosexist and homonegative world. After thoroughly reviewing the transcripts, the general essence of the participants' experiences might read as follows:

My own process of determining who I am has been a long process that has been uniquely influenced by my role as an athlete. As I realized I was lesbian, gaining my teammates *support* was or would have been the biggest comfort. Their *support* and trust was necessary for optimal athletic performance. If I was lucky, I was also supported by other gay athletes within the athletic community or found an "underground" lesbian athlete community. The *support* from my teammates and my strength as an athlete empowered me to be resilient against my experiences with *homophobia*. Many people made ignorant comments about my sexuality and sport, and/or judged me for looking like the stereotypical lesbian. My coaches and athletic administration had problems with my sexual orientation, or even worse they were lesbian but remained closeted and silent. My process as a student-athlete was stressful enough, but on top of that I had to deal with the additional *emotional* reactions of how my sexual orientation fit into my athletic sphere. At first, I was scared of whether I would be accepted by my teammates, coaches, or others. Then, there was a turning point that occurred as I came out to my team and I was accepted. I felt lighter because I didn't have to keep my identity a secret and I didn't have to worry about how it might affect the team. Maybe I could even serve as that source of *support* for someone else who is going through her own process.

The following sections examine each theme within the overall thematic structure in further detail and also provide implications for future research and practice.

My Own Process

The context of the participants' experiences was *my own process*. Each participant described her role as an athlete to be a significant part of her identity, which uniquely influenced each participant's process of sexual identity development about "who I am." Krane and Kauer (2007) noted how their 2007 chapter, "Out on the Ball Fields: Lesbians in Sport," is different from other lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, and queer (LGBTQ) psychology literature because it is one of the first to include sport. The present study provided valuable information on the experiences of athletes who identify as lesbian which advanced the literature in bridging the gap between scholars in sport and scholars in LGBTQ psychology. The limited research on sexual identity in sport illustrates the social norm of silence around lesbians in sport. The following section will describe the existing research models on sexual identity, and then also incorporate the depth of experiences from the present study.

Existing research models have outlined the common developmental stages of sexual identity (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). The most prominent sexual identity development model, which provided the foundation for subsequent work, is Vivian Cass' (1979) six-stage model of lesbian/gay identity development. Cass proposed that individuals can be distinguished by the characteristics of each stage (e.g., identity confusion, identity comparison, identity tolerance, identity acceptance, identity pride, and identity synthesis), and predicted the development of each stage in order. Many sexual identity models emerged from Cass' model. For instance, Coleman (1982) delineated a comparable five-stage model consisting of pre-coming out, coming out, exploration, first relationships, and integration stages. Likewise, Minton and McDonald (1984) proposed a three-stage model based primarily on males, consisting of egocentric,

sociocentric, and universalistic stages. Similarly, Troiden (1989) formulated a four-stage model including sensitization, identity confusion, identity assumption, and identity commitment.

Sophie (1985) formulated the first gay identity model specifically for women, which included four stages labeled first awareness, testing and exploration, identity acceptance, and identity integration. However, as Sophie tested her model she found that linear models were inadequate because there is a significant variability of timing and order among the stages. Chapman and Bronnick (1987) developed the second identity model specifically for women. Chapman and Bronnick's model differed from the existing models because it described the process of how women come to label themselves as lesbians, rather than the process of coming to terms with same-sex attraction. Their five-stage model consisted of same-sex orientation, incongruence, self-questioning/exploration, identification, and choice of lifestyle. Most recently, McCarn and Fassinger (1996) proposed a model of lesbian identity formation in response to the dual identities among lesbians and the oversimplification of existing models. McCarn and Fassinger's model included two parallel processes of individual sexual identity and group membership identity. Both of these processes are preceded by nonawareness, and then progress through the same four phases: awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis.

The present study indicated that sexual identity development (*my own process*) may be experienced differently by elite athletes because of the salience of their group membership on an athletic team; yet no existing literature examines sexual identity development within the unique context of athletics. McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) lesbian identity model may be applied to the experiences of athletes who identify as lesbian to make sense of their unique process of identity development as athletes. Their model may provide a lens to understand the identity

process of lesbian athletes because of its inclusion of group membership identity parallel to the process of individual sexual identity.

According to McCarn and Fassinger's model (1996), the process of group membership identity begins with non-awareness of sexual preference and acceptance of socialized sexual norms of heterosexism. The first stage of group identity is a realization or awareness of the existence of lesbians or sexual orientations other than heterosexuality, and may be reflected by feelings of confusion. Many participants in the present study described their athletic environment as the first group setting that they became aware of other sexual orientations. For instance, Fay described her realization of the existence of lesbians on her softball team in college:

Well uh, when I first started I grew up going to a private Christian school. And uh, so as far as I know I had never met another lesbian. I didn't know that there were lesbians and so I remember the first time, the first time I thought well maybe I am gay, or maybe I am a lesbian, um when I was playing ball.

Some participants also indicated that they became aware of the existence of lesbians through negative stereotypes associated with being a member of an athletic team. Ida stated how this revelation was confusing for her:

I didn't even know that being gay was an option...I played a sport that a lot of people...call all us softball players dikes and you don't want to fit into the stereotype but yeah you're gay...I don't know I just it was a really confusing time for me.

During the exploration stage, individuals seek knowledge about gay people as a group as well as belonging to that group (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). This may mean learning more about lesbians as a group without identifying as a member. This stage may be reflected by feelings of anger and guilt, yet also curiosity and joy in exploring the existence of other lesbians. In the present study, the participants described learning more about lesbians within the sub-

culture of athletes, as their athletic identity was prominent. They reported how the athletic team environment often facilitated or hindered this exploration of other lesbians. For instance, Dee described how she transferred to a university that facilitated her exploration of other lesbian individuals, as well as the possibility of belonging to a lesbian group: “Was an all women’s college um it was very, very open and very welcoming and I think that um a lot more women were exploring their sexuality.” Other participants reported how the visibility of other lesbians on their team provided them with a positive view of and knowledge about lesbians, especially within their current identity as an athlete. For instance, Fay described how she first explored a lesbian relationship within athletics, which at the time she didn’t consider to be a lesbian relationship:

But now, you know looking back it was obviously was a lesbian relationship...I didn’t consider myself to be gay, I did not realize that about myself...I think they [my teammates] really almost helped shape the image of who I am because I never met another lesbian. I didn’t know. In my body I felt different. The people I went to high school with were as far as I know all straight and so it was different to meet people in college and on the softball team that seemed so much like me.

In contrast, Anna described how she felt her team environment hindered the exploration of her sexual identity. She revealed that her sexual identity development was a “long process” in which she felt angry about her coach’s homophobic comments and the lack of visible allies that made her feel unsafe to explore. She reported feeling guilty about not exploring the possibility of being lesbian, as she stated, “Looking back, I wish I did have the guts to do that.” Likewise, Ida explained how it was difficult to explore the possibility of being a lesbian on her team because of the norm of silence about sexuality in her athletic community:

One of the things you didn’t really talk about at all you know that you were gay, You weren’t supposed to talk about it with your coaches, you weren’t supposed to talk about it

with people in the athletic department it was just at least on my team it was something that you were just kinda supposed to keep to yourself.

The deepening/commitment stage of the model involves identifying with lesbian culture and creating relationships within the lesbian community (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). This stage may be reflected by feelings of excitement, pride, rage, internal conflict, and “the discovery of sisterhood.” In the present study, many participants described the importance of identifying with the lesbian subculture in athletics. They indicated that the gay community within their athletic community was especially important, and more so than the gay community in general.

Dee illustrated how she valued the lesbian community within athletics as she stated:

I think that the community was very tight and there seemed to be um very much revolving around sports. Most of the women I dated who came out or um who were dating women were involved in the athletic community...athletics was a really important part of that especially forming a family away from home.

Likewise, Elle reported being excited about identifying as a lesbian within a community of gay athletes: “And so I’m glad like here in [southeastern university], like there’s definitely a big community of like gay people.” Jan also reported identifying with the lesbian athlete subculture, and expressed internal conflict about feeling rejected outside of athletics:

It’s a lot easier to be a lesbian athlete in college like, it’s more like, accepted I think...I just feel more comfortable around athletes rather than non-athletes...it’s just more acceptable and we’re around it more. So it’s like when I’m around a non-athlete I’m always wondering if they’re ok with it.

The internalization/synthesis stage is evident when a lesbian woman identifies herself as a member of a minority group (i.e., lesbian) and synthesizes that into her overall self-concept (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996). This stage may be reflected by feelings of fulfillment, security, self-love, and a stable lesbian identity across many contexts. Individuals in this stage will individually evaluate both gay and heterosexual people rather than stereotyping them. Some

participants in the present study reached the internalization/synthesis stage in which being a lesbian athlete was a positive, stable part of their identity. Elle described this sense of fulfillment, security, and stability in her integrated identity as a lesbian athlete:

Since I've gotten here, like it seems so open. You just start to like, say it once in awhile, and you start to see like, how people react. And like then, people are just like, whatever, ok, like I don't care. They're like, I'm still your friend. And like, it's enabled me to be able to say it out loud and that's definitely, a freeing thing. ...your teammates are definitely there for you no matter what...begin an athlete definitely like, established that safe um, stability part of communicating.

Dee expressed how important being an athlete and a lesbian has been to her overall self-concept:

I guess the last thing that I would add or re-iterate is that athletics has been and I think still is an important part of many lesbian identities that I can tell and it's been a way that I've actually met some of the most um interesting women in my life um and it's a great kind of community and continuing thing to be involved with.

Similarly, Cara described how she and her teammates moved past the stereotypes of their sexual identity and saw each other as individuals whom they respected:

You depend on each other so much, and you spend so much time together that you respect each other and you trust each other and so it doesn't matter. Just like there's a gay person on my team and there's a girl that slept with every guy, well, I don't necessarily agree with that doesn't change the fact that she's my teammate and you talk shit to her, I'm gonna kick your ass...that is the common denominator in women's athletics, especially in college level, is that bond and regardless of what you do, at the end of the day, you're my teammate and that's all that matters.

Anna summed up her meaning of synthesizing her identity as a lesbian athlete with self-love and being openly gay in all contexts by stating, "This is a whole new world."

Thus, understanding the group level of sexual identity development may be helpful in understanding *my own process* among lesbian athletes. For instance, McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) model advocates for psychologists to provide interventions targeted at group identity, beyond the individual level of *my own process*. This encourages psychologists, as well as other

professionals in athletic settings, to create a positive climate in the athletic subculture for lesbians to be aware of the existence of lesbians, have a safe space to explore, create relationships with other lesbian athletes, and synthesize their sexual identity into their overall self-concept as an athlete and a person. Future applied research is warranted as to how psychologists and other professionals in athletic settings can proactively transform attitudes and build relationships and environments that may meet the varying developmental needs of lesbian athletes.

Support

All of the participants described the *support* they had received or wish they had received. More specifically, the results from this study were distinctive because they indicated that, as athletes, their teammates were the most significant source of *support* in their lives, followed by their athletic community. The existing literature regarding *support* has not specifically examined lesbian athletes, but the importance of receiving *support* from their teammates and athletic community fits with previous research. For instance, Beals and Peplau (2005) revealed that social support and social stressors connected to one's sexual identity are related to psychological well-being in lesbian women. Accordingly, a lesbian woman's psychological well-being is enhanced when she feels supported and accepted by significant people in her life. Likewise, a lesbian woman's psychological well-being may be harmed when she does not feel supported or accepted by significant people in her life. In the present study, the women identified as both athletes and lesbians; because of having a strong athletic identity, their teammates were one of the most significant relationships whose *support* was important. One participant articulated the importance of her team's *support*:

They [my team] were okay with it...that was like to me like the biggest comfort. Like anyone else outside that was just like, well they'll deal with it or they won't deal with it, you know. But especially the team, like this is who you're around, you know, all the time.

Similarly, Perez (2007) asserted that receiving *support* from a community and group identity is important in the process of identity formation as well as facilitating resilience against social and political oppression. The results from the present study highlighted that since being an athlete is a significant portion of lesbian athlete's identity, receiving *support* within the athletic community facilitates her overall identity process. *Support* received or not received by teammates, coaches, and athletic community were discussed as significant to the participant's experiences of *my own process*.

While the participants in the present study indicated the importance of *support* from their significant relationships (namely teammates), they often described an initial fear of how their teammates would react before they became open about their sexual identity (with the exception with one participant who was not out to her team and never received support from them). Many of the participants reported how they and/or their teammates may not have previously known anyone that was lesbian and therefore had not experience with supporting/accepting their identity. Krane and Kauer (2007) suggested that as heterosexual, lesbian, and bisexual athletes interact, they connect, learn from each other, and then are able to change prejudicial attitudes. This circular concept about the process of how they gained *support* from their teammates fits with the participants' experiences in the present study: As lesbian athletes are open about their sexual identity, their heterosexual teammates learn to accept them, which allows the lesbian athletes to accept themselves, which creates a more comfortable and supportive environment.

Additionally, understanding the significance of the *support* each participant may or may not have received, suggests that psychologists and other professionals working within athletic communities should consider how they can create a more supportive, accepting environment for athletes that identify as lesbian. Krane (1996) asserted that a positive, supportive environment is essential to counter negative personal attitudes and reactions to homonegativism. Krane recommended creating a positive, supportive environment by enhancing the visibility of lesbian role models and heterosexual allies. Many participants commented on how they wished they had visible role models or the importance of other lesbian athletes. Additionally, coaches, sport psychology consultants, counselors, trainers, administrators, and others working within the athletic community should facilitate teams and the whole athletic community in acknowledging and accepting diversity among individuals. Open dialogues about diversity should be initiated to stop perpetuating the norm of silence about sexuality within athletics (Griffin & Genasci, 1990). Also, individuals working with lesbian athletes may need to gain more knowledge about LGBTQ issues to avoid unintentionally engaging in unsupportive responses; Smith and Ingram (2004) reported that minimizing (e.g., downplaying the significance of the stressor) and blaming (e.g., blaming the individual for her role in the stressor) responses towards lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals in the workplace predicted psychological distress beyond the variance accounted for by experiences of heterosexism. Further practical research is needed outlining programs or campaigns aimed at increasing support within athletic environments, how to practically implement such programs, and measuring their effectiveness.

Homophobia

In the present study, all of the participants described experiencing *homophobia* in some manner, varying in degree from off-hand homophobic comments to blatant discrimination. Participants used the terms “*homophobia*,” “homophobic comments,” “discrimination,” “stereotype,” and “unsafe” to describe the homonegativism and heterosexism they experienced. In fact, all of the participants reported *homophobia* in some capacity despite many of them also reporting a supportive community of teammates. Interestingly, many of the participants demonstrated empowered and resilient reactions towards the *homophobia* they encountered. For instance, some participants described the sense of self-confidence they gained from being an athlete and others reported how they want to be an open role model for upcoming athletes. Krane and Kauer (2007) commented how athletes’ pride in their athletic successes and status may be empowering enough to foster resilience against the *homophobia* they experience.

The participants’ universal experience of some form of *homophobia* suggests various implications for psychologists and other professionals in the athletic community regarding the continued presence of *homophobia*. Increasing professional dialogue concerning *homophobia* in the athletic community has been recommended for years, and the present study demonstrated that *homophobia* still exists and professional dialogue is still needed (Griffin & Genasci, 1990, Krane, 1996). Griffin and Genasci (1990) asserted that not addressing *homophobia* signifies acceptance. The first step towards eliminating homonegativism in sport is to understand the experiences of those involved (e.g., lesbian administrators, coaches, and athletes, as well as homophobic or less supportive administrators, coaches, and athletes), which can then lead to the development of the most suitable approach to resist homonegativism (Krane, 1996). Thus,

further phenomenological and related investigations are warranted. Future studies also should focus on the experiences of gay, bisexual, and transgendered athletes. Additionally, future research is needed to examine what keeps individuals and organizations from addressing homophobia within athletics, and also determine effective practical methods aimed at changing homophobic attitudes and behaviors. LGBTQ psychology in general has examined such issues, but are lacking within athletics. For instance, Szymanski's (2008) chapter regarding how to be a culturally alert counselor in her research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered issues in therapy may be beneficial for sport scholars and coaches and athletic administrators to apply in their context. The findings from the present study revealed that increased cultural awareness is needed in athletics, and therefore Szymanski's suggestions for counselors to examine the messages learned about sexual orientation and to be aware of heterosexual privilege may also be applied to professionals working within athletic settings.

Emotions

Each of the participants described a range of different *emotions* that were significant throughout *my own process*, and in addition to the stressors of being a student-athlete. McCarn and Fassinger's (1996) model of lesbian identity formation provides a context for the emotional reactions lesbians may experience throughout *my own process*, from confusion, to anger, guilt, curiosity, and joy, to excitement, pride, rage, and internal conflict, and finally to integrated feelings of fulfillment, self-love, and security. In accordance with this developmental model, there are a variety of emotional responses that should be normalized and validated as individuals' progress from non-awareness of their individual sexual identity and group membership identity, through awareness, exploration, deepening/commitment, and internalization/synthesis.

However, research addressing emotional reactions to coming out is scarce, with even less literature specifically regarding the experiences of lesbian athletes. Since sexuality in sport is such a silenced topic, many professionals in the athletic community may not know how to react to the normal developmental and/or psychologically distressed emotional responses. For instance, Krane and Kauer (2007) indicated that fear is a common social norm among lesbian athletes. They reported that lesbian athletes experience a fear of being labeled lesbian primarily because of the fear of not knowing how others (e.g., coaches and/or teammates) may react. This fear of how others will react was consistent with the participants' narratives in the current study. Many participants initially described keeping their sexual identity a secret or didn't feel safe to explore, despite eventually feeling "lighter," "comforted," and supported by their teammates reactions. Thus, how can athletic communities combat these universal feelings of fear experienced by athletes who identify as lesbian? Future research is warranted on how athletic communities may provide emotional support and challenge the homophobic atmosphere in order to acknowledge and meet the emotional needs of athletes who identify as lesbian. The possibility of a lesbian athlete support group may also warrant further investigation, as it may provide a forum for individuals to share their emotions, normalize and validate their feelings of fear, and connect with others going through similar processes.

Limitations

The present study has provided valuable descriptive information regarding the lived experiences of lesbian athletes, which is an area that lacks substantial research. However, the present study is limited to understanding the meaning of being a lesbian athlete, as phenomenological research is not intended to explain or analyze. Additionally, the present study

limited the definition of an athlete to include individuals who participated in collegiate athletics, and this definition may be expanded to a broader definition and/or narrowed to more elite athletes. There was also a broad range in the age of participants, varying between 18 and 35, which may have impacted the themes. Specifically, the experiences of the older participants may have been impacted by a different social climate surrounding the LGBTQ population.

Conclusion

The goal of the present study was to provide a voice to a marginalized population of athletes who identify as lesbian and to understand their experiences. An overall thematic narrative was constructed to describe the participants' experiences. *My own process* emerged as the context of the participants' experiences of being athletes' who identify as lesbian, and *support*, especially from teammates, *homophobia*, and *emotions* emerged as figural themes. Although the athletic environment has improved for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered athletes over the past few decades, this study demonstrated that there is still much work that professionals in the athletic field need to do to combat homophobia. The author urges others to further investigate the themes presented; a lack of professional and personal dialogue perpetuates invisibility of the experiences of athletes who identify as lesbian.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

Heterosexism and Homonegativism in Sport: A Phenomenological Investigation of Athletes Who Identify as Lesbian

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of athletes who identify as lesbian.

Your part in this research will involve participating in an unstructured interview in which you will describe your experience of being an athlete who identifies as lesbian. The specific research question that this study will explore is: “Can you please describe in as much detail as possible your experience of being an athlete who identifies as lesbian?” The length of the interview is anticipated to be approximately 45 minutes however, you may take any amount of time you would like, up to two hours. The interview questions will be open-ended, informal, and conversational in nature. The interviews will be scheduled at a mutually convenient time and place. The interview process requires audio-recording of the interview and subsequent preparation of a transcript. After the interviews are transcribed, the tapes will be erased. The primary investigator and other researchers who are graduate students or faculty at The University of Tennessee will then review the transcripts for themes.

Your participation in this study entails no unusual risks or discomforts. A dissertation, or research paper, based on this research will be prepared as partial fulfillment of degree requirements in a doctoral counseling psychology program. The knowledge gained from this research may be presented to others through published works and/or presentations. The only potential risk is your identification; however the information from this study will be kept confidential. While confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, confidentiality will be maintained by using a self-selected pseudonym (fake name) during the interview and replacing identifiable names, titles, and organizations with pseudonyms in the typed transcripts. No reference will be made in oral or written reports which could link participants to the study. Data will be stored securely and will be made available only to persons conducting the study unless participants specifically give permission in writing to do otherwise. The audio-recordings of the interviews and informed consent will be retained in a secure location on the campus of the University of Tennessee. Once the transcripts are completed, the recordings will be erased. The transcripts and this informed consent statement will be kept in separate locked filing cabinets at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville for three years, and then will be destroyed.

By participating in this research study, you are given the opportunity to share your experience of being a lesbian athlete to someone who is solely trying to understand that experience. The information you share will also help provide the foundation for further research on the experience of being a lesbian athlete, as well as health care providers, coaches, and athletic trainers a support staff a greater understanding of your experiences.

If you have questions at any time about the study or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study,) you may contact the researcher, Marie Shaw, at (865)974-2196. If you have questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Office of Research at (865)974-3466.

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed you data will be returned to you or destroyed.

I have read the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study. In addition, I am aware that:

My name, audiotape, and transcript will remain confidential and the tapes will be erased after a transcript is prepared.

I am entitled to have any further inquiries answered regarding the procedures.

No royalties are due to me for any subsequent publication.

Participation is voluntary and I may withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time and for any reason without penalty. For further information about this study or your role in it, contact:

Marie Shaw
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The primary investigator and other researchers who are graduate students or faculty at The University of Tennessee will review the transcripts for themes.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

TRANSCRIPTS

Interview Transcript #1 – Anna

I: Can you please tell me in as much detail as possible, your experience of being an athlete who identifies as lesbian.

P: Umm, well yeah, it was sort of a long process I guess. Um, when I first arrived at college, it was, I was in the closet. I don't think I was fully out to myself then, and then it was my junior year. I actually played tennis there for five years, so it was between my third and fourth year where I fully was like, yup I'm gay, this is who I am. And then, was out, you know, honestly, to myself. I guess which is the biggest thing, and then to one or two girls on the team that I knew could be some allies. But for that first year, I wasn't out to anybody. It was pretty long, pretty long I guess. Umm and then there's a girl that joined the team that year, so my fourth year, and we became good friends, all that good stuff. And, I would love to say it's my fifth year, my red shirt or my fifth year, um that I finally came out to her, to one of my friends on the team. And then, so it's a year and a half later that I actually came out to anybody on my team. Um, I think it was also because of like comments. You hear comments that your teammates make, the comments that your coaches make, and you just sort of register them as, ooh this isn't a safe environment.

I: Mmhmm

P: So, yeah, I wouldn't say it was the best experience. Actually I would say it wasn't a great experience, for sure.

I: Can you tell me more about...

P: Umm, It took more courage to come out though.

I: Mmhmm

P: Looking back on it now, I wish I did.

I: Can you tell me more about how it wasn't, like, a good experience?

P: Yes, umm, just being in [??]. I mean, you know, I guess I knew the first couple of years. I mean like yeah, you know I don't fit in; in that regard. They all talk about boys; they all talk about weddings, and I'm like I just don't see that. And then, you know, once it all finally clicked in, that summer it was like whoa. And then, then you really become sensitive to comments of like, oh that team is all full of dykes and, you know, it's not being able to communicate with anybody was like ah you know, they could tell. It was funny; one of the girls on my team

afterwards was like, “ah ‘Mandy,’ I knew”. We were watching Real World one time, and it was about two lesbians, and somebody was like, aw that’s weird, that’s gross. And I was like, no it’s not; why would anybody’s love be different, if they were gay, straight, whatever. And she was like, and I knew right then, and I was like no way, that’s hilarious that she told me that. [??] You know you wished someone would have fished it out of you a little bit, but you can’t say that because it’s on your own terms I think. Like, I needed to do it myself.

I: Yeah

P: But, I guess in terms of it not being a great experience, I mean I was very close with my assistant coach. My head coach and my assistant coach were married, and “Mark” was the male coach and “Kim” was the female coach. And Kim was just awesome; I mean we all looked up to her. Amazing, coolest person, great in tennis, great personality, really laid back. And she would sometimes say certain comments like, oh they’re all gay, or isn’t it weird how they had a kid like that about another lesbian coach in the [conference]. And I’d be like well yeah. It was very disappointing and disheartening to hear like somebody that I respect so much, sort of say things about that. Not knowing that I was identifying myself as a lesbian because I didn’t say it out loud to anybody. So, but at that point it was sort of a, you know, a catch twenty-two.

I: Mmhmm

P: Why would I wanna come out when, you know, I hear stuff like that. But when you do come out, would they say that? Would it change things though? I think it would’ve. So you know that gets back to the point of looking back, I wish I would’ve had more guts to do that.

I: It sounds like looking back that you think you could’ve changed some of, umm, their views?

P: Yeah, you know like, you hear some of those comments of your teammates, like oh I knew, and I wish, you know, you would’ve come out; that would’ve been fine. You know and another one of my teammates that was the same year, so we went through all of [University] together, until my fifth year, she was from the middle of [Midwest state], and she was like oh yeah, that’s just so weird, I’ve never seen a lesbian before. And even at a wedding this past summer, we were catching up and talking about it, and she was like, well I never had seen a lesbian, so it was a little different. So you know, it was sort of almost says, you know it wouldn’t have been a warm environment; it wouldn’t have been a welcoming environment. But yeah, I mean having the reserves, and the energy, and the effort on a team where, yeah we’re all friends, you don’t want to disturb that. Like I was a captain, and so how to you be like oh yeah we’re having a great year, and be like, and oh guess what coaches, guess what team, I’m gay, deal with that, you know. But like I said, looking back, I wish I did have the guts to do that. And then, because that’s how change happens. That’s how society, you know, understands lesbian athletes and how not to normalize it, but yeah I guess for lack of a better word, yeah.

I: Mhmm.

P: And make it be ok to be a lesbian athlete, because there's so many out there, but they're all stuck in the closet. Well, not all, but a lot are.

I: So what was it like then, you mentioned that it took you, like, almost a year and a half until you, um, came out to your friend. What was it like?

P: Ooh that sucked. I mean, you just learned not to talk about certain subjects. You know, like are you dating anybody? It's just not fun.

I: Mmhmm

P: You know, you always sort of look for an ally, and there wasn't anybody there. And, like, I have never even heard of a gay/straight alliance or anything like that until I got to grad school. And it was just sort of like, wow, that sort of stuff exists? It's, you know, like, this is so depressing.

I: Uh huh

P: And I'm thinking ooh, I you know, I want to meet somebody, but then how do you meet somebody that's not an athlete, but then you're going to start to come out of the closet and, you know. Which I did meet an athlete my fifth year. Umm, and that was fun, obviously. I mean, that's good, but, you know, they're still in the closet, and some people know, some people don't. It's just a bad environment. I hope it's changing, I mean I don't know. That's eight, seven years ago, so.

I: You mentioned ally a few times and how that was difficult to even find them. Can you tell me more about how you had, like, few allies, or it was hard to find them?

P: Yep. Um, at the beginning of my fifth year, and there was a girl on the softball team, and she was like my first kiss and everything. And so it was excellent. She was also hanging out with one of my teammate's roommates. So my teammate, "Sarah," would see this girl over at her house all the time, and you know. So I'm like huh, Sarah's gonna start, my teammate, Sarah is going to start wondering, like, why am I hanging out with this girl on the softball team. So I finally came out to Sarah, and she was like yes, and was really cool. Like, that feeling of you know what, I can do this, I can come out to her, I can come out to my teammates, and hopefully it won't be the scariest thing ever. And it wasn't. It was actually, was on a road trip. I remember where it was; it was in [Midwestern state], and it was freezing cold and it was outside, and she was like, Mandy, you're not telling me something, like why are you being so secretive? And I finally told her, and she was like aw that's so cool. She was like she's really cute, she was like I can even see myself kissing her. And it just made me laugh, like oh you know, that feeling of putting yourself out there, and then it's ok.

I: Mmhmm

P: You know, and so I guess that's like my definition of an ally. Like supportive, somebody to, you know, when somebody else says a dumb comment, they would sort of stick up for you a little bit. And it's not you generally, but them being like, oh that's dumb you shouldn't say that, or you don't know them, or they're actually some really good people you shouldn't say that. So you know, I think that's really what an ally does.

I: Yeah

P: And also, somebody to talk to. I mean, to listen and all that good stuff. I mean, you know there was also another one on the softball team who was straight, identified as straight. And um also really supportive, and sort of a nice, she was younger than me, um, but also sort of like a mentor really. It's really weird, but um she was, she was a great ally too.

I: Can you tell me more about how she was almost a mentor for you?

P: Yeah. Well she was younger, so I guess it was sort of weird, but she had just a lot of experience. I guess, I wonder if it was being on a softball team that she had so much experience with gay athletes. Because I mean, I guess [university] had four or five on her team at various levels of being out. And she was like, ah yeah I've seen this before. And she was like don't get sucked into that or she's actually really good people, you know, that sort of thing. And just sort of helped me navigate it just a little bit, of like ah you know. A great person to talk to, supportive, encouraging, you know and be like ah you know, what about coming out to this person, or doing this? Or you know, just another ear I guess.

I: Yeah

P: And maybe a little bit more. Like Sarah on the team was just like oh you know, listens and was young and sort of naïve and didn't really know any other lesbians.

I: Mmhmm

P: Um, but actually her roommate was lesbian; she was on the basketball team. So Sarah was very cool with it. I think that's also why I knew I could sort of be open with her. But um, but yeah Sarah was younger, and so was the girl that was on the softball team, which I think they were experienced with other lesbian athletes, I mean that's why she was a mentor.

I: Ok. Let's see. You also mentioned, like, a lot throughout about the comments that, just like, didn't make you feel safe. Can you tell me more about your experience with comments and being lesbian?

P: Well, yeah, I mean, it was actually, there was a big event. Like I said, Mark and Kim were my coaches, and one of the reasons I really liked [the university] was the assistant coach, Kim. Like I was saying, just a great person, so when I first heard some of these comments you know like ah we're going out to play this school and they have a bunch of lesbians, the coach is

lesbian, she's sort of weird. It's just sort of like what? You know, like, hey I guess I came from a place where it's like, just very accepting. My parents were accepting and, you know, very open, and you know, multicultural everything. And then, to hear something like this, it's like, ah you know, it just sort of, it frustrates you. Like, don't say those things. I hold you in such high regard, and then you, you know, you start to rip on somebody that you don't know and it's just because they're gay, and ugh, you're an athlete. And you know, you're probably confused, you can feel confused as gay too. And then, um, it must've been three years ago, we get a phone call from Sarah, my old teammate. She says, Mandy guess what, I'm like what? She like well, one of the, I think she's like a junior on the team. She came to the team when I graduated, so this girl filled my spot. This girl and Kim, my assistant coach, are dating. So Kim, my assistant coach, um is separating from her husband, and is now dating a girl on the tennis team. It was like, the most disappointing news I've probably, like top five in my life to hear. And it all came together, like she was saying those crappy comments because she's gay.

I: Yeah

P: And that was like, super frustrating. I mean that was the worst thing you can do. To be a gay-closeted coach and make your athletes who are gay feel like crap. So, I guess it all came together with that.

I: Mmhmm

P: So I guess everybody has their process of dealing with it.

I: Yeah

P: But that doesn't make it any better, that's for sure. I mean, it made it worse; it made it way worse. So, you know, learning now, being a volunteer assistant coach, like, try to create a supportive environment for any girls that I work with. And I work with a lot of high school girls, so trying to be, you know, always open always you know, ready to listen, and do things that I learned. Like hey, say I'm gay, that's great, you know. Like, I'm very supportive obviously. And you know, like, try and create an environment where they feel open to do anything.

I: Yeah

P: I mean to talk about anything; to be who they are. So I guess it was a learning experience, and it made me realize, wow, that's something I would never want anybody else to realize.

I: Mmm

P: So yeah, that was very disappointing to hear that. I don't talk to her anymore.

I: Yeah

P: We barely kept in touch after school. Not because of any reason. Just, you know, I got busy doing grad school, and she was busy coaching and stuff. But to hear that was just like, the worst news.

I: Yeah

P: Pshyeah right.

I: Yeah. [Laughs] And, I know you also mentioned that she made comments about the other coaches and how you know, you were like, you can be confused as gay too because you are an athlete and a coach, and I'm wondering if you could tell me more about that.

P: Yeah, well she, I mean she had short hair, she was very athletic, very you know, not masculine I think, but you know, like androgynous. You couldn't really tell gay, male, female, whatever. And, so yeah you know, just sort of like a sporty style, and like very athletic, doesn't really care about her looks that much, you know, some of these typical lesbian things. And so like yeah, I guess a lot of other people would be like, ah, you know isn't your coach gay? We'd be like, no, she's married to our other coach, Mark, you know. And so it's just funny to hear these comments, and then you know, and even the other people on our team would sort of be like, ah do you think Kim is gay? And you know I remember being like, ah, yeah I could definitely see it, you know. Like, doesn't wanna have kids, she loves her dog, she's never affectionate with her husband, and it's weird. It's just weird. So yeah, you're surprised to hear that, and you're surprised and, like disgusted almost. That was a girl on the team. Like that's just such a violation of your power that you have as a coach. I think that was probably the worst thing.

I: Yeah

P: So, ugh.

I: Well let's see, I'd like to summarize what you've told me so far. You've told me how you were initially when you arrived um, you weren't even sure if you knew and you were in the closet. And then eventually between the third and fourth year, you came out to yourself and a few friends, and then you found some allies. And um it was really difficult to come out to anyone on the team because of the comments and like the atmosphere with your coach. Um, but you eventually did, and um, you almost wish you had sooner in the process. Um, I'm wondering, you know, what else um, you know, have we left out about this experience? Is there anything else you'd like to add?

P: Yeah I guess, I think one of the things is that my fourth and fifth year we were doing really well. And my fourth year we were very successful and my fifth year even more successful. And my fifth year as a captain, you know, and this idea of like, I don't wanna stir it up. You know, I don't want to, you know, sacrifice the team, of like, oh the team was doing so well and then she came out, and then everybody, you know, just fell apart. And I may have even been using it as

an excuse or whatever or I don't know. Or, you know, like I don't understand what's wrong with Mandy? You know, like you just keep sacrificing things in your head at that point, I guess because you aren't out, you don't really have that support group that's like um no Missy, and if they do think that it's their fault not yours. You know, you don't have those people around you that much. Um, Sarah, Sarah was great with that um, she was like, why don't you come out, you should, you know. And I think she also understood too why I didn't.

I: Mmhmm

P: Um, so yeah, I think like being a captain and being sort of torn in that rule of would a good captain do this? You know, and I think that's such a crappy thing to have to think.

I: Yeah.

P: To have a good captain have to deny, like, being out and being who they are. You know, and I mean, that's changed immensely now. With my level of openness of being gay, like I'm very open about it now. I think probably because I was so closeted about it before, but it was also tough.

I: How did that change? From being so closeted to being so open now?

P: Well. I think it's that feeling of being liberated. I mean, this is who I am, and I'm proud of who I am. And you know, support people in my life, knowing a lot more gay people, knowing people that are comfortable with who they are. I mean, going to school in the middle of [Midwestern state] where even the coaches, like the softball coaches were dating the basketball coaches and that was all hush hush. It was such a quieted and closeted atmosphere. Where it's frustrating when you see coaches, people that you look up to, not mine, mine was still in the closet. But others who were like, I'm gay, you know, this is my partner we live together. But nobody talks about it. And I'm like, really? So I guess, I realized, like, that's not what I want. Like, when I have a partner, I want to be like, yeah, this is my partner, this is blah blah blah, this is what I do, this is who I am. I think that's how the world will start changing, instead of hiding it, and kind of, you know. I don't know I think about to job security and stuff, and I think that's also a scary aspect. Where the more closeted that coaches are the more we don't progress, and that makes athletes not want to come out too. Um, it's sort of a, you know, just keep on going.

I: Yeah. I think you mentioned catch-22 before.

P: Oh big time, yeah, I mean if you're looking up to a mentor and the behaviors that they're showing are, you know closeted, and they don't wanna talk about it, and this is my friend. No, she's not your friend, she's not your roommate; you're gay, she's your partner. And if they can't say it, oh my God, where do you look to?

I: So it sounds like it was a big contrast for you from [hometown] to [university location] and how no one talks about it.

P: Oh God, it's funny, looking back at it now, people have asked me like, whoa if you'd had another choice, would you have gone somewhere else? And I'm so not a regret person, but, so don't like using that word. But yeah, like I go to a school in the middle of [Midwestern state], like religious, right-wing, conservative, corn fields, you know, like second largest Greek fraternity school, and it's like whoa, that wasn't my style. But, and yeah, I think it's funny, my friend was just looking up [university], I think is the only school in the [conference] that doesn't have a GLBT center on campus.

I: Wow

P: And I'm like, yup, I totally believe that. So, you know, like I didn't really have a ton of other choices. I was looking at Nebraska, I was looking at College of Charleston, you know, and I, you know, when I'm looking through colleges at 18, I wasn't out to myself, so that wasn't really going through my head

I: Mmhmm

P: At 20, 21, I was like, whoa, what are my options here? It's sort of like, ok, lets make do with it. Even going my first year of grad school, that's the first time I'd met, like, other lesbians that openly identify it as lesbian and go out to bars, you know, gay bars. Honestly, my first year, all throughout [university], I didn't even know what a gay bar was, I thought it like, existed in movies. I had no idea.

I: Wow

P: And then I get to grad school, it's like whoa! This is like a whole new world!

I: Mmhmm

P: So, yeah, it's kind of crazy, because nobody talks about it.

I: Yeah. So sounds like a lot of things no one talks about it.

P: Yeah. I mean. I think that's how they also, everything probably just ties in together. Playing on a woman's tennis team in the [conference] at that had at that time, not many lesbians.

I: Mmhmm

P: And then, you know, if you aren't going to be out as much to your team, then, you know, it sort of keeps propelling that idea that, then you probably aren't going to meet many other gay people which means you won't to talk about it. You know, and if everybody has that feeling, it's very secluded.

I: Yeah.

P: Maybe it's changed more, and I'm sure it's, like, I would hope it's better like in bigger, diverse areas. But...

I: So it sounds like...

P: Funny I remember... Go ahead.

I: No, no, you go ahead.

P: Um, we played a tournament at [Southeastern university], and uh, yeah right! We'd gone down there to play, and there was a girl on the team that was totally out. Her girlfriend would come to matches, and I remember being so jealous of that. I was like, oh my God, how cool. And then, just sort of being like, wow, you know, that just takes guts.

I: Mmhmm

P: And I remember, just sort of being torn at that time. I think that was probably the fall of my fifth year, and like ah, you know, I can do this. And so I think that was sort one of those moments where I'm like ah, you know, you sort of see somebody that's like a possible self now.

I: Yeah.

P: Whereas before, you don't see many people, so it's tough to sort of blaze a trail I guess.

I: That was a big moment for you to be able see someone that was more similar to you?

P: Yeah. Oh definitely.

I: Well, let's see. Is there anything else you wanted to add? You also added um you know what it was like in the middle of [Midwestern state], and how everyone out there didn't talk about it, and it was a lot more secluded, everyone was in the closet, um...

P: I think that sort of gags me now a little bit too, thinking, you know, as a woman that, well you know, I'm a coach, uh, you know coach tennis players for a living. Like, do I wanna be in the middle of corn fields again in my life? No, you know, like, because of those experiences that I've had.

I: Yeah.

P: Um, so yeah, it sort of makes you think about your living place, or where you wanna go afterwards. So I mean, I wasn't out when I was 18 and choosing schools. It's, you know, I can't

really look bad for me like ooh should've chosen a different one, because it wasn't going through my head. Um, yeah.

I: Great. Thank you so much, Mandy.

P: Yeah. But the most disturbing thing was my coach. I mean, it all just sort of came together. And I'm like whoa, like, that's why she was saying all those crappy comments, and you know it doesn't make it any better. But, I think the biggest thing that I've learned is that... Yeah, like one of my teammates, the one that we went through the same year together, she was like well yeah, I never did see anybody, so I was, you know, sort of shocked. And when other people were gay and maybe I'd say things, they weren't negative, well yeah, I guess they were negative comments, like, oh that's weird, or I couldn't imagine doing that, or things like that.

I: Yeah

P: You know, I still wish that I would've come out because, well like I said before, that's how change happens. Like, you've gotta put yourself out there. And, you know, so I think that's sort of been a learning lesson for me, and I think that's why I do wanna be more out now. Because, it frustrated me that I could've been a better role model for other people.

I: Yeah

P: And it could've, could've been different for me. So...

I: That sounds like a great learning lesson that you're implementing now though.

P: Yeah. I try, definitely. I mean, well.

I: Ok well is there anything else you'd like to add before we turn off the recorder?

P: No, I think that's it. I think you've got this whole lesbian experience right there.

Interview Transcript #2 - Bella

I: Ok “Bella,” could you please describe to me in as much detail as possible your experience of being an athlete who identified as lesbian?

P: Oh jeez um, oh I think it was, um, oh where do I even start? It was, I would say very challenging and I think I just kind of think of where I started in terms of how I felt about um my own sexuality and how other people viewed me and then you know kind of points of when I graduated and how far apart those two were. Umm, that’s kind of the main thing that stands out for me that I’ve spent most of my time out at [university in the western U.S.]. And uh that’s some real kind of personal turmoil around this issue. Um, I knew, we all of us knew on the tennis team, we all knew our coach was gay, um and we thought our assistant coach was but we weren’t for sure. Um and they weren’t out to us so I always thought that sent out such a strong message...

I: Uh-huh

P: Uh to all of us because, you know, we all looked up to our coaches and they’re our mentors and, um, I just totally remember that and I remember thinking gosh I wish, I wish they could speak to their experience because then maybe that would help me kind of figure out how I can get comfortable and seem more proud of who I was as well. Umm, but that wasn’t there, but at the same time I knew, I mean I knew my coach was gay so at least there was some kind of presence so I didn’t feel like totally isolated. Umm, and we had a few other girls on our team that were gay as well. Umm, and I knew I was gay actually before I came to school but I wasn’t umm able to be really open I think until, probably my junior year like being really open I think I started to verbalize it probably my sophomore year. Umm, and it was interesting there was one girl on our team, who I’ll give you her information, but she kind of came out to everyone. She went home one Christmas and kind of just cut her hair and had this transformation and she came back and she said this is who I am. And I was like whoa ok. So here’s an example of what it looks like and I think that kind of allowed me to follow in her footsteps a little bit. I really admired her strength of character to be able to do that so. Umm, I had a lot of issues early on with team mates kind of gossiping about who I was and some other adults on the team and oddly enough the people that were doing all of the gossiping were actually struggling with those issues as well in terms of their own sexuality and kind of, you know, projecting the attention onto someone else, I think for fear of being labeled. So I had some really, really difficult times but I think in a sense it made me a lot more clear about who I was. Um, and it kind of opened a whole can of worms in terms of like, I guess discrimination and I thought I could look at different parts of myself in terms of ok I’ve felt some hate or some oppression or whatever because of my sexuality now and I thought gosh have I done the same thing maybe in terms of race or something else. So it really kind of shaped my world view but it was a pretty umm kind of painful experience I think to go through. But I think in the end I mean if I had do it again I would go through it again because I think it kind of helped shaped me and make things really clear about who I was and who I needed to be in terms of some other areas of my life.

I: Hmmm. Could you tell me more about that?

P: Umm, about the last thing that I said?

I: Yeah and how it shaped you and other areas of your life too.

P: Yeah, and this is so funny because I actually just chatted about this with a friend last night. Um, I, was studying science in school and biology and the general kind of fitness training and nutrition and all this stuff within sports. And I think that was, I never really had been interested in social sciences, umm, social movements, social justice, this kind of thing and I think, well I have always been aware that I was treated differently because I was a female. Umm, so that was kind of one of my hot buttons like, you know, don't, we're not getting any press coverage cause it's a woman's sport. Umm, you know I have to wear a skirt and I get whistled, well you know it's just I guess it's just a double standard. Umm and then I think the whole gay thing came along and there was there was, uh, I guess you would call it a critical incident. I was playing against a player. Here I'm from [non-U.S. country] so there's some cultural things from there, well we're not very versed in um, what would you call it? Racial color I guess is what you would say.

I: Ok

P: So, I was playing against a player and she was African American. And I remember making comments to myself under, under my breath, um, to do with that. Her race and that was the culture I grew up and you could throw names at people who looked different or were from different countries and da da da. And I will never forget this day and I kind of thought and after the match my coach I think she heard it she you know we had a real heart to heart conversation about it. But she said to me how can you, you know, label this person when you feel you like you don't want to be labeled because of your sexuality or be discriminated against and I thought wow! That was really brave of her to confront me in that way and since then I felt like I needed to explore that. Uh, because I remember like, you know, I went through a lot of turmoil because of my sexuality and I thought you know I was just a lot more open to what are other people going through, what are other forms of oppression and discrimination out there other than just my own, and how am I maybe perpetuating that?

I: Yeah, it sounds like for you that definitely was a critical moment for you. I'm wondering, you mentioned turmoil a few times now, if you could tell me more about like the turmoil you experienced.

P: Sure, that's a powerful word, I don't really know where that came from. Umm, I was seeing a girl on the team, umm, and I had actually also had a relationship with another girl on the team. Basically, our team just fell to pieces and it was this big division, umm it was kind of me and my girlfriend at the time and everyone else, and there were rumors kind of flying all over the country. My girlfriend at the time was American and I was [nationality] so she had friends all over the place and kind of she was getting phone calls and just hearing things from people. Like,

what's going on are you gay da da da, it was this whole thing it was like wildfire across the whole country. And it was so funny meeting up with [name of another participant]

I: Mhmm

P: Umm because she, you know, she heard the whole thing but she and I had never really met each other. But somehow we were identified as like a gay team, or the gay school, someone called us the lesbian factory, which was really interesting.

I: Ah

P: And then there was some rumor about a threesome between the three of us that was not true and I just I remember hearing all these things and going whoa! Like, at first it was really invasive, like oh my gosh this is out of control, like I don't feel ready to be out.

I: Uh-huh

P: I need to, you know, go through my own process. It was scary because all of the sudden I was outted to everyone so and I wasn't really ready for it. And I think you know my own teammates people like in my own, at my own school on campus, and I was supposed to be closest with these people they were kind of the ones that were fueling the fire.

I: Oh

P: So it just felt like where, where do I go and can I go to my coaches. You know I knew they were gay but they weren't really out and I, it was just one of those where do I go with this? And I wasn't out to my parents at the time, so it kind of just isolated me even more and put my girlfriend that was just kind of the two of us and then everyone else so I guess that's how I would describe it.

I: Well, that was really interesting you mentioned the team dynamics and that people called you the lesbian factory and that the coach was gay, but not out per say and, umm, I was wondering if you could tell me more about the team dynamics and how that influenced you.

P: Huh, yeah, I think there was probably a majority of us on the team that were gay and I think it was just a progression of you know, like I said my teammate was the first one to come out and I think I was pretty close, but right there with her. I knew who I was so beyond almost ready and I think she enabled me to be more open about who I was.

I: Uh-huh

P: But then some other teammates really never got to that level, and umm one actually just got married to a man. And I don't know, I don't want to judge like her sexuality, but I know it was like apart of her life in college. But she was Irish and Catholic and that it just...

I: Ah

P: It just wasn't going to fit with her in her life so that was the choice she made. And, umm, my ex-girlfriend umm, I think may be bi-sexual but way kind of more on the straight end.

I: Uh-huh

P: And she just never really ended up telling anyone about it. I mean people knew, but she just kind of made it a non-issue and I think all the time it was slightly different with me so we had this strange spectrum of pretty gay and pretty much out and then bi-sexual and then you know more straight but kind of experimenting.

I: Uh-huh

P: It was a weird mix, we had a girl that transferred, I think partly because of all the issues. Umm yea, so I don't really know what to tell you other than it was just a big mess for a long time and then there were some girls that were straight that just felt like, what do I do? These are my teammates and their gay, but I don't want to be labeled gay and what does that mean? And why am I so fearful of being labeled gay? So it really turned into this powerful experience I think kind of come junior or senior year. People could give voice to that and I remember one teammate saying she makes the point where she was like, no these are my sisters these are my teammates and I am going to be with them, I'm going to support them. She was straight, and she kind of finally the light went on and she realized that this was all a part of her maybe her own homophobia and I think she took herself out of it.

I: Mhmm

P: She just said I'm going to support my teammates and whoever they are and I'll deal with whatever goes along with that or whatever label or, she, I think she just saw the bigger picture. And I don't think I will ever forget that. umm but that was a pretty cool example of how far we have come in like maybe three years together.

I: Wow. Yeah, so you went from, you know, the fear of being labeled to more supportive it sounded.

P: Yes, uh-huh supportive and even I think proud.

I: Ah

P: Yeah, that was a, a thing for me. I realized when I was competing, umm there was apart of me I mean I just felt small as an athlete. And then tennis you just stand out on the court on your own for two or three hours.

I: Uh-huh

P: So I, so I only say you're really exposed like you still make it sometimes. With all your emotions, like everything, you can really read a lot I think into people by watching them play a game of tennis cause its just them and their emotions for two or three hours and I remember feeling when all these rumors and things were going on just feeling really small like I wanted to hide. And then I think it was pretty, a pretty awful consequence for umm, my performance.

I: Yeah

P: I mean how are you going to, you know, kick someone's ass when you feel like you would rather be hiding somewhere instead of out on the tennis court. And that, so that kind of shaped how this, umm, it just helped me be aware of who I wanted to be and like pride was such a thing for me in maybe my last year or so of playing I think partly because of my sexuality like, a feeling of not being proud, like being ashamed.

I: Uh-huh

P: And so I knew that that was, that I wanted to be a person I was proud of. So, that kind of relates to the other things I was talking about before with the exploring of my own intolerance of different people in different groups.

I: Mhmm

P: I wanted to be proud of who I was as a person, as a lesbian. And then I thought, this was pretty interesting, umm, I felt gosh I wish I had a role model.

I: Mmm

P: Like I wish my coaches were out...

I: Uh-huh

P: ... at the time, I wish I knew all the tennis players who were gay, but they were kind of this crowd that would like go out and drink and like not, I mean they weren't the kind of people you would really, really look up to.

I: Uh-huh

P: And I thought, I remember thinking that I wish I had somebody who could've played that role for me.

I: Yeah

P: So I thought, dammit, like maybe there is somebody who is gay and even younger than me that is feeling the same way that I was feeling. And I thought, if I could be that image or that role model for anyone. I was like, that would be great. So, I think that I decided I wanted to be out and I wanted to be proud of myself and I wanted to give someone who is in that situation that I was in maybe be, try to be that person for someone else.

I: Wow, that does sound very powerful in wanting to be that role model...

P: You know and its, I was just going to say its funny cause like now, now that I am out of school and coaching that umm I've now heard from actually a good friend of mine in [Western state]. But she was like I knew you were gay, I mean people were just talking about it all the time, but she was like I knew you were gay and you were out and she was like I looked up to that. And I was like oh! How cool! And I remember creating that intention and then years later that you know a couple of people notice and they were like yeah I can do this.

I: Oh, wow! Yeah, very cool. Now I know you mentioned that you, you know, weren't open until your junior year, but you did know that you were gay, umm when you went to college, but I was wondering, um, if you could tell me more about that point until you were able to umm be more proud of yourself.

P: Wow that's a great question. Ah...umm...gosh, I think I have known for a really, really long time. I, some people say they always knew. I just, it was never like, I think, well I just think I always knew. I always felt a little bit different.

I: Mhmm

P: And so, gosh that's a really good question. I don't know that I was like totally comfortable with it even though I knew. I mean I knew I wasn't going to be somebody else or live a life that wasn't my own life.

I: Mhmm

P: Maybe there is this is this whole spectrum of you know denial where like there's total denial and then there's like, well I kind of I know, but I don't want to know and then there's like, you know I know, but I don't want to tell.

I: Uh-huh

P: And I think that's kind of where I was and then all this drama started with rumors and it just felt really unsafe. I remember kind of thinking I don't know who I could trust.

I: Aahh

P: Umm, trust was an interesting word. Like trust not to tell other people, but then the question is why not?

I: Yeah

P: Like, what's the fear in that?

I: Mhmm

P: Um but yeah, I don't know. It just felt like a readiness thing for me. I think, I don't know I just think all the pieces came together and I was just like well this is who I am. Like, what are the options? Where else, where else is there to go other than coming out, being able to verbalize it, and coming out like this once. Like I'm sure you know it puts you up to maybe come out once a week or you come out to every friend, or come out to relatives, or its like a continual process. Umm, but I think I just got to the point where I was like what are the other options? And they don't look very good. And I just felt more, I think I was connected to a bigger, to the bigger picture as well in terms of how does this influencing other people who might be feeling the way I'm feeling.

I: Mhmm

P: And then, you know, in more of a even a wider scope of like kind of gay rights and how important coming out is to advancing the cause. I mean we still can't get married and I just saw that movie Milk, which is awesome. Well he was like coming out is the biggest way that we can be um, active in this cause because if you know someone that is gay then you are less likely to get discriminated against. But I think I got more connected to the bigger issue and so rather than just kind of my own life. So, I don't know if that answers your question.

I: Yeah, it does. It sounds interesting that the bigger picture it sounds like it motivated you more to, to want to come out even though you felt unsafe. You know at times when you thought about the bigger picture.

P: Yeah

I: Yeah

P: Yeah, yeah I guess that's how I would describe it. Cause and you know what can you do if you come out and someone doesn't like your song, wants to talk about you or someone thinks you're going to go to hell. You know, what can you do? It sucks when that's your teammate. I mean thank goodness it wasn't my coaches because I know they had been athletes where the coaches have a, you know, a policy around it a little bit. God knows what.

I: Uh-huh

P: So I was lucky in that sense.

I: I know you just mentioned that what if someone thinks you're going to go to hell. Like have you had comments ah like that from people or...

P: Oh...Sorry, what was the question?

I: Oh, like you mentioned you know what can you do if someone thinks you're going to go to hell or something like that. Do you get any comments from people like that?

P: Umm, well...good question. Not, not really. No it's funny now that I am coaching, I have player who is very Christian and I remember talking to her about it. Like, how do you feel about my lifestyle considering your beliefs and she said well I think that all homosexuals go to hell. And I was like, how do I have a coaching relationship with you when you feel like I am going you know go to hell or I am not living the life that God planned for me... (laughs). So that was hard for me just to go ok like those are your beliefs and I respect you for verbalizing that. Um, but its still like I'm like what the heck. It's hard, it's hard. But usually I think its just comments, more like homophobic comments.

I: Uh-huh

P: You know like the lesbian factor. I don't remember anything like that.

I: Ok, but it sounds like there were some homophobic comments that you did hear.

P: Yea, I think they kind of happened all along like, yeah, I don't know. And comments in terms of gender too, like boys used to, in high school because I always beat them all, the different words like butch, and you got balls, and I think it comes up. Well I think, you know our team was known like I said for being a lesbian factor or a lesbian team. It just kind of became a part of life, like you go to a tournament you know someone's going to be whispering, someone's going to be saying something. People are talking all over campus. Actually some administrator, I remember, tried to strike up a conversation with me about it. And like seeing this one girl on the team and I remember feeling really invaded.

I: Wow, yeah!

P: Yeah! I was like this guy is just digging for information. He just wants some gossip about what's going on. With this administrator I wasn't exactly sure of what his goal was. But I was like God are you kidding me?

I: Wow! So yeah the talking, the rumors all over the country, the administrators, there seems like there was a lot of talking.

P: Yeah, yeah, uh-huh, and I think even for coaches, I think our coaches got a lot of questions from other coaches and I think for the most part they were really good in terms of respecting our privacy and being proud of us. I think in a funny way they became proud of us because I think we were out before they were and actually I think it was senior year our coach came out to the team, but that was the third time she had ever come out to any of her teams in about 25 years.

I: Wow! What was that like for you?

P: It was awesome! Actually it was really awesome and I don't know if at the time or if it was later that I thought maybe in some way we've inspired her. Yeah, I think you know different generations face their own challenges and I think I started to think that maybe for her just you know living her life. Maybe that was enough of a stretch for her and that maybe she just didn't know how to be out to us or she didn't want to be out to us because recruiting is a big issue in terms of sexuality. So, I guess I just thought maybe she had come as far as she could and I think it must be pretty awesome for her to see the next generation make more progress maybe than theirs did. But I think their generation paved the way I think for gay rights and all that stuff.

I: Definitely, and can you also tell me more about how recruiting is a big issue that you just mentioned?

P: Oh, yeah that's a whole new can of worms. I think I asked, after I finished playing, I started coaching and working for the same coach, the one that was my coach when I was little. But I think I started to ask her about that. Well, how do you deal with these questions, what do you do? And her answer was pretty much, it's a non-issue, like your lifestyle should be a non-issue in terms of recruiting because you wouldn't want to lose an athlete because of that.

I: Mhm

P: And I thought oh that's interesting and then actually and I had a partner after school when I was coaching and you know I would bring her to certain functions just as I think that I would if it were a boyfriend that I had. And I remember my boss saying to me, she's like "you're too affectionate."

I: Ohh

P: Yeah with my partner and I just was taken aback. I was like am I really, I thought. And I tried to make a point to show that we're a couple in a non-offensive way. I don't think it's too overt, but I don't want to be one of those gay couples who you don't know they're together.

I: Mhmm

P: So I thought, ok I should touch her, that's what a heterosexual couple would do. I should say this is my partner, I should make a point so that they know that that's who we are, we're not just

friends or roommates. But I remember my boss saying I am too flagrant, like I'm not professional enough.

I: Wow

P: And I really didn't feel that way to my core and I thought maybe that's just her generation. You know a little bit conservative with that kind of stuff. But then I had this one recruit that came down on campus, an Indian family, and I had a ring on my wedding finger, because my partner and I were committed at the time, and she said "are you married?" I was like oh god-damnit! We were actually domestic partners, so in [western state], that's pretty much marriage.

I: Mhmm

P: And I just said "No!". And I will never forget, I'm just like uhh no. And it was such an omission, it was such a lie and then I said well I need to figure out what to do with this situation and I don't think I made a real plan about what my values were and who I was going to be. So, I was just stuck and I just lied because I guess I just assumed that they weren't going to accept me because they were Indian and they were traditional. And I just thought oh I am not going to even go there but then I thought that's just awful because I compromised a part of my life for people I don't even know. So, I guess recently there was a mother on the phone that said, "Well, can I ask you a personal question?" And I'm like well sure, yeah I don't mind, like if you are going to send your daughter halfway across the world to come here for free, of course you can. She goes "Are you married?" And basically she's saying I'd liked to know if you're gay. You know are you married? Do you have kids? I said no I'm not and that was it. I mean I think I could've, I know what she was getting at and I didn't really make a point to say it. Oh, no but I have a partner or, and I didn't have a partner at the time, but yeah it's still difficult, it's still difficult.

I: Yeah

P: Maybe I'm contradicting myself here, I don't, I haven't really been open and out in recruiting and it's hard because you don't have much of a foundation with people, but I don't think that should stop people from coming out. But I think it does come into to it because hey I want to be competitive, I want to recruit good athletes, but at what cost? So I think I still have some work to do there.

I: So it sounds like there's a lot of different things that you think of and what feels safe to you, and what does that feel like compromising, is it an omission that you feel comfortable with or is it something that you want to be a role model for.

P: Well, that's really true.

I: Well, um briefly I want to summarize what I've heard so far and then see if there's something that we haven't talked about that you would like to add. I know you started out with talking about how it was challenging and you went through some turmoil and you know with your

coaches not being out when you were there. You knew, right from the start that you were gay, but you weren't really open until your junior year and you know wanting to be a role model was something that really kind of pushed you past the fear of being labeled and the discrimination. And also that critical moment you mentioned about being confronted about race, that seemed to be very important for you to come out to the team more. It was interesting in how you described feeling exposed out on the court or naked and talking about that and your performance's negative consequences and that later you moved to towards more feeling proud and being able to serve as a role model. And now as a coach you are going through difficult things as well and you know with the recruiting aspect and not wanting to compromise yourself, but sometimes omitting some things. Does that sound accurate? Is there anything that I missed or that you want to add to that?

P: Yeah I think that sounds pretty good. This is such an interesting conversation, I think I could talk forever about it. Um, yeah, I guess I did probably come out to people more my junior year and I don't think I came out to my family until junior year either. That's one thing I've noticed, I always wanted to look at interesting research if gay people tend to separate themselves from their families? Or maybe geographically or something. I just felt like I needed to do that cause like we're usually a minority in our families. Like I'm the only one who's gay out of five people. So, I just, I always felt different around them and I think that's part of it like being over here and feeling like I had to distance myself away from them just to explore and not feel like I wonder what they think. I didn't really want to think about for a long time until I got this urge to tell them.

I: Mhmm. How was that when you told your family then, you know them being far away with the distance, but still telling them that?

P: Yea, I think by that time I felt like I kind of had my own life, like I felt pretty independent. I had been living on my own, I had some of my own money and I kind of knew I was going to end up staying in the states. But I felt really independent and maybe in the sense if they were judging me or couldn't accept me that, not that it didn't matter but, that I'd be ok, like I felt like my own entity.

I: Mhmm

P: And for the most part it was good, they were pretty accepting. I think my mom went through her, you know it's just a phase and did you not meet the right guy, did you have a bad experience, all that kind of stuff. And I'm like come on mom, like she knows me more than anyone else. So I was a bit disappointed. I mean I knew she knew, but she was kind of in denial a little bit. I guess they say that parents go through the same coming out process as we go through, so I just thought that I had to give her time. And now she's pretty good about it. She's kind of outspoken with friends of hers or if she hears someone making a dumb comment she'll say well you know. Some guy was making a comment about some gay golfer, like her being a dyke or whatever and my mom was like oh really? My daughter's gay. And the guy was oh, oh. So immediately he was aware that he was being really derogatory and I was like "You go girl!"

That was awesome that my mom could get to the point where she could say that. But I think she nailed it.

I: Well, then is there anything else you would like to add before I turn the recorder off?

P: Well...yeah I'm thinking more about that comment I made about how we had that administrator that was kind of being unprofessional and that's funny because then I started working out of the coaching staff and he kind of persisted with some of those questions. Like tell me about this and that, and you guys are rooming together what happened with you. Kind of brings me to a bigger point about what needs to be done in terms of education and honestly research is huge. We need to know what our own stories are, about our own experiences. But I know I'm at a different school and it was so cool because our AD ,a female, and she was pretty outspoken in terms of women's rights and equality, but also gay rights. So, there's a climate here where it's pretty accepting and pretty open and we've actually done a workshop on sexuality. And I thought wow, this is really cutting edge. She actually was involved in some kind of scandal back in [Southeastern state], she had an issue, this could be of interest to you, there's this swim team, they have this end of year party, the coaches were there, and the kids were drinking. So there was an issue, because they were drinking and the coaches were present. There was something else that came out that two girls were kissing at this party then people got wind of it. So, there was these two issues that came out. One was drinking and one was, they called it hazing. But it wasn't hazing at all, these girls were like making out, they were dating each other, or whatever they were doing. So my AD now was the AD there at the time. And so she's overseeing this school program who's involved in this scandal, and the chancellor, the president or whoever of this school said to her you need to fire the coach, um, the swim coach and she knew that that was partly about homophobia. That they thought now that these girls were kissing and we kind of have that reputation. And she said she was like no I'm not firing the swim coach. So imagine your boss tells you that you need to fire somebody you're supervising and you say no to your boss. So she stood up for what she knew was right and it compromised her own job. And she just recently retold the whole story and I thought oh my goodness this lady's a pioneer, and really kind of a visionary cause she's not gay. She's married and has a kid, but she gets it and she's willing to take a stand and here we are once a year hopefully we're going to do these diversity workshops on sexuality and I thought wow, this is really cool. A lot of athletic departments or workplaces around the country I'm sure are pretty full of homophiles.

I: So it really sounds like the activism against homophobia and for gay rights is something pretty important to you from this.

P: Yeah, uh-huh, I think it's really shaped my world view and like who I am as a person. Well, I do workshops cause for my kids too on diversity and as soon as I got here on my campus I came out to my team, I came out in the first meeting and said that I was gay, this is a picture of my partner. If you guys have any questions I'm really open to what you have to say. And a couple of my kids who had been seniors that graduated came up to me and said that was awesome, we really respected you for doing that. So that's pretty cool. We do workshops with the girls cause they're pretty white, pretty straight, pretty economically privileged group, so I kind of feel like

this is partly my role in education to open their eyes for what's going on, cause they may have never felt discriminated against. And sometimes I think that isolates me, they're like well she's still in the feminist thing, doing the thing that she does, but I think in the bigger picture they will stop to open their eyes to some of these things. One of the guys in the workshop said that being gay was my entry point into looking at social justice and I thought oh that's such a cool way of saying it. Cause I think it was the same thing for me.

I: Well that's awesome. Definitely I could see pride in what you're doing now, also with your team. That's great.

P: Definitely.

I: Ok, anything else you would like to add to that then?

P: No I think I am just about out of air!

Interview Transcript #3 - Cara

I: So if you could tell me in as much detail as possible your experience of being an athlete who identifies as being lesbian.

P: Well I feel like that is a really loaded question, just like saying what's your experience of being a student who identifies as a straight person, it's, it's all of your life. But umm, I think that growing up, for me I can kinda go back and see, growing up, umm I didn't date girls. I went, I lived in [Southeastern city], well south [Southeastern city], and went to a Christian school, Church of Christ School, which is very conservative and umm, I graduated with fifty-five people so I went there from 2nd grade to 12th grade so you kinda grow up and everybody is the same. You might listen to different music, or you might play a different sport, or like the small things. But, like at the core, everybody's the same. And like I grew up with five my really close female friends, three are married, one's engaged right now, so that was just, I was just, I was just kinda everybody did the same thing. So then like in college and I played travel ball and stuff but still wasn't really exposed to any lesbian, like especially people that were out. The people that were like, well they grow up and umm, but umm I hadn't been, and then I came to college and freshman class, all my teammates, there were seven of us; three from [Southeastern city], two from, no from [Western state], and one from [Midwestern state], no four from [Southeastern state]. Sorry, four from [Southeastern state], three from [Western state], and one from [Midwestern state]. So that's seven, seven or eight. And umm, I got to know them and we went to class. When I came to college I instantly had fourteen sisters, and I know like sororities do their sisters, but playing sports are totally different. You're together for everything, you have to have this respect and trust for each other and so you get really close to people. And you know I was with these girls for three or four months and one night I was in the car with one of my girls and umm, I was like, "What's with the other ones, What's going on? Why do they go everywhere together? Are they dating or something?" And my other friend was like, "Yeah they are." And I was like, "What?! Really?" And she was like, "Yeah." And I was like, "hmm..." So by that point it worked out really well, cause by that point I had a relationship with them, like they were my friends so them being gay did not change anything. It was just like hmm, because I had the stereotype in my head from growing up really conservative that to be gay you have to be this and this, like you know; you have to have short hair and dress like a boy and all this stuff. And so like being around it, that's how I integrated into the whole culture, I guess. And it wasn't for another year and a half that I started dating a girl. And the girl that I dated played softball for Alabama, and umm, one of her teammates came up here cause she was friends with one of my teammates and it was like, she was like, one of my teammates has a crush on you. And I was like, "well umm, I have a boyfriend," I dated a guy from my senior year of high school till the end of my sophomore year of college. So I said "I have a boyfriend, I'm not really interested." I appreciate it you know I tried to be respectful, like I appreciate it but, not interested. So she went back and tells her this, and this girls writes me you know on facebook and it's like, "sorry if I crossed the line, I didn't mean to be like that, like didn't mean to offend you." And I was like, "No, it's cool. I appreciate that you understand that I'm not interested." So we started talking and being friends. And then through the course of about two months we started dating. And in hindsight, like, in high school I always had female friends that I was a lot closer to than other

people. Like more people that I was like, like, I would hang out with her. It wasn't a sexual thing and technically I don't really see it as a crush but it could have been like if I had even let the thought in my mind maybe I was sexually attracted to them, that was never an issue. I never even, I probably didn't even look at a girl and think she's hot or she's not until I was, I'm 23 now, so I was probably 22. I started dating my first girlfriend when I was 20... 20. So I mean when I started dating her, it wasn't like an instant thing, it was like let's just do this and see where it goes. You know it was different, I like her, and then it kinda went from there to different things. And like now I have no problem with it, but it's a gradual thing, it's not something I just jumped into. And I'm, I'm not one of those people, I have been this since birth, like it never crossed my mind really until I was in college. The people in high school would always joke cause I played softball, a lesbian sport, which is totally not true, umm my freshman year, my friend that was a lesbian was the only lesbian on my team. And so, my sophomore year there were two. And then I started dating a girl, so I mean it's different at different schools. I mean some schools have like one straight girl. But I mean, like here at [Southeastern university], it was totally not like that. So um people would joke and, and it bothered me and it never really occurred to me until I came to college, that that was even really an option. So I don't know if that's weird or not, but it's what happened.

I: Okay, you mentioned the stereotype and softball being a lesbian team. Can you tell me more about your experience with that?

P: That's actually something you hear about growing up and it's in like movies and stuff. Like dodgeball when the girl, she throws and then the guy's like that dyke can throw. She's had to play softball for how many years, and just stuff like that. And it's like the culture of softball is so unique. In volleyball you have short spandex shorts, I mean there's lesbians in volleyball too. But it's a different culture, like guys will watch volleyball but most guys are like softball is more dirty, it's not flattering as far as the way we look when we get done after we play. I guess it's just the stereotype that gets picked up that a lot of lesbians play, which is partly true but I don't, I think from my experience, at school, like here at [Southeastern university] there are more lesbians on the basketball team then there are on the softball team. So just to pin it on one person I don't think that really, I think that athletes, I think it's easier for an athlete to admit that their lesbian and be okay with it, but I don't think that the sport per say has anything to do with it, whichever sport they play, I don't think that has anything to do with it. (Cough)

I: You also mentioned umm like the culture a few times, and I think you talked about getting integrated into the culture, can you tell me more about that?

P: It's just totally different; when I started dating a girl she played [NCAA Division I athletic conference] softball too. It was just really funny cause we umm, you find out all these different things about people, other people. Like that are dating other people that are on other different teams and that are lesbians and cause we have call it the underground [NCAA Division I athletic conference], so it's not that people just know, it's not stuff they are going to put on T.V. but it's like stuff that happens behind the scenes. Like you know, people dating other people on other teams and people dating people on their teams, people break up. Yeah just drama, just your

normal life. But it's like softball is like a club you know you have this sorority and this fraternity and how they mingle and cross date and whatever, it's the same thing, but it's just different teams. And so umm, just kinda getting used to that kind of thing and umm I've met a lot of new people. Once I met my first girlfriend I met a lot of different people that played ball at different places and they were gay and they were friends with my girlfriend and their friends with my girlfriends roommate or this and that. I met just different people and then even know I say culture because it's different, umm, like when I go out somewhere, umm, I'm kinda particular about where I go out. I don't like to go to gay clubs and it pisses my girlfriend off, but umm, it's just like weird to me, like I don't like places where you go and have to be gay or straight. I like places where you can be who you are and have a good time, like go have a drink, like I don't like going to [dance club] downtown or in the [specific area of town] because especially downstairs it's very frat-tastic and if you don't look like this or act like this then your totally not accepted. I mean I've gone there twice and it was with some of my friends and like both times my friends were the only people that talked to me. And it was the way that, the way most people react to me like in different settings, like at work, or I'm giving softball lessons or at work on campus or something I'm like why won't people talk to me? People always talk to me, and it's just different, I like, it's something, I don't know, you can't really explain it until your in it an it's, I just like some kind of mixture of this straight world and then there's the totally gay world where everybody hangs out with gay people and everything and I think there both a little bit out of reality. And I like to be somewhere in the middle. I mean I like to be around straight people, gay people, I don't really care what you are, as long as you're open minded and you don't sit there and bash gay people or bash straight people, like people are people. Who cares who you sleep with? I mean that's my opinion.

I: I know you mentioned before not feeling accepted how you act or what not. You told me before it's awful hard to explain but can you try to explain more what that can mean?

P: Well, I feel like people at some places you go look at how you dress, or look at who you're with, or if I was standing somewhere and had my arm around my girlfriend then people give us certain looks. It's like okay, well, if one of the guys had his arm around me, would you look at me the same way? Definitely not. And it's just like you like to think that certain things don't happen. Like you like to think there isn't racism in America, which is bull shit. And you like to think that, you know, people don't look at interracial relationships, and people accept gay people and don't care what you do. It's totally, I think it's actually, in my experience I get more being gay than I do being black or female or anything like that. And I, it might make it worse that I am in an interracial lesbian relationship, but umm, cause especially I think that, I think not only being a lesbian and being black, I can't imagine being a guy and being gay. Because that's a weird thing too because guys get it so much worse than girls because the girls, being lesbian is still kind of sexy to some people, and umm, I think it's way more accepted than being a gay guy. And just knowing you can't walk around and hold hands, like, straight people can do, I mean make out in public. But if two guys did that somewhere it's a huge deal. It's like outwardly a huge deal; people would give them weird looks or yell something and stuff like that. And I just think it's just a totally different world and people just don't, some people, some people, in public, there's always someone that's not accepting of that kind of thing.

I: Yeah, You mentioned a lot of like looks or comments and things like that, that are sometimes outward and sometimes not that you experience.

P: Yeah, like my girlfriend, I'm the first girl she's dated and we worked together and that's how we met. Then we started dating and we were at this bar together and everybody knows us, they've known her for three years before I came along, and then they got to know me, and then they got to know us together, and people still will like, guys will come up to her, a big group of guys and they'll be like, "you're not really gay, what are you doing," like that kind of thing. Like we've been together for two years now and still just stupid, ignorant comments. Or, it's like, does it really matter if she dates guys and then a girl for two years, as long as she's happy, like, just people. Like uh, my old roommates finance just can't grasp the whole lesbian thing. He thinks he's funny about it, but he's really, really not and he'll say, he'll comment like, "you just really need some dick in your life," or something like that. It's like no, it's not about that and like people just don't understand and they don't try to understand. Like people just think they're right and whatever their opinion is is right. People have their opinion, that's okay but don't try to force it on me and my relationship. But don't disrespect me and ask my girlfriend when she is going to be out of this stage, it just doesn't make sense, like you wouldn't do it to a guy and a girl so why would you do it to me?

I: Can you tell me more about what it's like for people to not understand you, or understand what it's like, or...

P: Umm, well I think that I've kind of been lucky in that sense because I've been around playing softball, I've been around people that don't necessarily understand but don't do anything, accept it, like it is what it is and move on. Umm but it's just like, depending on the person usually, but like my roommate, I even had a talk with her, like, "look [Bob] keeps saying all this stuff, like how necessary is that," like, I know he doesn't mean it bad but if he's saying stuff about me being gay like sarcastically, and he says he's okay with gay people, but if has to say something, is he really? If he was really okay with it couldn't he just be okay with it and let that be the end of it? But I mean, like, not only does that hurt me as his friend cause I've known him since I was a kid, but it like makes me think that he's not okay with not my lifestyle, but with gay lifestyles in general and like he says he's okay with it because it's me but what if it wasn't me? What if it was you know, one of his buddies comes out, would he be okay with it or would he make some comments? It's just that kind of stuff. It's one thing not understand like, "oh how do you guys have sex, or oh, like, how did you know you were gay, or how did you start talking to [Barb] if she was dating a guy, " and stuff like that. It's one thing to not understand that but it's a totally different thing to just, to be ignorant to it and not even try. Like I could be sitting here and say I've dated guys, I've had sex with guys, I have no desire to have a penis, I really don't. And this is why because of guys like this, but he wouldn't understand it, he'd be like, "oh come on", like it's like never ending.

I: That sounds pretty pressuring, the never ending.

P: Yeah, it's just like understand, you don't even have to understand just accept it, this is what I am and move on! And I mean it so, and if they're educated questions I don't mind, because people try to understand, I feel like people try to understand things on their own terms. So if it's an educated question like, "I was just wondering, I mean, anything, like, have you told your parents or how is going out in public with your girlfriend?" Like that stuff, I don't mind that at all, especially if they are trying to understand and be educated. But when it's just stupidity, and your, your internal thought processes just spewing out and you're not even listening. It's not about, it's just you talking and saying nothingness. Like just, it just hurts, it doesn't make sense to me. Like I don't ask him, I don't ask him why he doesn't want a dick in his ass, sorry.

I: It's okay

P: But yeah, I'm okay with him not wanting it, like I don't care, so.

I: Yeah

P: It's just weird, it's just you'd think that if I was in a straight relationship that would never happen.

I: Yeah, and you mentioned that it hurts, you know, when he says things like that. Could you tell me more about that?

P: Yeah, when it's your friend, he's supposed to be there for you and be your friend, and it hurts when they say stuff about you know, the way you live especially when I was living with his fiancé because he was there all the time and like you say your okay with it, but you're not. So when he came over it was just kind of awkward, like you know, you guys can sit there and cuddle but if I sit there with [girlfriend] he would just sit there and think, "Why would she want to do that, why, why?" And it's just like, just accept me for who I am and let's just let that be the end of it. I don't want to know about your sex life, so why do you need to know about mine? Just enjoy our time, just be friends.

I: You also mentioned growing up in a very, I think, conservative, Christian type setting, and I'm wondering if you could tell me more about that too.

P: Oh man, it was, it was great, it was literally, umm, like I said, we were taught, you're gay, you're going to hell. Straight out of the Bible, and like I'm not going to get on anything thing more religious, but just like straight up word for word out of the Bible. And, umm, I never really, well I knew of one gay guy when I was growing up, he worked for my mom for a short time and that was the extent of all the gay people I knew. Because where, where I was I went to a Church of Christ high school, the travel team I played on from the time I was 10-18 in the summer, like most people went to church, it's, it's the suburbs of [Southeastern city], like Bible belt, Brady Bunch kind of thing. We had one Catholic girl on our team, half the people are Church of Christ, Baptist, you know everybody's the same. And so when I came to college I was just, I was choosing between here and [Southeastern university]. And [Southeastern university], I knew that

coming from the high school I went to going to [Southeastern university] I would do the same thing I have always done. I would see the same kind of people and if I wanted, literally, my thing was, if I wanted to play ball, get an education, and then get married and go on with life, then I would go to [Southeastern university]. But when it came time to chose I was like, you know I can go to [Southeastern university] get done, get married, grow up, do all that stuff, or I can go to [chosen Southeastern university] and see what I'm really made of, see what kind of person I am, get in a more diverse setting with other people, and you know, see what I'm about. Without my parents, without going to church every Sunday because I need to. To see what it's all about, and that's what I did and it's the best decision of my life.

I: Yea, so sounds like you mentioned the same a lot and when you came here there was much more diversity in many different areas.

P: Oh, so different.

I: Can you tell me more about how it was different for you?

P: Uh everything, for one thing I don't have my parents here all the time, three hours away is close enough for sure. But then umm, my roommate freshman year is from [a different Southeastern state], she ran track and she was the greatest person ever and umm, she was just really good for me, cause umm, she taught me to stand up for myself and to be my own person and umm, I made really good friends on my team obviously and playing softball at this level is just, I mean it was amazing, umm, just meeting different people from different places. And getting to hear different, different ideas, umm, about all kinds of different things. Like I umm, had girls on my team that hadn't been to church, ever, which I thought didn't think that existed, I didn't know that happened. But also, I had umm, one of my best friends come up here with me, we went to preschool together, we played ball together through high school, like on the travel team and she would come up here and I would always call her my security blanket because I know that things get crazy and I forget where I came from in the world and I always go back to her. We can sit down and talk about things and umm, kinda figure it out from a moral point of view, cause were both.....so.

I: Sounds like some good support there.

P: Yeah, being on a team is like great support, I mean, in everything. Cause it's like, it's just like, I'm an only child, but it's like a family where you know, "I love you, I might not like you right now, but I respect you and I love you," and in a way you depend on each other. So I mean, especially like, when I started dating girls and stuff, I, I think that people think that coming out is like, "oh yea, you're out and everything," but really I mean, I was real slow, I picked which people I told, and who knew and made sure, especially at first that I had people that fully supported me. You know cause I didn't know if it was really what I wanted to do or if it was going to be like a thing or whatever. So umm, but my teammates, most, well I would say, ninety-five percent of them were very supportive. And the ones that weren't, umm, like, actually both of them were my roommates. They weren't quite supportive, they were just like, didn't understand,

didn't understand how I wanted to date girls. But I never, they never said anything to me about it, but I lived with them so I could kind of tell, just a little bit of tension at first, they had to get used to it I guess. But I mean it wasn't anything because uh, I was gay, it was just getting used to me being different, I guess now, not being with boys anymore, and dating this girl. And umm, just going through that kind of thing, my teammates were great and I think that you forget that when you play sports, especially when you come out to public, you forget that the whole world is not, your whole world is not the world. So my teammates were cool with it, like whenever you hang out with athletes, so like the whole football team, they didn't care, whatever, baseball team, you know girls basketball team like hey welcome to the club, like that kind of thing and then you forget that the whole world's not like that. The whole world's not that inviting. Like I was saying, you can't just do whatever you want. I mean, when I was playing ball, you know, if I wanted to hold my girlfriends hand in front of my teammates, no one would have ever looked. But, you can't do that on [location on campus] or somewhere like that, it's just different. You really forget about that and I think that, especially with like your family, I didn't come out to my parents until probably a year ago. I broke up with my first girlfriend and started dating my next girlfriend, but umm, you forget that umm, just because you're so comfortable with it doesn't mean everyone else is. Doesn't mean, like I just assume people know. Like I prefer to wait, like there were some people that I actually told and there were some people, I assume you know, I'm not going to tell you caused it'd just be an awkward moment. And that's how I came out to my parents, so umm, you just forget that people aren't there every day and they don't see the things that you do and it's just, it's just funny now cause some people are still like, "what? you're gay?" and I don't wear my sexuality on my sleeve, I don't feel like I need to. And it's just like, really, you didn't know? So it's just funny.

I: It's interesting, you say wear it as your sleeve, you don't do that. And you mentioned how heterosexuals don't have to say, you know, "I'm heterosexual," that distinction that you talked about.

P: Yeah, some people you know, you see a car drive by with like the gay stickers and stuff. If that's what you wanna do, then that's what you wanna do, but I don't need straight people throwing, they don't throw it in my face that they're straight, so why should I throw it in their face that I'm gay. I'm not ashamed of it in anyway, but I don't feel like when I introduce myself I should be like, "Hey my name is [Cara], and I'm gay." Like, it's just not a necessity. Umm, I'm not, I don't hide it, if someone asked me I would tell them and you know in class, I just graduated in December, and when I had class, I majored in communications, which is small. So I went to class with people over and over and when I would want to talk about my girlfriend I would say, "Hey my girlfriend..." and I would say it like it's nothing. It's like if you make a big deal about it, people are more likely to react, like make a big deal about it. But if you are just kinda, it's no big deal, I'm still the same person. And that's another thing, I like people to know me before I'm actually like, "Yeah I'm gay."

I: Yeah

P: Because I don't want them to see me as the gay person, I want them to know me, and then it's easier for them to accept it. And that's how it is with me and my friends.

I: Yea, that makes sense. Could you tell me more about the team and coming out to them. You mentioned that it was actually really great, other than your two roommates, there was a little tension at first, but could you tell me more about that part?

P: My umm, well umm, obviously the first person that knew was my friend that was gay, cause at this time, it was my sophomore year, end of my sophomore year, we were like best friends and we still are. We got really, really close my sophomore year and so I was telling her, "I think I might like this girl, I'm not sure, yadda, yadda," and she is all I talked to. She was just really cool about it. Like, "if you want to do it then do it, you can see what happens, it's not like you're signing a contract, you can do whatever you want." So then umm, the next person I told was another one of my really good friends, she's a couple years older, she's a female so umm, her sister is actually a lesbian. She was really cool with it, she was just like, "That's really cool, that's fine, do whatever you want to do." I feel like whenever you play ball, being a lesbian isn't a big deal, it's not, I mean, your teammates know that you respect them and like, I'm not checking you out in the locker room. The last thing I want to do is make me uncomfortable and you the same. It's like hey, do what you do buddy, and umm, some people, the people that are like really, really heterosexual, they were more umm, I was more hesitant to tell them just because they are like, "why?" Like, they, really, they don't mean it in a bad way but their like, "another one turned?" Cause like another girl on my team dabbled in being a lesbian and then umm, like everyone was like, "really?" I think it was different when we you're straight and then gay, then if you're gay the whole time. People on my team had questions for me because I dated a guy and also dated a girl, "well why?" And I think that's understandable, but you know, [Sherry], my friend that has been gay the whole time, no one ever thought anything about it, they're just like whatever.

I: Yeah, could you tell me more what it was like then, the, you know, going from dating a guy to that period of your first girlfriend?

P: Oh, well actually, I'll go back to when I first started talking to her. Umm, but it was just different, just talking to a girl is more personal, especially it really helped if she played ball. Umm, my ex-boyfriend was not athletic at all, he was in the military so he didn't really understand what I was going through with all the stuff. And she was a senior at [Southeastern university] so she understood, she was going through the same thing. So we talked about ball, it was the end of the season so, you know talked about what happened in practice and we talked about teammates and this and that. And then she'd come up to see me play and it was just more of like, more intimacy I guess than you would have when you first started dating a guy. And like, in my experience with the two girls I dated, like, it's just quicker, like the intimacy part, just telling each other things, and getting to know each other and you don't really have that [?] like kind of have in a heterosexual relationship, or that I had. Where you don't know if they're playing you to try to get in your pants, like with a girl, it's like, what happens, happens. I don't think that there's any kind of handbooks like I a heterosexual relationship on having sex. Like we have, but

like, it's more natural it feels to me, like it's more natural to start a relationship with a girl, just like a friendship. And you know it was really easy to me.

I: Yeah, let's see, let me summarize what I've got so far and then we can see if there's anything you want to add or something. So you started out talking about how you come from a really conservative um, religious area and everything was the same and um, you initially started dating guys. And then when you got to college everything was different, you were away from your parents, you had wonderful, supportive teammates, you eventually ended up dating another girl, um, and it felt very natural for you, and you kind of came out to the team with mostly support. You mentioned having um, problems with not being able, like the different worlds, gay world and the straight world and wanting you know there to be just one world, and you know comments from people that can be hurtful, umm, you know the ignorance and not understanding. And then, umm, gosh let me think, I know there's more, but that's a short summary of what I've heard so far. Is there anything that you want to add, or correct me on, or..

P: Umm, I think that a lot of people don't understand, like, when you say, like, people will think or make it look like I was gay because that was, not necessarily the cool thing to do, but cause I had the opportunity to do it, that's how I see it.

I: Yeah

P: I just want to make sure that, that it wasn't, it was just that I never even let myself think, "go there". Or like, they way I was raised, I mean I couldn't until I came to college and was exposed to different things and realized that it's not always black and white, like there's no, there's right and wrong, but just cause I feel this way, doesn't mean that it's right or wrong, you know, you're going to have to decide for yourself. So I just wanted to make sure that you knew I didn't do it cause it was fun or something like that, like the cool thing to do. And umm, I guess one of the main things is that, my friends that are gay that play sports, one of the main things that's different is like, when they knew they were gay, umm, some people, like my first girlfriend umm, she knew when she was twelve, whenever, she realized she was gay. But umm, my best friend, I knew her in high school and her situation was similar to mine, where she never even thought about it and then a girl cam on to her and she was like, "hmm", and over time, like, "oh okay". And I know people that still to this day may come out, or may not. And some people know they are gay and then they're not. Every person is different, I feel like, umm, for some reason a lot of times it's easier to understand it when you're in the situation. Like if I hadn't come out of the closet, it'd be easier for me to understand why she's not or why she, or her like, she did in high school, but every person is different.

I: Yeah

P: And I think a lot of it has to do with your family, umm, my dad is very supportive of me being gay, my mom is very supportive of me, but along with the typical Church of Christ mom, where she knows I'm gay, she loves my girlfriend, but we don't talk about it. And my dad's real cool about it, I think that's why, it has a lot to do with their points of view of life. And my mom,

she's just strict, country raised, my dad was raised a different way, but, umm, but I think coming out has a lot to do with that. Like everyone knows, I'm like, do you have a script in your head when you start coming out, as to who is gonna say what. But, it's one of the most stressful things you can do, especially before you come out, if you're already dating someone, trying to keep it a secret and I mean, and you never know what kind of reaction, you kinda have an idea of how people are going to react, but you have don't know until it happens.

I: Yeah

P: So, I can understand why people put it off as long as possible. Cause I think that if I didn't have my teammates and I didn't know how they were gonna react, I woulda put it off even longer too.

I: It sounds like it was stressful for you even though you had such great teammates.

P: It was stressful cause they knew, knew the girl that I was dating, through softball and stuff, and umm, actually just telling people. Especially, like telling gay people, it isn't a big deal, but telling heterosexual people then that's when you get nervous because, like, they don't understand. And like, I don't expect people to understand, like, I'm just telling you, this is how it is, and so, since like, heterosexual people don't understand that, I don't expect them to understand how hard it is for me to come out. You know what I mean? But, yeah I mean, in hindsight I totally understand why people don't do it for long periods of time.

I: Yeah

P: I mean, even until they're way into adulthood. Cause in some situations things would be so much easier if you don't have that family and you don't have that support system, like I do.

I: Yeah, it sounds like you feel pretty lucky. You mentioned a script too, like a script of what you'd say to some people. Could you tell me more about that?

P: Yeah, well being a communications major, one of the theories is that every action has a script.

I: Okay

P: So like on the way here I was thinking about some of the things I was going to tell you and stuff like that, and umm, it either goes by or it doesn't go by. And umm, it's definitely the same thing when you're coming out, you know [??] her sister's totally cool with it and all, she won't have a problem with it. And one of my other friends, [Charity], I don't know if Charity will understand, and umm, but, she'll still love me, but like our relationship won't change. It will just take her a little bit of getting used to. And then umm, the other of my teammates, like well uh, one of the teammates actually ended up being my best friend. I just moved out of living with her, she, I was like, I was like, she, I don't think that [Melinda] will understand. And I don't know

why, but like umm, she's pretty religious, and umm, we've been to parties together and whatever, and I've talked to guys with her and I don't think she'll not necessarily understand, but I don't think she'll see it coming. And I don't think that, you know, that she'll really grasp like that that's what I want to be. She'll probably just think I'm doing it cause [Sharon] does it, and [Sharon's] my friend. Umm, but I have these people I've told, the easier ones you tell first, that way you can get them on your side just in case something happens the other ones. But you know, some of them turned out the way I thought they would, and some of them turned out way better. Umm you know like, [Matthew] was like, okay that's cool, that doesn't change you, so I was like, cool. And then umm, my friend that I had just lived with and was umm, from [Southeastern city] with me, umm, I didn't expect her to understand because she grew up the same way I did.

I: Right

P: She's definitely straight, but umm, she was cool with it too, and they were both cool with it and we ended up living together for a year and a half and them and my girlfriend are like BFF basically. And, they talk all the time, and they're just cool with it so umm, some people I think that you, you underestimate them.

I: Uh huh

P: And some people you don't, you peg them and you get the reaction you're expecting, so uh, but yeah, I definitely think there is a strategy involved with coming out.

I: Yeah, that makes sense. It sounds like another big theme for you is like, the understanding piece among people and having them understand or not understand.

P: Yeah

I: It sounds like there was a fear that someone would think you were doing it as like a fad or that you're doing cause of you know, other people or something like that.

P: Yeah, some people, umm, like I said, like I don't care if you understand why I'm doing it, just that you accept it and just don't treat me any different. Like, that's all I ask, I mean in life in general. And umm, I think that, I mean, everywhere you go, the same thing happens, like you see some one, umm, like if I saw you walking down the street, I'm like okay, she doesn't look okay with me being gay. If I met you, no offense to you but just looking at you I would be like, uh, I wouldn't just voluntarily say, "Hey, I'm gay." Just like one of my friends I had class with, was in a sorority, dated [football star player], like so cute, Barbie doll, and like when you see her you say to yourself, "Like oh, she's a bitch, got to be stuck up," coolest person ever. Like, we still talk and we haven't had a class together in two years almost, and it's so cool, and I think that happens in everything. Every time you see someone, in your head, you play it up to whatever your experience has been with someone who looks like that, or someone that acts like that, or someone that color or dresses like that or whatever. And, uhh, I mean I obviously thought I was right but that's a problem.

I: And I know in the beginning you mentioned that it was a loaded question and there is a lot to answer with it, do you feel like you have kinda gotten to speak about each aspect that you wanted to? Is there anything that you would like to add to any part?

P: Mmm, well I think that it's different depending on what school you go to, what team you're on, as far as your experience being gay. But I feel like over all, if you're gonna be gay, the safest place to do it is in sports, being a lesbian and playing sports. Because, I can't like pin point why but that's just like, that's cool. And my opinion has a lot to do with the fact, you know, you are who you are, but right now we gotta go lift weights and I really need you to bring you're A game in here, or you know, we're about to go play and that depends, like you depend on each other so much, and you spend so much time together that you respect each other and you trust each other and so it doesn't matter. Just like there's a gay person on my team and there's a girl that slept with every guy, well, I don't necessarily agree with that doesn't change the fact that she's my teammate and you talk shit to her, I'm gonna kick your ass. Like, it's the same thing.

I: Yeah

P: And I feel like that is the common denominator in women's athletics, especially in college level, is that bond and regardless of what you do, at the end of the day, you're my teammate and that's all that matters.

I: Yeah, being a teammate is huge.

P: Oh yeah

I: And you also mentioned like the level of playing here and in college level is pretty big.

P: Oh yeah, I mean I played, I know a kid, I've played against people from my high school and I've played [??] college twice. just like, my roommate is still around, my old roommate is still around. Like, it's just ridiculous, like just stuff that you would never think about when you're, when you're a kid. Like, that won't be me, and it's you, crazy.

I: Yeah, haha, that's awesome, congratulations on being able to do that, yeah. Well is there anything else you'd like to add then before I turn off the recorder?

P: I think that's good.

I: Alright

Interview Transcript #4 - Dee

I: Ok so if you can just tell me in as much detail as possible your experience of being an athlete who identifies as lesbian.

P: Um particularly particularly for choosing psychology experiences?

I: Um it could be to any experiences.

P: Ok, um, let's see ok like I guess I would probably begin in college because that's when I began to personally identify as a lesbian. Um and um I think that maybe um I was in not only an all women's sporting environment, but also an all women's college environment so it made it um an easy place to [?] about identity um and a very open and welcoming environment um lets see just generally what my experiences were like um?

I: Yeah.

P: Well let's see very um I'd say it's the first experiences were very um very good. Uh I actually had quite a community um of of gay women around me of primarily athletes I would say and um I think that most of the women had very good um uh self image concepts um good concepts about their body, um, they were all very active which um to choose to be is an important thing today. Um, for me and I think for a lot of people that I knew then um I think that it, it was also um a relatively small community so it was, um, let's see. I think a lot of people tended to one another um and there was a lot of kind of inter community dating across sports.

I: Um hmm.

P: Um, not doing much dating within teams um although I think that maybe happened on other teams but I was a volleyball player so it's not a sport that actually in my experience have that many people that identify as lesbians in it. Um and I'm I'm somewhat speaking to both um, and growing up in club sports um and in college although I think uh my college had a higher percentage of of queer women than um than maybe other colleges that that I went to. And um I was a D1 athlete and a D3 athlete. I would say that my experiences in D1 were less than welcoming in terms of um just exploring your sexuality. Um and then after I transferred to the D3 environment which was an all women's college um it was very very open and very welcoming and I think that um a lot more women were exploring their sexuality. Um let's see a coach coach college actually I found um being an athlete a wonderful way to form the communities and continue to be an important part of my life and actually it was a way I met (laughs) I met a couple of um uh former partners um through through sports uh from from college.

I: Uh huh. Yeah.

P: Um yeah I mean I can I can start there if there is anything more specific that you would like to know I'm happy to talk about it.

I: No that's really great. I guess the first thing I was wondering about, um, you mentioned um you transferred from division one to division three and you mentioned some differences in division one feeling less welcoming and division three you know feeling a lot better and I'm wondering if you can tell me about um those experiences more?

P: (Noise) Sorry those experiences?

I: Yeah.

P: Um well I think that part of it is just a matter of school size. Um and I transferred from a school that had about 60,000 students um from (Northern state university) down to a school that had I guess maybe we had about 5,000 students so a significantly different um kind of uh tumultuous like college and university experience itself. Um, I think that the level of sports of course that D1 was incredibly intense and wonderful um however it was not the right one for me it it didn't fulfill that balance and I think part of that may have been a very much and this may be particular to volleyball I'm not quite sure. Um but I remember hearing stories of women who had come out more who weren't um pursuing very hetero- normative um kind of uh lifestyles and my freshmen year of college and thinking ooooh that doesn't sound fun and wow they really um the press got a hold of things and it was not um not exactly a welcoming welcoming thing or a thing that very many people talked about. Um and for me I wasn't identifying as a lesbian at that time but I have two moms and so I was kind of aware of the discourse and there was some back lash happening and it made me really uncomfortable. Um however I mean and I guess it didn't really pertain to me personally at that point.

I: Uh hmm. Yeah you mentioned like the hetero-normative and um you know how that wasn't welcoming. Can you say more about that?

P: Um, well I came from a really big football school and life around the college seem to revolve around just the football culture you know everyone going out a lot of beer and dating a lot of parties, a lot of frats and I think that um you know I definitely tried to be a part of that frat lifestyle for awhile but it was never really something that I found that interested me that much and um and I think that I mean that's for many people the first year of college is really important kinda finding yourself and finding what kind of dating was like to be doing and there seem to be a very clear path um for a lot of the women on my team that you did a lot of frat parties you did a lot of dating with men and people just got really really drunk which not to say that that didn't happen in a lesbian environment um after afterwards when I transferred but um I would say that the well like when I felt was a little bit of peer pressure was lessened by the time I transferred to D3.

I: Ok thanks, um I also heard you mention like the community of gay women and I was wondering if you could tell me more about that sense of community you talked about.

P: Um what the community was like or whether it's been long lasting what?

I: Um yeah I mean pretty much anything more that you'd like to tell me about that community and you know your experience of it.

P: Ok um let's see I think that the community was very tight and there seemed to be um very much revolving around sports. Most of the women I dated who came out or um who were dating women were involved in the athletic community um that may have just been my um the community that I was closest to but um it was I would say having been a part of a couple of different of actually way of contributing after that as a coach.....

I: Mmm hmm.

P: Um, that the lesbian community or me just generally you know there was a lot of a lot of drama going on there was a lot in that community that people knew everything that was going on in everyone else's lives in terms of kinda gender dynamics.....

I: Um hmm.

P: Um I would say that um I went to a wealthy college and it was a lot more um I would say that the spectrum was a lot um smaller and edged a lot more toward kinda the feminine side of things.

I: Um hmm

P: So we had a good people who kind of were more like baby dikes and we had some who were a lot of them were sporty lesbians that when I went to um college we didn't have that many people who were at all part of the transgender community or who were um really really butch I would say.

I: Yeah, can you tell me more about like baby dikes and sporty lesbians?

P: (Laughs) Um well let's see so I would say like um, how I would define them or?

I: Sure.

P: Ok ok let's see um sporty lesbians um I would say you didn't need to have any particular kind of um gender presentation you could be you could just as long as you were athletic and you were um usually you usually dress kind of sporty (laughs) um where as baby dikes I would say they had a very much softer side were often involved in the athletic community but were maybe had a slightly more kind of um masculine um presentation um gender presentation but I would say were at all um they were still kind of uh softer emotionally um yeah.

I: Ok.

P: Pretty much to me both of those I would see in my college experience.

I: Ok. Um let's see, you also talked about um how in colleges when you began to personally identify as lesbian can you tell me more about that process?

P: I'm sorry, about what of identified?

I: Um you said you began to personally identify as lesbian more when you were in college I believe is that what you said?

P: Mmmhmm.

I: And I was wondering if you could tell me more about that.

P: About how I came to my own personal identity?

I: Uh yeah anything about that process that stands out to you.

P: Ok um well I think for, for me um some of it involves some retrospect kind of thinking in retrospect that I had been interested in women for quite some time usually through athletics actually.

I: Mmhmm.

P: Um to have women teammates to have very tense friendships with or um had um well actually I didn't really have experiences I was involved a lot in the music scene um and I had a couple of friendships that I realized might have been or could have been something more but it was um when I finally transferred um my sophomore year that I think that I saw a really large community of women that actually ended up being most of my team and they were very fascinating women they were just great and I immediately felt a connection with them and most of them ended up being gay and it really took me a little while to kind of not only convince um kinda come to terms with similarities in the way I wanted to be in the world and the way I um identified and kind of what my um what I desired that kind of thing but um also for me to work through and making sure that was completely my own decision and had nothing to do with having a mom she's a lesbian.

I: Mhmm.

P: Um so who is also an athlete and had really similar um kind of experiences in the you know seventies so for me um finding a team that could feel that close with and share not only athletic experiences and experiences um in school but also um the you know sexuality as well was actually a great guess and I think I made a lot of strong friendships there.

I: Yeah so friendships and that came up a lot. Can you tell me more about the friendships that you made?

P: Sure um I made friendships that I still um keep to this day and though although I think some of them lets see out of um there were maybe eighteen women on my team in college probably about fifteen of them dated women um but by now I would say maybe there's six and you know many of them have married since then and that's kinda what their identity is but in terms of friendships um they have been people that I can um I had experiences with just cause we had a very close team a tight team and um that was very special to me and we want people to go pick up the phone or Facebook or um stay in touch with people um and have it be have them be very close friendships. I would say there are two women who are in the area that um who are in the [Northeastern city] area I am still in regular contact with that were teammates and um unfortunately the way volleyball functions that involve recruiting athletes a lot of my friends from college ended up returning back to [Western state] (laughs) I mean too bad but um I ended up staying out here on the east coast.... so.

I: Mmhmm. Okay um I'm actually just a little confused I thought you had mentioned that volleyball isn't a very lesbian sport but then you said most of your team was lesbian?

P: Yeah yeah it was a little tricky actually um it is not a gay sport at all um and so that was very surprising it's the highest kind of percentage that I've run across since then I mean even in coaching which it was just a really interesting year I think especially my sophomore year of college and in to which but then but then I would say by my senior year of college you know maybe about half the women um were queer or identified as lesbian.

I: Umhmm. Ok let's see I think had you also mentioned or there was something about self image and that you felt like everyone like a lot of your teammates and um athletes that you talked with had a good self image and that was important to you could you tell me more about that?

P: Umhmm. Sure I think that I think a lot of the women that I met through athletics had very strong sense of themselves they were they weren't afraid of confrontation they um they [?] what was important to them they um in relation to that they were some of the more upbeat people that I that I uh maybe would meet.

I: Uhhuh.

P: And I think they had endorphins and just being involved in athletics generally tends to make if it's really a good thing for women and um so I think most of the women that I met through athletics had generally very good self body images um and uh were uh thoroughly uh what's the word? Um just really confident people.

I: Umhmm.

P: And I thought that that was wonderful.

I: Yeah that's great and does that you mentioned that the other many of the other women you met um had that good self image and were confident does that describe you as well or is that the other women?

P: Does that apply to oh sorry.

I: Yeah does that also..... (noise) apply to you?

P: Um I think that if you're athletic um definitely athletics (background noise) um that yeah that helped my self confidence a lot um and that um also just being able to form friendships athletics was a really important part of that especially forming a family away from home I would say um I would identify myself as being I guess you could call myself as fairly confident yeah.

I: Yeah well thank you let's see um let me kind of summarize what you've been saying and then you can let me know if that seems to fit and if you want to add anything else is that ok?

P: Yeah sure.

I: Ok so I mean I think you started with talking about how um you started talking about college and how that's when you really began to first personally identify as lesbian um and then you talked about how you, you know first went to a division one school that felt less welcoming and then you transferred to a division three um school that really felt like there was balance um you built like friendships that were um you know felt like a family away from home um and um you know you were surrounded in a community of gay women that um you know and everyone was very tight um it was revolving around sport you know everyone knew each other um there was a lot of good self images and confidence that you know um was really a good environment for you um sounds like it was kind of a surprising cause you were in a sport that you didn't describe typically as very lesbian but there were many lesbians on your team especially your sophomore year um and you know really I think you mentioned that it was just like a good experience that you enjoyed and has helped you, you know post college um you know your athletic experience too you know really helped identify to who you are and what not. I'm wondering if that sounds like that fits with you or if there's anything else you'd like to correct or to add to that?

P: Well I think that fits with me um and also too the other thing that I think sports lends or um something I've noticed about many women in sports is that they are able to um they know what it's like to be intense and I think that I've seen a lot of women who are incredibly intense who have participated in sports and that that's something that I definitely noticed missing after college is that kind of intensity that you get in competition and so last time I saw post college um participating in club sports and semi pro to in order to find that kind of intensity it involves be um be active and athletic um after college and so I think that being an athlete in college provides you with many of those um stepping stones to continue to have a life that um touches on many of those things after college um participation in a community, being active, trying other people who aren't afraid to be intense but who also have self confidence.

I: Yeah.

P: To kind of wrap it up (laughs).

I: Great and also did you say you had some coaching experience after college?

P: Yeah yeah I did. I coached for a couple of years.

I: Oh could you tell me just a little bit about your experience coaching also?

P: Sure um in relation to sexuality or just in relation to kind of gender and coaching and athletics?

I: Whichever way you'd like to go with it.

P: Ok scary (laughs).

I: (Laughs) I know I know I can see it's hard but..... (laughs).

P: Um let's see um I was a volunteer coach during my second year out and uh for my college team when I was still in (Northeastern city) and then I coached I was the assistant coach for another women's college in (Northeast state) afterwards so I guess I coached three years total so um and then I was an assistant coach here at (Northeastern university) just very briefly um and I think that the most formal experience and I think the deepest level of coaching that I did was probably the second of these was at (college) and um let's see I think that um the transition from athletics into coaching is a very big one and that I it took me a little while to really um make the transition um but I really, really enjoyed it and I think that I saw a lot of the women going through similar things that I had been through um and they had a very close team. We definitely had two um women who were lesbian um and I would say the gender dynamics were similar from what I observed um at college it was very interesting actually (laughs). And a lot of the women who ended up in volleyball that I could tell um who were dating other women in the college um I don't think any of my players were dating each other but who knows.

I: (Laughs)

P: Um they um seemed to be more primarily more kind of feminist and from what I could tell their fan section was very, very butch and that was that was different for me to see um and I think that that's maybe particular to [college] which is a pretty radical kind of community um but they seemed kind of a lot um physical and which is about sexuality than I had and this was almost five, almost ten years later....

I: Mmhmm.

P: no wait, six or seven years later (laughs) and um you know it's hard to change but I noticed some differences there um in how they uh came out um and in the kind of the disparity in gender um presentation that they had when they were dating women we also had some very, very heterosexual players as well and you could tell from their fan section um but in terms of how that came onto the court um I would say there was no difference in terms of coaching them maybe just a little difference uh from rotation on the conversations on the bus where as um I think just myself coaching I spent a summer and part of a fall coaching D-1 and um we had a much wider range of student athletes that we had some who were well I think most of the students that I had coached prior to that had been incredibly liberal and had come from fairly liberal backgrounds. Their parents were ok with sexuality they seemed ok with their sexuality and were [?] of their sexuality where as when I coached D-1 um I mean was out and um I was doing kind of a favor to someone um they needed some help and I was around and I needed a job but I'm in a doctoral program in no way related to athletics so it wasn't my real job and I still felt a lot more constrained in what I could say um and some of that had to do with recruiting but also it had to do with um student athletes being from a much broader range economically and I think very much less comfortable with um with sexuality uh I couldn't name a single lesbian athlete or queer athlete that I coached that year um and in fact had some very interesting conversations when I was kind of out but not out I mean I didn't and I would hear overhear things that made me a little uncomfortable and had a couple of conversations about um being P.C. about um you know being accepting of all different kinds of people and then I think what really drove home the point home for the girls is we got a very out gay male coach who an assistant coach who came in to help in the fall and that seemed they seemed much more comfortable with gay male sexuality than a sexually a lesbian from what I could tell.....

I: Huh.

P: But I actually wasn't all that close to the team so it might be different for other coaches.

I: Yeah interesting well thank you is there anything else about coaching or about any of your experiences that you would like to add to anything?

P: Um.... Mmm no I mean I guess the last thing that I would add or re-iterate is that athletics has been and I think still is an important part of many lesbian identities that I can tell and it's been a way that I've actually met some of the most um interesting women in my life um and it's a great kind of community and continuing thing to be involved with.

I: Yeah

P: That's all I would add.

I: Great that sums it up nicely let me just turn the tape recorder off real quick.

Interview Transcript #5 – Elle

I: So if could you tell me in as much detail as possible your experience as being an athlete who identifies as lesbian.

P: Umm, well, it was definitely hard at first, like, I came out this year. So, um, like I kind of like, well I guess I could say I fell in love, and um, it just like, nothing happened, because, [clears throat] because they were in a relationship, so umm. But like, it was like hard to get over that; and like I've had a rough year anyways. So, like all that together, kind of brought out who I was and who I would, like, neglect to be. Like I did try to like, push it away for a while, but um like my teammates, I mean, they were just like really accepting. So it was just like, no big news; they were just like, ok, so like, everything's pretty good, but yeah. I mean, at first, like you're kind of uncomfortable because you don't know how they're gonna react at all; and you get nervous, and you, like, tell that first person, but like, it was definitely like a big eye-opener to be like, it definitely opened my eyes, so...

I: Oh. So it sounds like I'm hearing it was hard, but it was also so supportive.

P: Yeah, definitely. I feel like with other teams they probably would've been like, you know, like, kind of like shunning, but no. They were just like, ok, that's whatever, let's get back to practice, so...

I: Yeah. What do you mean with other teams?

P: Um, like, other colleges I know like are more strict or conservative about that type of thing. Like, I know it uh, I was in a health class this year, and the teacher was a softball teacher, and uh, er, or a softball player um in college. And she said like if anybody was thought to be a lesbian on the team, they had to like, go through a bunch of, I don't know, meetings with the coaches, and it was just like not really accepting. And so I'm glad like here in [Southeastern state], like there's definitely like a big community of like gay people, so yeah.

I: Can you tell me more about the community?

P: Um, yeah I mean I found out, I found out, through one of my good friends, who's also a lesbian. Um, like, it was like [club name] around here, and it was like a club, and we go there and then, just like a lot of the athletes who are out like, we just like know each other, and like we're, it just like really open and friendly, and very just like, very like, really accepting. And like if you're going through a rough time, like they'll help you out so, yeah.

I: Yeah. You also mentioned like a rough time, like I think at the beginning, like could you tell me more about that?

P: Um, I probably had like the worst, uh, coming in as a freshman, but uh, I mean I laugh about it now. Like my first week at school I was uh um, assaulted by my roommate; I had to like call

the police. But um yeah, like she was like a normal person, as we call like a non-athlete, and she was a junior, and she was just like a random person I got paired with. And she just snapped at one point, and like just attacked me. And so that happened, and then after I got a concussion from that, and then I got another concussion from volleyball, then I got in a car crash [laughs], and then I found out I had a heart murmur. And I just got surgery last month, on my heart.

I: Yeah.

P: And uh now I've got to get surgery again so, it's probably. Oh, and then, um over the winter break, um. I felt like since I had so much already on my plate, it was probably just a good idea to like, tell my parents now. So I told my parents, well I told my mom, and my mom still like, thinks it's a stage. Even though she like, knew what I was going to tell her. So, um, it's still kind of like, trying to like get them to accept me when they have to, but like trying to get them to, understand, I guess, so...

I: Yeah. So it sounds difficult then.

P: Yeah. I was difficult, definitely a big first year here, but I mean I got through it, so it's all good.

I: Yeah. You mentioned I think the very first thing you said was it was hard or, can you tell me more about that?

P: Um, just like emotionally, like I knew how I felt, and it was like almost like a, an unbearable feeling, because like, you want to like tell people, and you want to like have support, and like tell your best friends. But I feel like it was one of the hardest things to do, because you have to be like, completely open with them, and just like completely hopeful that like, they'll just understand. And so I think that's probably the thing I had to like overcome, was the fear of not being accepted, or like having a friend de-friend at me. But that hasn't happened, so I got pretty lucky with that [laughs]. So...

I: Yeah.

P: So...

I: It sounds like you had a lot of fears, and you overcame them with good results.

P: Yeah. Definitely. It was a lot, definitely a good combination of fear. I mean I had anxiety after the whole assault, and then getting over, um I guess my first love. That was a big fear, because like, you just feel like, you're never going to find that again, or just like um, just scared that like, you could be losing the only person that you could ever love. So, but, I definitely don't think that anymore. I mean like, me and that person are really good friends now. She was actually, um was a volleyball player. So, but, yeah we're like best friends now. So it's good.

I: You mentioned like your teammates and touched on other players too, can you tell me more about your teammates or other players too? Any experience with them?

P: Umm, I mean, her, she was kind of like my big sister throughout it, um like throughout the season. And then, like I, I started to feel feelings for her, and I didn't tell her until after the season because I didn't want anything to affect volleyball. And then, um, we also have someone who's bisexual on the team, and um, she kind of like, helped me through things too, because she's actually good friends with um, the other, my uh big sister. So she just like, you know, kind of like, got me to understand everything. And like, she had a very tough time too because she's from like, [Southeastern state], which is like a conservative state so, and she knows how it is. And um, she just kind of like, tried to help me like around here in [another Southeastern state]. There's a lot with the community, as like I said before, and like people don't care, like not they care but, like, people don't feel threatened I guess by like gays and lesbians; kind of like in some places.

I: Mmhmm. The community there seems pretty, like...

P: Yeah.

I: ...it was good for you

P: Yeah. Definitely. Definitely glad I came here, even through everything I've been through. I mean, I guess, I think this university has probably been the most stable place I guess for me. If had to deal with all of this. I mean like open.

I: Can you say more about open?

P: Um, like, I don't know, I feel like, I mean there are sometimes when like, I guess people try to force things upon you, like force religion on you, or like tell you how you're supposed to act. And like you can see that like sometimes here, but like, I love being where like, I guess a lot of people can just like tell by the way you dress. If you don't dress this like feminine, you dress a little more masculine you just don't, people don't try and come up to you. And like, I've heard stories where people like come up to people, um and just like try to impose a religion or something like that, and that hasn't happened here. I just feel like telling other people, they just don't act surprised, or they're not scared of you I guess.

I: Mmhmm

P: They're just, accepting.

I: Accepting. You also mentioned you know, like what stood out to me was like the way you dressed, like masculine or you know, that like different look.

P: Yeah.

I: Can you tell me more about that?

P: I mean, um, I guess like most people think all lesbians dress more masculine, but I mean, it's not true, at all. Um, but like, when you do... like for me, it was like a more comfortable outfit. And um, but like, when you do, like, you're kind of putting yourself out there a little bit more. And you're more of like a... people are more aware of what you look like, or like who you are, I guess. So, I mean, you still see looks like on the street, but it's not like anything extreme here or anything. But I mean you, no one really like, comes up to you and says something about your clothes. So...

I: Mmhmm

P: Where in, like in the further south, I'm from up north, and like in more southern states like, you'd probably get like, someone to come up to you and be like, you know, why are you dressed this way, or like you know, something like that. So...

I: So you don't have people saying stuff, which is good.

P: Yeah. Like, just not, I guess uh, being objective to who you are.

I: Yeah. I also heard you say, you know, you're putting yourself out there...

P: Yeah.

I: Can you say more about that?

P: Um, well, I mean for me, like I had kind of followed along with society's guidelines, and like almost like, gender-rolled, I guess. Like, I used to dress for them, and then, um once I got here, like, I just was like, I want to dress the way I want to dress. Like, I don't care about the stereotypical guidelines. And so I just dressed, I mean, I guess more loosely, or like sporty, and like so, just being I guess, I don't know, out there.

I: Mmhmm.

P: So. [laughs] But yeah. I feel like here, you can dress however you want to dress.

I: Mmm definitely. And you mentioned that you're from further north, um, you know what was it like there?

P: Um, well my high school, it was like, very frowned upon if you were gay or lesbian so it was probably another reason why I wasn't out like up north. And, um I mean I had a best friend over there who was like if I ever found I had a lesbian friend, like I wouldn't be their friend anymore and I think that was probably one of the things that like stuck with me. Like, just the fact that

she said that and like, I don't know, it just kind of hurt a little bit and definitely like sunk in, so that kind of scared me. But I'm not afraid to love anymore so.

I: Yeah.

P: But I usually associate myself even further north, because my state is considered southern so, my state is more liberal, but I usually still [gets really tongue-tied] associate myself with further north. So...

I: Mmhmm, yeah. I liked how you said you had neglected yourself; can you tell me more about that?

P: Mmhmm. I mean, like I had always felt certain feelings, or like had crushes. But I never told anybody, um and I definitely, since I was like, from what I can remember. When I was six-years-old, um, like I definitely felt a certain way, but I never acted upon it, or um. Like, there's always something that says like you're supposed to be feminine or girly, and so I just kind of, like went along with how society says you're supposed to. But um yeah, during high school was probably a, with all the drama anyways of being a high schooler and like, coming into adolescence, um. I just kind of, I don't know, I think it was probably going to be more difficult, or harder on me if people knew I was a lesbian in high school. So that's probably what kept me from accepting myself, so.

I: Mmhmm. Yeah, you mentioned that it was hard at first.

P: Yeah.

I: Mmhmm

P: So, yeah. Like, I just, I guess it's like everything in high school kind of like sticks with you, so, but, it gotten over it. [Coughs] sorry.

I: It sounds like it was painful.

P: Yeah, a little bit. Um, but I guess I got over that.

I: I think uh, you mentioned how it was open here and different back home.

P: Yeah, because here it was like having a southern... southern

I: Mmhmm

P: Um, that way you'd think it'd be like, less open, but it's definitely more than my high school, so.

I: Ok. Let me try summarize what I've heard said so far. I've heard you talk about um, thinking how it was hard for you, and you had neglected yourself, and then, um, how it was scary to come out and you did while you were here at [Southeastern university], it was a safe, a you know, very open, supportive environment, and um there's a community there and um, and that's quite a contrast from your high school, and that um, I think you mentioned like kind of putting yourself out there, you know, and like a thing you know, like a stereotype of society that they have towards masculinity and femininity.

P: And I guess like, not being afraid to say, like, I'm a lesbian is like one great thing to be like, out there.

I: Yeah.

P: Just like saying it. You know, like saying you're gay, and they accept it.

I: Yeah, can you tell me more about that?

P: Um, I mean, like I'd always been afraid of saying it before, but since I've gotten here, like it seems so open. You just start to like, say it once in a while, and you start to see like, how people react. And like then, people are just like, whatever, ok, like I don't care. They're like, I'm still your friend. And like, it's enabled me to be able to say it out loud and that's definitely, a freeing thing.

I: Mmhmm. Freeing.

P: Mmhmm. Yeah, because you just feel like confined I guess, because you want to just like, you know, scream it, but you can't. And when you finally do, it's like, wow! [laughs]

I: That's a good description.

P: Yeah

[Both laugh]

P: And then, that identity of being able to say it out loud, directly.

I: Is there anything else that maybe we haven't talked about or anything you'd like to correct me on that would describe your experience of being an athlete who identifies as lesbian?

P: Um, I think it's just easier for someone who's an athlete, I guess. Because it's just um, you do have teammates, and they know you. Like, if you haven't come out, like, they knew you before and after; so it's not like your character has changed at all. And um, I guess it's with me, like I was a little bit more scared, just like more tentative; so now I'm like myself, and I'm just like more energetic. And um, your teammates are definitely there for you no matter what, most

of the time. So, like, being an athlete definitely like, establishes that safe um, stability part of communicating.

I: Uh huh. So for you that was easier?

P: Well yeah, I mean if you're not really an athlete, you still have friends, but you don't have... Like, like I still have other friends that are non-athletes... But um, the fact that you're around these people all the time, and they really know you, and they're not going to object to who you are, so yeah.

I: Well, is there anything else that you'd like to add?

P: Umm, I think that's probably it... yeah.

I: Ok, so, I'll turn the recorder off...

Interview Transcript #6 – Fay

I: Ok so could you tell me in as much detail as possible your experience as an athlete who identifies as lesbian.

P: Uh yeah I played softball

I: ok

P: And so typically the softball team I played on, there were, there was at least one other one person who identified as lesbian if not more than one, so um playing softball I always felt comfortable and always felt welcomed on the team and the only time I think I felt unwelcomed playing on the team was playing on a church league uh co-ed. So I am not sure if it was because I was a lesbian or because I was a woman

I: Um hmm

P: I guess the boys think they play a lot better than we do but....

I: Haha ..yeah.

P: Ha Ha ... but I never really had any real negative experiences but then the only people that really know about me are my friends, so other people that meet me in softball may not know I identify myself as lesbian yeah, just my friends.

I: Mhmm could you say more about your friends?

P: Umm, yeah. In college I had uhh in all the softball team there were probably five or six of us that were really close. And some were lesbians and some weren't and it really didn't matter to anybody who was or who wasn't we were just all friends. But even now umm, I play on softball team that is in a gay league so everybody on the team is uhh, well everyone on the team is accepting.

I: Mhmm

P: Um I really enjoy playing in a gay league, it's really fun, and uh I had a couple of classmates there were three of in college who umm were together a lot on a softball team and so umm we hung out together on the softball team and lived in the same dorm. We had a lot of fun together

I: Mhmm, can you tell me more. Um let's see, you mentioned that it was welcoming and you never really felt like it was a negative experience, can you tell me more about how it was welcoming?

P: Umm yeah, I mean its been, like when I played in college, I don't know if it was ever even brought up, like it wasn't, in softball, like I don't know if anyone ever even asked, ya know. Like the people that I think we knew were lesbians ya know. No one ever even cared, we all ate together, we played ball together, hung out together, so it wasn't ever really even brought up. It wasn't umm an issue. The only time I remember people bringing up who might be gay or who might be a lesbian, was when I first started playing college ball at the two year college at this time, I myself didn't even identify myself as a lesbian but umm we were on a road trip and one girl.. I remember, we were playing ball and she said her back hurt and I was like well, you slept on the floor, and we were all trying to figure out why she slept on the floor. She said because she didn't know if a lot of lesbians played softball and she didn't want to sleep with a lesbian so, she slept on the floor and that's the only...

I: oooh

P: Negative comment really but I remember hearing when I was in college playing ball, um. In, so you know, people with me, because at that point I didn't identify myself as a lesbian. I was like oh that's weird, why you'd act that way, and it turned out later the girl that slept on the floor was gay too. Ha ha

I: hmmm

P: So umm we were always invited to the parties. Yeah I don't ever remember being called names or making fun of us. I really felt like I was part of a family or uh a group of friends because we all had some kind of a common ground, with softball ya know. Yeah so at some point softball felt like it was a family or group of friends, it was a non issue, very welcoming and what not...

I: Yeah, you mentioned earlier that at first that um you didn't recognize or identify yourself as a lesbian

P: Right

I: Could you tell me more about that?

P: Well uh, when I first started I grew up going to a private Christian school.

I: Mhmm

P: And uh, so as far as I know I had never met another lesbian. I didn't know that there were lesbians and so I remember the first time, the first time I thought well maybe I am gay, or maybe I am a lesbian, um when I was playing ball, my best friend and I, I was thinking I don't know if this is normal best friend stuff, and even then, even when, looking back to it, it definitely, my girlfriend my partner and I never called each other that, she was my best friend but so, even then at that point she was say are you gay and I would say no I'm not gay.

I: Mhmm

P: But now, you know looking back it was obviously was a lesbian relationship. But, um. I was trying to think of, I didn't consider myself to be gay, I did not realize that about myself. I didn't think, I didn't have negative thoughts about people who were lesbians. I was, I was scared to be one, but I don't remember thinking that they were bad people. Um that's not the way my family felt, but I guess its from being in college and being around all my friends because that's how they felt, that they were just somebody else somebody who might be a little different.

I: Yeah, you mentioned that you were scared to be one, could you say more about that?

P: Well yeah, because growing up, ya know, the home that I grew up in, it was always, I don't ever remember discussing that topic with my parents at all, ya know. I don't ever remember them explaining what somebody that was gay is, but ya know I remember hearing about it at church and they would always talk about how, ya know, they were going to hell and its wrong and an abomination to the Lord and all that too. So I was scared to be one because I didn't want it to be an issue with my family.

I: Mhmm

P: Or my church.

I: Mhmm

P: And um once I, ya know, once I realized that about myself, ya know, my family still doesn't know. So it's not something I talk about with my family, it's something I talk about with my friends

I: Ok

P: But that's why I was scared because I didn't want my family to know and I didn't, I knew that if that is who I excepted myself to be, than if at that point before I really dealt with the issue I was wondering oh, am I going to go to hell or am I a bad person. I got those feelings. Ya know, but it wasn't because of the friends I was around because they made me accept myself more than anybody, but it was my family that I was scared of.

I: Yeah, you had mentioned your friends as being really important and you also have mentioned there had always been others on your team other than that co-ed team, who also identified as lesbian. Can you tell me more what that was like, having others who also identified on a team with you?

P: You mean to not have someone on a team?

I: No, uh like how you did have others on the team.

P: Oh umm well I think they really almost helped shape the image of who I am because I never met another lesbian. I didn't know. In my body I felt different. The people I went to high school with were as far as I know all straight and so it was different to meet people in college and on the softball team that seemed so much like me.

I: Mhmm

P: And so, it always just felt so much more comfortable to be around them than it did to feel like I was the only one, like it was at my school.

I: Yeah

P: So, uh not that they changed who I was, but that it, that they made me realize it was ok to be who I was

I: Mhmm. Could you elaborate on how it was ok to be who you were?

P: Well really it was because I saw them, I saw who they were and I knew that they were a good person.

I: Mhmm

P: Or good people and they were ok. Other people knew about them and their families accepted them and other people accepted them. And um it wasn't like they were off the sides and all alone by themselves. They were excepted; they were happy; they were well adjusted adults and uh, that's not the picture that the church had painted for me as someone who was a lesbian. So seeing that made me feel more comfortable about being who I felt I was and I felt like it was ok to be who I was because I was a lot like them and they were ok

I: Mhmm

P: And were good people too and so.

I: Yeah, well I guess in contrast you mentioned on that co-ed team how that was different for you.

P: Yeah um, when I played on that team I always felt like the outsider. I don't know if it was because, I don't know if they knew I was a lesbian so I don't necessarily pin it on the fact that I was a lesbian. But just because the team I came into playing with they already knew each other

I: Mhmm

P: So when I came in I didn't already know somebody and have those friends and it was hard for me to make friends because I really didn't have anybody on the team that I wanted to hang out with and there wasn't anybody on the team that wasn't like me I guess. And I knew that, I knew, not that they weren't good people but that they were nice people and I liked playing ball with them I guess but um. I don't know I guess I feel like when I am around them, especially people who are religious or Christians it makes me nervous to be around them because I am afraid if they find out about me it would be a big stink. Like oh they might be mean or might be rude. I don't know how they would react and it's just hard to predict how people would react if they knew.

I: Mhmm

P: And so I also feel like I have my guard up so I don't ever really. I don't feel like I can ever really relax and be myself when on, when I played on that team.

I: Yeah, so it sounds like the difference was that you were scared in how they would react so the guard was up, where as the other team knew who you were.

P: Right, right. And I felt like the teams, you know on the gay league and even in the college teams, the girls who were lesbian they knew I had a similar, that I had similar experiences.

I: Mhmm

P: And that they knew how it felt to be target?? I guess. I knew that they understood me and at least that's the way it felt.

I: Mhmm, could you also tell me about your experience on the gay league team?

P: Yeah, I currently play on a gay league and they have all different sports so its not just softball but, umm it's a lot of fun because there is a lot of different people. There's straight people and gay people, but everyone excepts people for who they are whether they are,

I: Mhmm

P: A transgendered person or bisexual. It doesn't matter because we are just people and you know that that is the standard I guess. You know that going in, you know that there is not going to be discrimination, not discrimination but you know there is not going to be anyone rude to you because of sexual orientation, you know.

I: Mhmm

P: It's nice going in knowing that everybody likes you just the way you are.

I: Yeah ok, well let me kind of summarize what I have heard so far and then you can let me know if that fits or if there is anything you'd like to correct or add to that. Well you mentioned at first that softball is the sport that you play and most the teams that you have played on there had always been others who identified themselves as lesbian, and that you always felt it was really welcoming and that a lot of your teammates really helped, were friends and family and really helped shape who you were, and made you comfortable and feel ok. Um the only time that was different was when you were on a co-ed team and whether that was because you were a woman or a lesbian or what not you felt very guarded and scared how others might react. Um you mentioned your friends a lot, especially in college, and how everything was somewhat of a non issue how at first you didn't even identify as a lesbian until you got to college. Um, and then you mentioned religion quite a bit too and how that scared you in many ways to come out or um scared to be one, I think you had mentioned. And um a lot of it was pretty much talking about good experiences it sounded. Feeling very welcomed and comfortable and shaping who you are. And you are currently in the gay league team and sounds like that's really fun. Um does that sound like what your experience has been? Would you like to correct anything or add more about it?

P: No, everything you said was the way that I felt and was accurate, so. I wish I could add more. I am not very good at interviewing

I: Oh no you're doing great. I just wanted to make sure you had enough opportunity to talk and your doing great.

P: Haha, yeah well I can't think of anything else but yeah what you said was accurate.

Interview Transcript #7 – Gina

I: So if you could tell me in as much detail as possible your experience of being an athlete who identifies as lesbian.

P: Ok um well I wow it's funny I've been thinking about this and yet I'm not quite sure where to start. Um I guess I would say my experience being an athlete who identifies as lesbian the word that probably comes to my mind most of all is closeted, which is funny because I don't think of myself as closeted now but um when I was in college I for the most part I think I was. Um I wasn't out at all athletically. Um which I had been a three sport athlete in college um played basketball all four years, tennis my first year which I kinda fell into that, um and then softball my last year, and I was out two summers for the summer softball team but that's really because we were out to one another and then that um those relationships predated playing softball again. Um, but I wasn't out to anybody on the tennis team and in four years of playing basketball I came out to one person. And that was during our last year playing together. Um I think for me where that decision came from and this was much more I think for basketball but I was very aware coming in as a freshman that our coach, homophobic. Um when she came to my house to meet my parents and to sign me when I was still in high school uh she wanted to know if I had a boyfriend which fortunately at the time I did. I'm not sure what difference that would have made if I didn't um but it seemed important to her somehow and um I was just very aware from that moment and then when I came on to campus through a homophobic comments that she made really inappropriate things that she said about other players, players from other schools and coaches from other schools that um anybody who identified as gay or lesbian would not be welcome on her team and in fact um heard her say that about somebody that we both knew who had approached her about playing and what coach [Smith] had said was that, "she would never play on a team I coach cause I don't take those kind of players." Um she didn't say gay players but I felt certain that's what she meant and she communicated it in a way, you know, she took left handed players, and she took tall players, and she took athletic players I assumed that gay is what she meant cause it wasn't a secret that person was gay. Um that coach something that also really stood out to me about her, every year that she coached um she had at least one player get pregnant. And you know to me what I took away from that is she would rather have something that so overtly says heterosexual rather than have someone who was gay, like, and knowing that I wasn't a starter um and didn't get a lot of playing time I was aware that I was very expendable. And I was also aware that I really really really wanted to keep playing basketball, and so I made a choice. I don't remember it being a conscious choice so much as just being aware of it. I would never tell, certainly not the coach and not anybody on the team that I'm gay um it kind of I don't remember it ever coming up it just we all just kinda hung out and um it wasn't a big deal and I'm not sure if that was just the coach being who he was or if it was the fact that he was a male coach.

I: Mhmm.

P: And so maybe wasn't quite as in tune with it um but yeah I mean I was very aware of the you know I was not about to come out even though you know it would have been nice to be able to

say I at that point I wouldn't have I think I would have resented being gay if it had cost me basketball at that point.

I: Mhmm. Can you tell me more about what it was like to be closeted um I think each one was different but

P: Um I would say my freshman year it was really kind of unique cause I wasn't dating anyone (laughs) there wasn't really a lot to fear um my sophomore year was a little tougher um because at that point I was dating someone and was dealing with coming out to my parents and um it would have been nice to have been able to talk to the coach or some of my teammates to get support and I didn't feel like I could. Um fortunately I had an amazing psych professor who was very compassionate and made that a whole lot easier but you know there were times where I would hear the coach or eventually some of my teammates it seemed to trickle down uh make homophobic comments and I wanted to say something but at the same time I was afraid that if I did I would be outing myself um so there was yeah there wasn't pressure there I think to you know I didn't for me I wasn't going to lie and say I was straight or date a guy just to make it appear as though I was straight um but at the same time I was very careful about what I didn't say also um I never talked about my girlfriend um if I did it was my friend [Kit] not my girlfriend [Kit] um yeah so I felt pressured to keep that part of my life very very separate. Um at one point we were playing we had a game in my home town and it we were playing the school that [Kit] went to so she came to the game and that was incredibly awkward um and what made it awkward really was at that point I was having conflict with my parents so they didn't want her to come to the game but I insisted it was her school why shouldn't she?

I: Mmhmm.

P: Um and we had a guest list so we could get so many people in to the game for free to come and watch and I put her on the list and the coach wanted to know who she was. And so what I said is that she was a friend that lives in [Southeastern city] um but I think pressure is probably the word I would think was probably a trend um particularly those first two years.

I: Ok.

P: I in my mind it's funny I mean it's a four year stance but it's two very distinct experiences and I think some of it relates to a change of coach. Um the coach I had my first two years of basketball was fired which I gotta say I was so happy (laughs) um and the person that they hired was a phenomenal, phenomenal guy um I never came out to him but it also seemed like wouldn't didn't matter if I did but I would just be me and it was all good there was no need to talk about it and yet I didn't feel pressured to hide either it just was. Um I think that was one critical thing than the other was the end of my sophomore year um somebody that I had a couple classes with came out to me and we ended up coming out to each other and became very close friends and then at the beginning of the fall um a third person became friends with us we were kinda the three musketeers.

I: Mmmhmm.

P: And um I think that was also really a good little point because suddenly my world got a little bigger.

I: Yeah.

P: You know and I wasn't the only gay person that I knew on campus or actually one of two gay people that I knew on campus at that point and even though there were only two more of us um that doubled (laughs) doubled my community um and so I had a place where, I had a place where I could be me and I think that released a lot of that pressure that I felt. Um something else that happened at that time I had a new, I got a new advisor who was gay um my advisor, my formal advisor had retired and then [Jodi] showed up in the department and was gay and out and comfortable and I'd never seen somebody do that before. And so I know those aren't directly related to me being an athlete but it I think it shaped how I found myself as gay and I think it did take the pressure off maybe it would be okay and at some point maybe I would feel comfortable coming out and just being me all of me.

I: So it sounds like the homophobic comments and then being one of only two gay people and then it was pivotal when then the coach left there were homophobic comments and a new coach and community doubled and um.

P: Mhmm.

I: Can you tell me more about what it was like afterwards, after that pivotal moment or....

P: Um yeah um yeah, our coach just brought such a cool spirit um to the team in terms of making sure that everybody seemed to fit and have a role and a place and that those roles and places were respected. Um our former coach I don't think respected anybody except whoever scored the most points and um really seemed to have the attitude that the rest of us could go to hell. Um the with coach [Jones] the one that we had our last two years, my last two years um he just really seemed to focus on team as a unit um yeah which stood out to me I think the most when we interviewed him cause we players had an opportunity to meet with the candidates.

I: Cool.

P: And when one of my teammates asked him, "why are you leaving your current job?" and he said, "well I'm getting a divorce and I'm working at a religious university that does not allow their staff and faculty to be divorced and I can't sacrifice my personal life for my professional life." And you know obviously he was talking about divorce but for me I took such a different message from that. (Crying) I wasn't expecting to feel the impact of that. (Crying) It's amazing it's been a long time since I thought about that I think for me that one statement that he made I think that was the turning point for me. It really helped me through, maybe not in the two years I had college of undergrad um but that at some point I wouldn't have to sacrifice one for the other.

Yeah I think that was the turning point for me you know I think those other things in terms of friendships I think they've all contributed but you know having him make that statement just I liked him instantly from that point on you know he had me at hello (laughs) at that moment um yeah I mean he I don't think he could have known and prob he knows that that statement made an impact on me but we've never talked about the depths of it um but I think what I took away from that was also the fact that maybe there were ways I could start expressing myself a little more forward. Um and during that year what I found was I did start coming out more, still not athletically but in some of my other involvement in students in student affairs and things like that and even though it was a small campus the folks that I did choose to come out to I think did respect my request that they not share that information which if they didn't respect it I was never aware of it. Um you know the ones who on the basketball team that I did come out to. We were playing in a tournament in [Western city]....

I: Mmmhmm.

P:and we snuck out of our room and the only time I ever violated curfew (laughs) it's amazing um he was always aware that I was expendable although she was the highest scoring person on the team so I thought maybe it would be ok um but we snuck out of our hotel room and went down to the bar and had a couple of drinks which again I mean the only time I ever violated the team or like that um and we just had a heart to heart conversation. I told her that I was gay and she looked at me and started laughing and said "I've known" and I was like "well why didn't you say anything?" and she said "well why didn't you tell me?" and what I told her was that it was because of something she said our freshman year. Um I helped her move in to or unload her dad's truck and we were driving it back to the parking lot or something and she made this comment that "I feel like a big ol' dike in my dad's truck, hope nobody thinks I'm a dyke." And even though she had meant it very off hand and non offensive what I did with that was make a decision that I would never tell her I was gay and so I actually told her that and you know she said "oh my god I can't believe I said that" and she remembered it um and we talked about how much her opinion had changed um and then she shared something equally private with me that um had transpired uh during out time in college and we just had this moment of real connection. Um she's the one teammate that I've stayed in touch with and I know a big part of that is the fact that we know each other fully in that way.

I: Yeah if you could tell me more I think you mentioned um being able to fully express yourself more or to be yourself more, can you tell me more about that?

P: (Laughs) Um its funny my version of expressing myself fully at twenty or twenty one um is very different than it is now at 34. Um you know for me I'd gone on a camping trip and got one of these beaded necklaces and it was they were the beads were in a rainbow and you know I thought it was so cool and that nobody would know what the rainbow meant so it would be my little inside joke and I wore that thing all the time and for me that was that was me expressing myself. Um you know I wore, the only time I took it off was when we had a game or if I was dressed up and it you know wasn't appropriate to wear with whatever I had on but I have slept in that thing I we could wear some jewelry to basketball practice but I would wear it to practice I

mean you know I wore it when we were on the road and so you know I'd walk into a gym and for me the gay people on the other team or in the crowd it signified "I'm here!" and you know I think for me that was me doing in actions what I didn't have the words for or was too afraid to say verbally.

I: Mmmhmm.

P: Um it's funny I still have that thing but I've grown out of it well physically it won't fit anymore um but it's funny I think emotionally I've outgrown that too in some way. Um that I don't need to do that in order to be me uh to figure out how to just be me uh rainbows or otherwise.

I: (Laughs) yeah could you say more about being you?

P: Uh now or back?

I: Either.

P: I mean you know what I think back then I was acutely aware of homophobia I think in women's sports and I think for me what I thought was that was really a top down process that you know my coaches attitude you know those first two years really set the tone for some of the players that I played with for four years. Um in terms of where comfort using the word dike versus gay or lesbian um or some other euphemism um the freedom that they felt to so say to make negative comments about opposing players or opposing coaches sexuality. Um and what I was very aware of was even if they thought those things about me I was not willing to say something that would confirm it because those weren't things that I believed about myself, um those negative things. Um like even knowing that I think if the environment had been different I'm not sure that I would have come out any sooner than I did um cause I think for me I hadn't I didn't understand what it meant to what it meant for me to be gay which was identify as gay um I think I have a better idea now but that still evolves.

I: Mmmhmm.

P: Um if I, I don't know that I would have done it differently though I think I may have felt differently and maybe felt a little safer um if those circumstances had been different um yeah.

I: It sounds like the environment and the homophobia in sport really affected you.

P: Yeah it did um I mean I you know things that I'm sure, when I say I'm sure, um my friend that I came out to, [Bette], she and I actually talked about this and so I at least with an in of one I feel sure um you know there were things that she never had to think about that I was always acutely aware of. Um the locker room you know that was the most uncomfortable place in the world for me not because I was attracted to any of my teammates um that would have felt really weird if I had been.

I: Mmmhmm.

P: Um but because I was aware of what they were saying about opposing players and opposing coaches that really made gay people sound predatory and so you know they seemed to have this perception of gay people as predatory and here I am in the locker room changing clothes or you know in the shower next to someone else who has these beliefs and you know that was the furthest thing on my mind I just wanted to get my shower and leave and so it was those times were very uncomfortable you know just changing clothes or um there's an intimacy that occurs on an athletic team because you spend so much time together and you know you do see each other walking around in socks and bras and panties and changing clothes and stuff and because the last thing in the world I wanted to do was to be accused of taking advantage of that. Um cause the last thing in the world I would [?] is take advantage of that. Um that was ver, very uncomfortable. Um I've heard people joke, joke about aw yeah that you know you're so lucky you got to be in that. There's nothing pleasant about that.

I: Mmmhmm.

P: And I imagine that had what I perceived as homophobia to be less um that might have been different. And I might have been more likely to stick around and talk or something like that instead of just change and leave.

I: So it sounds like with the team being such you know an intimate relationship with teammates that part of you um you didn't fully allow yourself to connect.

P: Yeah yeah I think that's accurate you know and I its funny hearing you say intimate I'm thinking yeah you know it was but I didn't fully invest or connect um or allow myself to be as intimately acquainted um I think cause I didn't want, I didn't want that part of me to be known or recognized or maybe acknowledged possibly for a better word there.

I: Ok let me summarize what we've talked about a lot so far so let me summarize it and then you can let me know if there's some things that I've left out or I've got wrong or if there's some things that you want to add?

P: Okay.

I: So I think you started out with saying that closeted was the first thing that you recall and it was especially um with basketball in those first two years. Um and then there was a pivotal point um about two years in when you had come out to more people um a few in the athletic realm and more outside. Then there was some, you know, an advisor and a new coach that really made you feel more comfortable um then there was still many aspects of the team that made you feel uncomfortable such as being in the locker room, um the homophobic comments, you know um a whole bunch of different things like that. And um there was also a couple of instances with your family um you know other issues going on with you that um you were never really fully

able to be you know intimate with you know all of you teammates um so I'm wondering you know what more what did I leave out of that you know what haven't you spoke about that you know you'd like to share or.

P: I can't think of anything. And I know I can talk (laughs) but I, I can't think of anything else I think, I think you summed it up.

I: I've got one last question actually. You mentioned you were a three sport athlete and I'm wondering um if there's any different experiences um that we haven't talked about with softball or tennis?

P: You know it's funny I cause I think I have talked mostly about basketball and I while I did play all three sports I always identified myself as a basketball player um tennis it's funny tennis I really did fall into it I mean there was no planning um what happened was they had six, they needed seven players on the tennis team on the women's tennis team they had six and so the tennis coach came to basketball practice one day and said, "when the season ends would any of you like to try out?" and the coach said you know coach [Smith] the our basketball coach said, "yeah if you want to go ahead" and so I was the only one who did.

I: Mmmhmm.

P: And you know I had never played tennis in my life.

I: Really?

P: I took a tennis class my actually fall quarter because I wanted to learn about tennis and so I had no business being out there you know but I actually worked my way up from the number seven position who didn't play to number five.

I: Cool. (Laughs)

P: Through challenge matches and stuff um tennis for me it I played it for two years it was a way it's funny it wasn't part of my identity. I mean I was an athlete but you know tennis was what I did in the off season to stay in shape and I had fun with the people that I was playing with and you know um got a chance to do something different um and then with softball uh I switched from tennis to softball our school was trying to get closer to title nine compliance anywhere to swap up to meet NCAA standards and um so they instituted a women's softball team to try to get closer to that with [?] of men and women's sports and I was actually I did play softball in high school I actually knew how to play softball (laughs) um as opposed to tennis and so um I switched cause I wanted to help them get a softball team started and there's no question I was a much better softball player than I ever was as a tennis player um and so that's how that switch happened but again it wasn't my main sport. You know softball season was fairly short mostly the spring quarter it was on the quarter system um where as basketball was you know practicing in the summer then pre-season all fall and then continued all winter and so time frame it

consumed a lot more time but then knowing that that, that was the sport that I identified as and got a little bit of funding for um that was how I identified myself. Um it's funny as much as I loved basketball and playing I had a lot more fun personally and socially with tennis and softball.

I: Really?

P: Um I'm not sure if was just the different pressure, if it was the different people who were playing um maybe the fact that since I didn't identify in that way there was I didn't feel any pressure to perform and could just have fun.

I: Yeah.

P: Um I don't know what it was but I distantly felt a lot more relaxed during those seasons than I did with basketball.

I: Mmm interesting yeah that makes sense that we talked mostly about basketball since it was your main identity. Okay well is there anything else that you'd like to add then?

P: Gosh um no I don't think so. Can't think of anything.

I: Okay let me turn the recorder off.

Interview Transcript #8 – Halle

Interview Transcript #9 – Ida

I: Ok so if you can tell me as much detail as possible your experience as being an athlete who identifies as lesbian.

P: Um, I kind of had an interesting experience um I guess I don't know as I am sure you know as you go to college trying to figure out who you are and you know where you fit in kind of and I kinda really didn't know I was gay until I was college toward my sophomore year in college I eventually stopped playing softball after two years because I was gay um I had a bunch of teammates on my team that were gay, [?]. I was dating a girl she was my first girlfriend ever and um I didn't know but [?] uh everybody knew that my coaches were gay but they never really talked about it and um my teammates were always really supportive of you know people that were gay on the team, the athletic department, the athletes, or the athletic department, one of the things you didn't really talk about at all you know that you were gay you weren't supposed to talk about it with you coaches, you weren't supposed to talk about it with people in the athletic department it was just at least on my team it was something that you were just kinda supposed to keep to yourself.

I: Uh huh

P: And uh I started dating a girl into my sophomore junior year in college and um I didn't know that she was going to end up being the grad assistants' roommate, our grad assistant on our softball team, her roommate, in the fall

I: Ok

P: And we had been dating for a few months and then um I kind of got strung on a she was going to be moving in with that grad assistant and then all these new rules, you know keep for me from my head coach, the assistant coaches and our managers that coach you know took me awhile to go see her and all because she lived with the grad assistant coach and uh that was like a confusing time for me uh, and then I, it was my first relationship. I was trying to figure things out and then as stressful as it is playing college sports and you already have a bunch of rules and all when you get told who you can see and when you can and can't go, I just kind of decided into my junior year that that was enough for me and then I didn't want to play anymore uh because I just needed to figure things some things out about who I was and um you know the thing about it is so it's really frustrating because um nobody really knew the whole story behind it and it was just something I was told needed to keep to myself about why I quit and um later our head coach, because I still went to the softball games to support my teammates. I still worked with my teammates and they were still really supportive of me um a few years later when I was a senior in college the head coach came up to me and uh I think she felt really guilty about everything she kinda put me through and uh she told me she was sorry and uh that she really respected me for some of the decisions that I made and um I kinda really didn't say anything, I just said thank you and that I learned a lot from you guys too. And um I think the biggest thing about being in college, especially a college athlete, it's just that here you kinda live

in a microscope, or uh live under a microscope as an athlete. You know everybody watching you, what you do, especially at the bigger university where you're at. Um, the more people that are looking to you or looking at you all day long all the time. I really didn't understand that until maybe you are really into my college sports career. Um and when you're gay they say you know it worse, you shouldn't really be open about it out in public. It's just that, you know, a lot of times the other gay athletes kind of get together and we have our own little group friends that we kinda hang out with and very rarely when I was still playing did I actually hang out with other gay people that weren't athletes. Just because it was one of those things that you didn't want anyone else to know that you were gay. I don't know, there was this fear about it. Um and that my coaches weren't very open about it so it kind of all fit into that air of you know not really letting many people know.

I: Yeah

P: Um, and I mean, I played a sport that a lot of people anyway uh you know they call all us softball players dikes and you don't want to fit into the stereotype but yeah you're gay but you're not at all you know have that short hair cut and I don't weight you know 200 lbs. and I just I didn't want to fit into that stereotype and I didn't want anybody to judge me because you know that I was gay, I don't know I just it was a really confusing time for me. I think you know just going to college and trying to figure things out just like any other college student your trying to see where you fit into the world and also you know all through life you knew you were gay you get a few more things going you know, it's almost like going through puberty again and its just a really confusing time for me

I: (laughs)

P: Actually I really don't talk about it very much uh but my partner for four years and that was after we were done playing softball. Um uh so I don't know if uh if that is what you are looking for but it just, I mean, I think that I that it's really tough really, tough place to figure out that you are like gay. I mean a lot of people on other teams don't quite have the same problems that I had on our team. Um, you know some of the basketball players didn't run into as much problems being gay, well with their coaches, but they were almost more forced into the closet just because you know their face is all over the place. You turn on a TV and there's you know commercials about come to the women's basketball game. And it was almost worse, and especially for the football players that were gay you really never talked about it with them. You knew who it was but you just they did never really come hang out with you, but you just, I don't know, closed conversation. So um I thought college sports gave me a bunch of opportunities but, it um it definitely made life a little more difficult my first 2 ½ years in college.

I: Yeah, very much so.

P: Um, nobody really knows, I mean there are people on my team that know about what happened but uh a lot of people don't know

I: Um huh

P: Um so I know I don't really talk about it very often

I: Oh, could you tell me more I know you mentioned that while you were in college you weren't supposed to talk about it, you know being gay or what not, and you haven't talked about it you now very much since can you tell me more what its like to talk about it?

P: It's kind of, I was thinking about it last night and I, um, it was kind of strange because it brought up a bunch of feelings and kind of angry but really sad at the same time. I mean I love playing softball and its something, the worst thing about the sport of playing is that you can't really ever go back and play it again. You can't play [?] softball ever again. Um I play [?] softball now but it's not the same. And it's not the same level of competition. There is no pro softball. And I um I think maybe I am a better person, that experience I think it helped me grow up. I kind of [?] and I think it kinda helped uh me grow up a little faster. But it definitely, I don't know I thought about it last night, and uh it just makes me really sad. It makes me really sad taht I missed out on a lot of things that I wish I guess I wish I would have been able to complete my four years playing softball at [Midwestern university]. Um I really missed my teammates a lot when they went out of town, um, and you know, I don't know I wasn't one of the favorite kids on the team and some of my other roommates were and their situations were dealt with a little differently. And I totally understand that, you know they didn't want me coming over to [?] coaches house, but you know some of the rules that they made up were kind of ridiculous.

I: Yeah

P: And, uh, to make matters worse I think our coach kind of realized that uh the assistant coach was kind of a little different and that um she, she really, I don't know, I kind of, you know like when like you are first going through puberty and you find everybody attractive and like this really awkward time in your life. Um I was kinda going through the same situation

I: Um huh

P: My freshman and sophomore year in college and um I was kind of attracted to my grad assistant coach and I didn't, it was like an awkward like I didn't, [?] I thought she was intellectually one of the dumbest people I actually knew, so um it was awkward. I would have to say that. But it was like a mutual, like you know when you feel like someone else is attracted to you as well. It was a mutual physical attraction between the two of us. And I, for 2 years, I avoided her actually and I went out of my way to avoid her because it made me feel really uncomfortable.

I: Uh huh

P: And I never really talked about it with anyone I just it was what it was so it was and uh so when all this happened with like my first girlfriend it sort of made it even worse.

I: Yeah

P: And I think that um, I think that our head coach kind of figured out the whole situation about a year after I stopped playing and um I don't really know, I wish I could go in and talk to her now about just different things, um that I dint' really talk to her about because I was embarrassed I quit. I don't know I never really quit anything in my life, especially something that was that important to me. [?] Complete your task or you physically can't do it, so quitting was a real embarrassment to me at least, um so I think, I don't know I was really embarrassed I quit. It took me a really really long time to get over it, a few years to get over it so um

I: Yeah

P: I don't know I felt emotionally scarred (laughs). I guess I got to travel to places where I never been before like Las Vegas, California, and it was a really good experience for a lot of things. I didn't happened to have a really negative ending experience...

I: Yeah

P: With being an athlete in college.

I: Yeah I know I mean definitely sounds like it was a difficult situation. And I know you mentioned it was stressful and frustrating and you're embarrassed and I mean there's a lot going on there.

P: Yeah, but I mean I think of it sometimes as we, kinda like the inner circle of athletes, [?] it was a lot of fun to be around a lot of other people that were just like you.

I: Uh huh

P: And in high school, I went to a Christian high school...

I: Uh huh

P: And uh, so I mean I could tell you in my graduating class I was the only lesbian from my graduating class. I didn't even realize at the time that I was gay and it just, you know it's so funny I think about all of that now and it was like opening up a whole new world. Like I didn't even know that being gay was an option. I mean, it never really occurred to me. I thought you were supposed to go to college and find somebody to marry and get then married, you graduate, that's what was told to me. And then I went to college and um that plan didn't really fit in to my plan.

I: Umhum yeah, can you say more about opening up a whole new world. You mentioned you know the parties in college and the not even knowing that with the possibility of to go there and not getting married. Can you tell me more about that?

P: Um I went to a Christian school and it was, I don't know, Catholic, and um I didn't really know anybody else that was gay. I mean later now I know of some guys in my class that are gay you now kind of makes sense now. At the time I was like you know everybody in high school is just trying to fit in and I didn't feel like I fit in at all. Um, I always knew I that something was a little different, but I didn't realize how different. And so I ah, I don't know it was nice to be around a bunch of other people I felt so a lot like I did

I: Um huh

P: I mean I never been, I never, in college you're finally out and able to go and make your own decisions and to go to places and to parties that you know, I don't know. You can stay out as late as you wanted, I mean I didn't really stay out that late normally. I like to go to bed early. But you were finally able to make your own decisions. It's just like regular college except for you are trying to figure out who you are at the same time. Um and you look around there are other people a lot like you.

I: Yeah.

P: And uh, you know it's just a lot of fun. I mean, in the athletic department there's a big group of people who are highly competitive, highly very motivated, and you get a lot of people are like funny and you get all these people together at a party and its just [?] I can tell you that.

I: (laughs) Yeah, definitely.

P: I mean, anything we did was just ultra competitive [?] I go to an all women's college now and it's definitely a different experience. Uh and um I can't feel like I can fit in with a lot of girls on campus. Um even if it was ----softball at a party it was super competitive --- we had tournaments I mean that to me was fun but I am sure that

I: Yeah

P: That to me was fun, but I'm sure that would not be fun to other people

I: (laughs) Okay well let me, how about if I summarize what you said so far to see if I've got that right and then maybe if there's something that we've left out or you want to add we can go from there okay?

P: Sure

I: Um so I think you started out with a it was a interesting experience um in that you didn't know that you were gay until about your sophomore year and then we had you started your first girlfriend when she went to move in with a grad assistant coach that caused a whole bunch of new rules and some stuff with the coaches and that you eventually ended up quitting and that experience was really you know stressful, frustrating, and embarrassing , um and um but you're time as an athlete you really did enjoy it because it was fun and you were competitive and you had you know supportive team mates um that you were able to hang out with go to different cities kit was also difficult you know just being an athlete like because you live under a microscope and then being um you really felt like you couldn't be open about being gay in public because you have like a fear that you didn't want others to know um but you felt like at college opened up a whole new world and um it was um fun, you wish you could have finished all four years as an athlete but um you definitely came to knowing more about who you were so I guess what I want to know does that fit with what you said um do you want to ----or add anything

P: No, that's exactly it I mean really thank really therapeutic

I: Well thanks

P: Just I don't know I guess I really don't talk about it a lot because it's hard for other people to understand I that situation --- college--- it s just a really difficult situation to describe

I: Yeah, I really appreciate you sharing with me.

P: Tell [another participant] I said hello.

I: I definitely will, is there anything else you want to add before I turn the recorder off?

Interview Transcript #10 – Jan

I: Please tell me in as much detail as possible your experience of being an athlete who identifies as lesbian.

P: Ok, um, so freshman year, um I came in, uh and I didn't tell anyone here. And then we had some ice cream social end of the year thing and uh I remember I wore like jeans and a blue shirt and a hat, and um, after looking back its kind of when everyone realized I was lesbian because I wore a hat, apparently it was a big sign. And um, I did date one girl probably for a couple months and um then kind of let the girls knew. And I remember I wasn't out with the girls and one of them pulled me in and was like, "[Jean], are you a lesbian?" And I was like "What do you mean?" She goes "Are you a lesbian? We all know," and I was like "Alright, like, yeah I am." Um, and then they kind of found out. And, um, it was actually kind of like, freeing, for a word. Like helped me and um because from there like going around being myself didn't really like bother me because everyone kind of like knew talking to me. I didn't really like, I didn't really care if people knew or didn't know, stuff like that. Um, then, uh, I'm trying to think. People knowing about it wasn't a big deal or anything. Um, and then, this year the new freshman came in. You know, I was kind of like [?]. I told them right away that [?]. But uh, a few of the girls were like, were more religious, and I didn't know how they would take it and stuff like that. But that was alright and that went good. And then from there once like my team and everyone here knew, then I started like coming out to my friends at home. My friends found out. Like all my friends from home know now, most all of them. Um, my um they've all met my girlfriend and they've all come down here and which is all really good stuff like that. Um, then, uh my family found out this year. That was this year's big event. Last year was coming out at school and this year was family. Um, I'm trying to think. That was pretty much how like it all like got out there kinda thing. Um, it hasn't been like bad with anybody. I think like, uh, it was a little weird at first, like, when like the guys found out. I didn't know how that would be. But, um, a few of my friends, like some of the football players they kinda knew, um the baseball team. We hang out with them a lot and they found out. And you know, some of them were like they were all good with it and some of them were just immature, just like guys, just making jokes whatever. Um, but, it hasn't, I mean it's been fine. You know, it's been like, especially this year I'm more like open about it I don't really mind. Last year I would do like, like I would carry around purses or this or that. And now I'm kind of like I don't care if I walk around in guy jeans and this or that. So.

I: Yeah. So like a pair of jeans that was a big thing [P: mmmm], people knew from the shirt [P: yeah]or hat [P: yeah]. You have guy jeans, you carried purses [P: yeah]. Can you tell me more about that?

P: Yeah. Um, that last [?] when they all knew I was a lesbian and they go because you wore a hat to the ice cream social. Like, well, what was that about? I wore a hat like at school in high school to this or that and nobody, you know, like commented. But like down here it was more, I guess what they just stereotype as like being a lesbian was my hat, hat on sideways. They were like that's how we knew, I was like alright. And then some of these girls would be like, oh but

you fooled me because like you carried a purse for awhile. And so I was just like oh we're allowed to like carry purses [laughs]. And um, so that was kind of like, I guess the big like stereotype that they all had. Like because I had a like hat on and I wore it sideways, that I was like a lesbian. I was like alright, but I was kinda like, that they knew type of thing. And then um, so I think for like dress now, I think that everyone knows that I'm like comfortable, like more comfortable in like, I guess that's my style, it's probably my guys jeans and like a shirt like this its like from [?], you know what I mean? Um, but I think now that's like a good indicator for those who don't know, but it's not so much because I don't really care anymore, cause you know.

I: You said you feel more free now. Can you tell me more about that?

P: Uh, I think like when I came here and it was like people didn't know, it was almost something like I kind of like carried this burden of nobody knowing. You know, if they find out how they react to it. Um, especially like maybe more down here with like the society how it is. I'm from [Northeastern state]. So you know, there I figured maybe it's not as big of a deal, you know. Uh, so I think that kind of like made me nervous, like nervous, I just mean I had a secret that no one knew about except me and my relationship. So no friends knew, no family knew, so it was just like, it's annoying. We'd have like, work outs at 6, leave at 5:30 so I'd have to at 5:20 go in the hallway to call so my roommate wouldn't hear me talking. It was just like, this giant, like this annoyance to be talking in the hallway. "Who you talking to?" "Oh nobody," you know? So like once everybody kind of knew, it was kind of like this like, everything felt lighter. And it let me like walk around campus, like not care what anyone thought. Because like the people that were my friends and I associate with were fine with it. But anyone else, someone else had a problem with it, I mean I can't do anything about that. I don't know them anyway. So that was kind of like a good thing. Um, I think once I did that it let me kind of tell people at home. And the first person at home was my best friend. She didn't really handle it quite well at first. She kind of like freaked out a little bit. But then she got over it the next day. It was just shock thing to her. So, but even that, it was just nice to like be able to talk to someone about our relationship. If I have a problem I could say "hey this is like the fight we're having" or you know anything little, even "hey, it's her birthday, want to come shopping with me?" or you know what I mean. You know how, it is a nice thing to be like open with it. And lighter, it really, it really did make me feel lighter about the whole situation.

I: Yeah, lighter that its not a secret.

P: Yeah, like I always carried around this thing in always like worrying oh what do people think. Like, you know, how do you [?] this or that. I mean it helps like, last year there someone else on the team who was. It kind of like helps the situation too, because it's kind of like someone else relate to. Like, you know, like you know it was hard but it was nice just like getting out there. So, it was good.

I: Can you tell me more about some of the people on the team. You said there was someone else who was also lesbian, and then I guess the others weren't. Can you tell me more about your teammates?

P: Yeah. Um, well last year there was one person um who was a lesbian. Um, no one else is this year. Um, but, all my teammates are really like good with it and fine with it. Like, um, they're always asking me how I am [?], like go shopping with me. They're all like perfectly like fine with it. And even with um, this year, like when I had with my family, they were all like there for me which was nice because I had like I kind of like need that with them. Um, the only difference this year is there was there was um, there was like two girls on the team this year, um that were more religious. Which I was wondering how it was going to be, kind of, with them. Um, but they were good with it. I mean, sometimes it would be like, little like, comments that I don't know if I read into wrongly because like how I was stressed. They'd be like, how is my family, and they'd be like well don't worry I'm sure you're doing the right thing. I'm like, well what do you mean, like, the right thing? Like, you know what I mean? But maybe I was just reading into things too much at that time. But um, all my teammates have been really good with it. Like, everybody gets, um, I still like, [?] really good friends with or anything. Um, but my teammates all like good with it. Even like, other athletes that no about it are fine with it, not a like big deal, so. Its good.

I: You also mentioned that your team hangs out with the other teams, in larger, you know, different team environments. Can you tell me more about that?

P: Like how it is with other teams? Um, it's like the same thing like um, the ones that like know about it, it's kind of like relaxing. Because even when you go out at night, or you go to like parties, or you do anything, with everyone knowing about you just kind of like be relaxed, not have to like put this act or like this front which is kind of like a nice thing to do, you know. Um, even like, she came down and we went to a party together so everyone like saw us together, and you know. Which was like, fine, you know what I mean. And um, all the guys might [?] and guys don't say anything. I'm assuming they all know, they're all like, I knew that some of the baseball team does, and like the football players that we associate with. Like they do and stuff like that. Um, but it was fine. The only thing that sometimes is, like uh, pain in the butt when we go out and stuff like that is, um, a lot of times my friends, like, not all of them just like a few of them, we'll like go somewhere and they'll like uh, if it was me and my girlfriend together, like around people I don't know yet, and they'll be like this is Jaime and this is her girlfriend. I'm just like okay, like, they like, like introduce like my situation to like people I'm just meeting like, I don't know if that's the most important thing to go first, you know what I mean? But, now I don't care if they know, it's just kind of like funny that's like how they first introduce us, like oh this is Jan and she's bringing her girlfriend. I'm just like okay, nice to meet you.

I: Yeah, so it seemed like they emphasized that you had a girlfriend.

P: Yeah, yeah. Not most of my friends. Just like, uh, one or two of them just sometimes will do it. I don't think they even like realize, they just, going out there, just like put my business like

out there without even like thinking about it. Which is fine, I don't care anymore. I mean last year it probably would have bothered me because I would have been uncomfortable like right away, but this year it's not so bad.

I: Can you tell me a little bit more about last year then? Like how you would have been uncomfortable with that?

P: Um, I think last year was uncomfortable because, last year was the first year like, um, I just started dating like the girlfriend I have now probably like my, like the summer before I came here. So that was like my first relationship too. So that was how like, new for me kind of time. And um, I think last year like that was like new for me as it was. And then not knowing how they were going to react to it because I've never seen anyone react to it before. And then I was kind of like not knowing how people here would deal with it and then knowing this is where I want to be for the next like four years. So that's why I think it was like made me scared kind of because it was like, if these people don't like accept, or my team doesn't, like I can't like do anything if it was like that. You know, how do I change, not change [?mutter?]. I think that kind of like made me nervous. Like how people are going to react to it. Um, I think, I think like being like in athletics especially in college, it's not so much like a big deal anymore. I think um, especially in talking about lesbian athletes it's like [?] oh okay. Um, so it's not like as like big, especially like when the girls don't really like care at all about it. Um, but uh I think like everyone's [?] you know what I mean. Um, so I think last year was just me kind of getting over my own nerves, never like having told anybody, never seeing anyone react to it, learning how it was type of thing. I think that was it. And I think like, not knowing like what's my team gonna, and they were okay with it, like that was like to me like the biggest comfort. Like anyone else outside that was just like, well they'll deal with it or they won't deal with it, you know. But especially the team, like this is who you're around, you know, all the time. Um, so I think that's the been the most from last year. I think that's what made me like, more shy last year. Like quiet last year, even like going out. Because I was just like, the people that [?], it kind of like changed the way I had to act. Or I thought I had to act. And then once everybody knew, it was just kind of like, I didn't care anymore. I didn't care like how I acted or what people thought, because people know everything about me now. If you don't like me now, I can't control that anymore. That's the thing, you know. So I think when they didn't know, it was like I okay, if I ??? then maybe it will, you know, be okay kind of thing.

I: Right, you needed to have that support to be able to be yourself. [P: Yeah. Mhmm] And it was scary because you didn't know if you were going to get it.

P: Yeah. Yeah. And then once I got like that support like from my team and those people that I would be around, like I said then it was just like anyone else I didn't really care. Like, I would walk around campus and a couple strangers looked at me and me and were like oh lesbian, like well okay, you know what I mean. I didn't care anymore because I can't make people like or dislike me because of who I am type of thing, you know. That was, like all you can do kind of thing.

I: Yeah. So it sounds like your handling those comments now and that you have that support and also that “I don’t care,” whereas before you would have.

P: Last year. Last year would have definitely been like that. I think even like last year like not wearing certain things. I mean like last year whatever in the fall, like boy jeans, you know. And then like this year it’s like asking all my friends, like hey you want to come shopping? I’m going to go to the guys, oh yeah, I’ll go, yeah, lets go find, you know what I mean? So last year like I wouldn’t have done that. I would have like, you know, have like my like whatever wardrobe would have been okay for that day type of thing. And now it’s just like, I can be comfortable. Not worry about anything kind of thing.

I: So I’d like to share what I’ve heard so far, and if you’d like to add anything to it or correct it or what not. [I: ok] Um, so I think you’ve mentioned there was a difference between your first year and second year. And that difference was that your first year that you weren’t really out to anyone, you were really scared about how they would react. And then when you did come out, to your teammates first, um they were really supportive and it really made you open to feel free to be who you were, in that in the clothing, and that the stereotypes played a big role. [I: Yeah] And, then your second year, right now the year you’re in, has been really good because you could be yourself. Um, you’re open more to, now more friends and your family and you’ve had some big, you know, milestones with that as well. [I: Yeah] And that it sounds like overall you’re feeling more comfortable with yourself and sounds like more confident too.

P: Yeah, yeah. I definitely do, I think like, last year was hard like coming out in general. My team was hard, my family was hard. But I think like overall, like, overall like every time I hit like that big bump like getting through it was like really hard, but like now I’m past it, like makes me like more okay with like who I am. And more like, sure of who I am. Like, you know, like. I mean a lot of times like when things get hard, it’s like easy just like question kind of. Like, well, I mean like [?] You know what I mean? You know, kind of like really question that. But then once I got past that, it just makes you like better, and like more okay with me, than I was, you know what I mean. It gets better with each year kind of thing.

I: It sounds really hard to have to question that too.

P: Yeah I think that’s like, like a more like stressful, like that’s what like adds so much stress to everything. It’s like every time it gets hard and challenging, it’s easy just to like question like, you know, should I do this or like I mean should I just go like date a guy and you know I’ll be okay. Like you know not happy, happy but I’ll be like fine. That’s the thing that makes it like a lot more like, stressful and then it’s just like oh well that makes like your relationship hard because like you know I’m stressed and its like a lot of stuff going on, you know. But I think like when I step back, and just like let it all like play out the way it is, that it just makes it like a lot easier, a lot more like more lighter on myself. And it just makes it like really like challenging like. Actually it feels light really like when everything is so stressful for me when I get like heavy heart type of thing, you know, and when it’s light I feel free. Because when like

everything like collapsed and everyone like knew, it just let me free [?] at one big time. So it's not my secret anymore type of thing.

I: Can you tell me more, well I guess you may have already explained this as much as you can, but if you could tell me more about how hard or what it's like to be hard.

P: Um, I'm trying to think what is hard about it. Uh, I think like, I think some of the hard part about, um, for like, some of the little things are like, you know a pain in the butt like, not like hard, but just a little annoyances. Like, uh, when I'm out, like out in public, my girlfriend never like [?] relationship type of thing you know. So that's kind of like different, um. A nice thing about like people knowing is being able to like actually show like a relationship type of thing. I guess hard things are like, like uh. We were out one night with the baseball guys, and uh most of them are fine with it, and then there's always like one kid being like immature about it. There's nothing you can like do or say, but it's just like, it just kind of makes it like kind of feels uncomfortable for the moment, you know what I mean. It's just like, why does this guy have to be a jerk about this type of thing, you know what I mean. So I think that's a hard thing, it's just like dealing with people being like immature about situations. Like even though they felt okay with it, they still make jokes just because they can. Um, but I mean at that time like that's like a hard part about it. Um, I'm trying to think like what else with school and stuff was a hard part. Um, I think sometimes just for me it's still hard like, um, going into the class for the first time, I think sometimes that's all they care about. Just kind of like, wondering about peoples opinion, you know like walking in there my first day, if I'm not, if I'm dressed right or like things like that I just wonder what someone's thinking or, you know what I mean, like constantly trying not to make people uncomfortable I think a lot of times I think like I won't talk about my relationships with some people because I don't want to make people uncomfortable which is kind of annoying because they all always talk about their like, boyfriend and like I don't want to talk about my relationships and I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable is the thing, um, A lot of it depends on the person too, I mean like with my roommate it think doesn't matter I can say what I think it doesn't matter. Like its fine. Some people like, I just know, like, their probably like, don't want to have an in depth conversation about it or like have a long conversation about it. They just want it quick and short, you know what I mean? [?] Um, uh, I think like something else that is hard is like, constantly having to like, like people always tell you like, always try and be [?] or be like this and that, and um, I think that's bad, like, a stressor like, you know? Like yeah I know people are like making fun of me and like and I think like its hard to like convince people like I'm aware of this its all real thing.

I: um hum

P: Because I think like, people like, don't really understand why but are like, ok, [?] when I'm sitting here like like they don't accept me or anything like I wanna have a family and like I think its like based on real life like cause somebody doesn't just wake up and decide like, oh I want to be a lesbian because I think it will be like, easier for me, you know what I mean? Um, so I think like that's hard just hard like to answer those questions like, if someone says "how are you going to start a family?" "how are you going to do this or how are you going to do that?" and its like I

don't know how I'm going to do it but its like, I'll be fine doing it all but yeah I know like, but if I'm like ok with it then like its going to be hard but like it will make it easier when I get to that point I guess.

I: Yeah

P: But which is good, my girlfriend is an athlete at um, not here, at a different school um, and uh, its uh, she goes to school up north um at her school like there it's a lot more common like there are a lot more lesbians there um, so I mean like there it seems like everyone there is like a lot more ok with it, you know, I think like here their not, I mean there might be but there's not as many, openly outward like and up there like everyone knows and like there's 15 [?] people there but all of them don't go to school there (laughs)

I: (laughs) yeah

P: So it kinda seems like its ok there.

I: It just seems like up there the region of the country the culture really affects how open people are.

P: Yeah, I mean like the culture where she goes to school, like, its not like, a big thing like a lot of people know what its like and there is a lot of people who are like very open or out about it or like [?]. Like when I go up there like all of her friends, like all of her adult friends are kind of like the same. Um, I think like, um here, like, not as many people are open like you have people who you think that might be but they're not open, you know what I mean? Um, I think that like I would be more nervous like, coming out here than I would like at home, just cause I feel like at home, everything is more like, not more like, [?] but its more like, ok. You know what I mean? Especially like, you know when you like gay pride and um, you know what I mean, and like, you cant like, gay pride in Knoxville, you know what I mean?

I: Yeah

P: Like I remember last year there was um, I have this shirt that says "it's ok to be gay" and I was at the Vol Walk and some little kid was like "are you really gay?" and it was just kinda like, um, times like that makes it a lot more uncomfortable like, coming out here first, you know what I mean?

I: Yeah

P: I can't think of anything like back at home, like at my high school like anyone around it wasn't like that big a thing, you know?

I: Yea. Ok is there anything else you want to add like about the culture and how it's hard?

P: Um, I think the whole um, I think like it's a lot easier to be a lesbian athlete in college like, its more like, accepted I think. There's like stereotypes, like especially like in softball like I remember one of my friends and her mom called and she was like, uh, "oh your hanging out with this softball player?" and she automatically assumed I was a lesbian before she even knew me, and uh, it was kinda funny cause like, I'm the only lesbian on the entire softball team so its just kind of like a stereotype how softball players are um, which is kind of like interesting because its not so much like, I know that I'm one but my teammates are like oh ok. Like you know what I mean? Like softball is like, you know like in high school people always put like softball and lesbians together, and uh, I think like that happens a lot of other times and its just like a stereotype and like just attacking a person for no real reason but I thinks its more ok like I played for a 23 and under team, like over the summer, and that's like all girls like, some of us are from here and some are from Florida and stuff like that. And you know them, I didn't mind, like just talking to them about it, you know what I mean? Because they always accept you and all that type of stuff, which was good. I think like athletes are a lot more accepting of it kind of, than maybe like non athletes are like, because they were around it so much more and so I think its a lot more easier to be around athletes with it than with non athletes just because like, I think I just feel more comfortable around athletes rather than non athletes just because like I said we're around it a lot more. So it's a lot more like acceptable, more and more not a big deal. But when I'm around non athletes I kind of wonder if their ok with it type of thing.

I: That's interesting that there are two different environments and one feels more comfortable.

P: Yeah, I feel a lot more comfortable like in my athletic environment just because I know like their ok with it. Like their all ok with it like they never say anything to me like you know what I mean? Where like outside of it like I kind of wonder sometimes you know like people don't really know how to associate with lesbians or don't want to associate with them and that type of thing. Um, so I think that's why I'm a lot more comfortable with it like [?] its kind of hard to wonder how they like feel about it like in that kind of environment and that kind of thing. You know? And I think, um, I think I'm just really confident in my athletic group than I do like other places. Like I know everyone knows so it's not like a shock for anybody. Or those that don't know, don't know me and like that's ok with me too like you know what I mean? I mean but like its, like its, like easier around especially like athletes because your around them a lot more so you never really like get people that are like outside that you know what I mean? Which its kind of like, um, kind of like different to see them you know like if somebody finds out like you want to try and hang out with different people but you know what I mean and stuff like that?

I: Yeah

P: But its just like especially like here like it seems like all my friends are [?] people like you know it just kind of seems like how it is like we just all hang out together because were all together all the time. You know what I mean? So

I: Yeah

P: So like the only thing I can like think of that's like kind of like, not a challenge but just kind of like, like um, like um, like coaching staff doesn't know, well actually like, I think like coach knows and she's fine with it, like when my girlfriend comes down she hangs out with her, it's fine. But I think me having my coaches find out makes me nervous. Only cause like I don't know how they were going to react to it and everything not like, not like they would be against it or anything like that but just like a type of thing where I try to keep anything that can be used to affect my play out of their minds type of thing. I don't want it to ever be like oh Jen's not focusing because she has a girlfriend or whatever you know what I mean? And stuff like that but I think that that's different like you know like, other people on other teams like talk loudly about their boyfriends and like oh "Bob's coming to the game today," you know what I mean? Where like when she comes down here, sometimes like I don't really want people to see her but like they have met her before but like her father was my coach so like so when she got her eligibility she was older than me and we were on the same team and they met her, that's how I know they know who she is so when she comes to the game I don't want them to know that she is there and play a lot that day I don't want them to know that she was there and they would be like Jen didn't play well today and this girls here you know what I mean that parts a little bit like, like challenging. You know what I mean? Kind of don't want them like know about it type of thing

I: Sounds like you're more nervous to be open with them because of the possible consequences.

P: Yeah, I don't think it's like anything like that or all not accept it or like be anything against me, but I want to keep that 2 parts of my life separate type of thing. I think that's just one thing that's kind of different. Even like my teammates [who are in?] relationships [???].

I: In many ways it's helped o be open with other teammates, friends, and family, but with the coaches it helps not to be open.

P: Yeah, it's just I want to keep anything that can possibly be like, I uh, like I don't want anything used in a way that could possibly be like come back at me type of thing, you know what I mean? Like all them know, not talk about it if we're at practice or this and that. My assistant coach doesn't bother me at all and um she's like she comes down and she hangs out there and she's like I watch her kid while she watch the game and stuff like that, which is good.

I: I guess another question that I had for you, was before you mentioned the stereotypic softball player, lesbian. What's it like to meet that stereotype?

P: Um I think like, for me what's kind of funny is like there are these stereotypes of what a lesbian is or is supposed to act. And um, I think like, I don't know how to explain it. I think it's funny that people think like stereotypical lesbian sort of thing. Some of my friends like, like as far as lesbians go, get described a lot, describe lesbians as like A, B, C, D to describe like kind of lesbian that you are. Which is what your stereotype of like how you should look, like how you should act is and like this or that. Its kind of funny, like people are talking about what a lesbian is and this and that and they would be like wouldn't she be like a C shouldn't she be like a C and I'm like I don't know how to fit into that category, like who we can date type of thing. It's just

like or people be like oh you're, you can be, you're girlfriend she's like a B right and you're a C, I'm like, I don't know. They put like stereotypes, even like, not even so much that she's a lesbian because she's wearing this, but oh she's wearing this so she's a lesbian and she's a C lesbian you know what I mean? And then they'll be like well how can you like date her if you're a C and she's a C, isn't that like weird? And I don't know like she's a person, you know, that's how like [?] go to college different [?] talking about or their talking about I don't think their like aware like knowing so much about it type of thing they'll be like oh she's a C I know she's a C like ok she's a C [?] like you don't feel like explaining about it like.

I: Anything else that you feel you haven't talked about that would be important to explain your experience?

P: Um, I guess I think like this year big decision was like being able to come out that's like a big thing. I think like um it's kinda like funny, but say you'll meet someone or you'll be friends with somebody, or your team says about somebody like isn't she a lesbian and I'm like yeah, I don't know, their like I really wish she would come out about it and you just sit there thinking well it's not that easy you know what I mean. I think like for me it helped having someone else on the team. I think that was kind of like a comfort. It's kind of like knowing someone else is there so obviously like I really [?] have the comfort and um it's kind funny because like when I cam on the team she was like it's nice to finally have another lesbian on the team. Like someone who really understands like how it is or like what it's like to talk to about differently type of thing. Cause I mean a lot of times a relationship is a lot different, people don't really understand how different it is or a lot like um especially like I guess people ask who's the guy in the relationship or who's the girl in your relationship? I think like as far as relationships go like, it's a lot different than like, I had a boyfriend in high school for a year, it's just like a lot different, it's a lot like, both are so emotional, you know what I mean. People are just like, you all are so crazy like ya'll like emotional like you it's like, there's no like [?] when you're fighting like you're like she's fine whatever you know what I mean. You're both like you know I think that's like a different [?] I had somebody who was on the team last year so it was kind of nice to talk to them without like she's just being crazy you know what I mean and understand when we both fight it's a lot different type of thing. I think that may be different like talking about a relationship it's kind of different because I don't want to they'll be like really get it fully type of thing um. I'm trying to think [pause]. This year is the first year I think that like a lot of guys found out for me. Which um, wasn't a big deal for me because I actually felt more comfortable hanging out with the guys once they knew. Cause I felt like I just could be like. I felt like last year they guys would probably be like think it kind of thing but they didn't really know, you know what I mean. I think now, [?] which is good they kind of be like normal you know and it's like, it's probably the keeping a secret thing like now they know [?] which is good. Yeah, so, I think I think like, one thing that sticks about last year and it still hangs around this year is people [?] about when you wore the hat that one day. I was just like I never knew wearing a hat was such an obvious thing. But that's fine, it's probably a region thing again too. I always wore hats at home, which is kind of funny, you know. [pause] I think that's pretty much it.

I: Thank you so much.

Interview Transcript #11 – Kit

I: Alright so if you can tell me in as much detail as possible what your experience was like being an athlete who identified as lesbian.

P: Um just start at the beginning I guess? Ah shoot well I um got recruited by a division two school and um I was recruited by two schools actually um the school that I choose kind of was a division three private school in [Northern region] and I chose between that one and a division two school [Northern region]. I ended up picking [name of school] because I was able to come out and um coming from a small town up north in [Northern state] I was closeted my entire career there. So um I went to [university] and I came out and it kind of was a um easy coming out for me um my teammates accepted me extremely well and um and then my coach who did not know that I was gay at the time when she signed me on the team found out. And um she found out by what some of my teammates had said and she ended up calling my AAU basketball coaches and um stating that um from what I've heard she said I thought she said that I wasn't gay so I guess she wasn't looking forward to that conversation so it was kind of a tension type thing between my coach at [university] and um and myself. And that happened around the middle of my first year there, so my freshman year. And um there was one other girl on the team who was out and um she was accepted more than I was because obviously she was better than I was so the coach kinda needed her a little bit more than me she got more minutes than I did so which I can understand I guess. The coach has to get along with the people that she needs. And um but as far as classes and teammates go, my friends um all that was pretty smooth. Uh things went well my first two years in college other than my coach and tension. I ended up dating a few girls those next two years.

I: Uh hmm.

P: My first year I was actually dating somebody in high school uh so I went to college dating her and ended up dating her for my first year there and we ended up breaking up and my second year I kind of went out and did more of the bar scenes and uh partied more with people who were gay and um I kind of got a reputation like that from my coach [?]. I actually ended up transferring to the division three school um which was my second choice um my freshman year in college and um I ended up transferring there to play basketball um that's a little bit more extent um being a private school they're able to say that you have to sign certain things or um you have to commit yourself to a life of change or that when it comes to the gay lifestyle and um I ended up going and meeting with the coach who had wanted me out of high school and um things went really well he knew that I was gay and um his process was a little weird for me uh he ended up having me talk to the teammates of his team at the time and ask them if it was okay um that he recruited me because I was gay, uh openly gay.....

I: Wow.

P:and um they had to sit down in a meeting and talk about it and the verdict was that they had no problem with it so that went pretty well. And then um I ended up coming in for my

meeting to sign to play at the division three school and he ended up saying that he ended up talking to the athletic director and the president and the dean of that school on getting permission to allow myself to be a part of this campus and this team and it was a very long process that um I didn't really think was necessary but um it was a lot of people that were extremely scared about it they didn't know what I would be like, they didn't know if I would come and um reinvent the school and you know wild and crazy you know they had a lot of stereotypes and it um was a big deal for them. And I ended up having to say that, in the signing my uh my commitment to go there and at the bottom of it, it had the typical [?] and do not drugs that kind of thing and um at the end there was an extra clause for me saying that I was going to keep my lifestyle of choice um to myself. And uh even though that they don't hate these people they don't agree with the lifestyle, is basically what it said. So um I had to sign that committing myself to uh respect their wishes and respect their rules, and respect their community by not leading an out and proud and practicing gay lifestyle. So that was that and that was a little bit more um discriminating type of people and I ended up going there I ended up playing two years and uh things were great, uh the girls were pretty great, the coach was really nice um and it really wasn't a problem um at all cause I kept to myself so it wasn't that big of a deal um so I mean that's kind of my experience a little bit of bad and little bit of good as far as my teammates go. (Mumbles) you know it was really the administration that um you either had to jump through hoops or coaches had a problem with it such as [1st University] so um yeah.

I: Wow.

P: So do you have any questions you want to ask?

I: Yeah I was wondering if you could tell me more about um how the administration wanted you to respect their community's wishes and what it was like for you not to be able to be out and proud um at that school?

P: Um well it was a it was a little bit of shock for me um I knew well my coach told me that he went and talked to the other girls on the team at that time about it I could understand that uh the administration part I thought was a little bit much for me.

I: Uh hmm.

P: And I didn't really quite grasp reasons for doing that but uh they wanted me to um there's a school that's right down the road from where I went to school and it was a little bit more strict than and they said that if they ever found out uh they you would end up having to leave that they would kick you out of the school, they would expel you and I had a friend who went there who was also lesbian but she was closeted and um it wasn't that extreme but they wanted me to um if I was dating anybody or if I um a coming out day or a day of silence or um any sort of pride days at all um it was kept a secret if um I was going to attend it um I wasn't allowed to do rainbows and balloons and you know where the t-shirts you know that kind of thing I wasn't allowed to do that and uh that was a little weird for me but then again I wasn't, I wasn't a huge activist when I first transferred. I wasn't um all about the rights, I wasn't really into all that. Coming I had just

come out to my parents the year before and things were very tense around that and um I didn't want my name to be in the papers and that kind of thing with being the activist I was at [1st University] um because it caused such a big controversy within my family and I didn't want to do that going to this kind of school, I was nervous about how people were going to react uh you hear about all the time there was this kind of um I don't know what its called but there's um a group of students who travel around the country to different campuses who do anti gay or hateful campuses to spread the word and being on the campus and kind of uh give out information about the lifestyle and about who we are and it is part of what we are and um they came the year before and had an article piece on it in the local newspaper at the college and um there was a lot of protest and a lot of hatred talk there was broken car windows there was a lot of stuff that happened that scared me a little bit to be uh to be out in crowds so I was I was kind of okay my first year I was very hesitant to talk about it like my teammates wanted to talk about it, wanted to talk about my girlfriend and um wanted to know about it and I was really hesitant because of course I didn't want to get expelled. I didn't want to have a reputation with the administration, I was going into physical education, I didn't want that to come and backfire on me um basically you know grades stuff like that I didn't want any of that I didn't really want any trouble so it was difficult for me to close mainly my relationship um that I was having that I had. I starting dating the girl that I'm with now and um we were, we were serious and we wanted to pursue it and she ended up going to [university] so that was hard for me to closet my relationship but as far as my activism goes I don't think it really was affected um any more than it was at [1st University] other than that fact that I was a little scared when I first came.

I: Yeah, well I'm also wondering what it was like to, you know, to be scared and being out in the community but then the opposite almost um you know having your teammates want to know, it seems like two different um atmospheres.

P: It was, it was um it was a little confusing um I actually expected my teammates to kinda respond the way the administration did um the college that I chose to go to was most of the students were from the surrounding Christian schools and so they were very tight knit, they all grew up together, they all knew each other um so the community at school was very, very uh inter-twined and um to have my teammates want to know about it felt really, really great however what my teammates now knew, I knew would get around campus.

I: Umm hmm.

P: So um if they knew I'm seeing a girlfriend my first year I was there or if I've slept with you know one of their friends or something like that then they're gonna find me out. I knew that would get around school extremely fast and um so I kind of always had this a uh distance from my teammates and I knew that affected our chemistry on the floor, I knew that it affected what they thought of me. They thought of me as of at first, um I don't know they thought I had that mentality, they thought that I didn't want to get to know them I didn't want have anything to do with them, I was there to strictly play basketball and that was hard for me because and even though I don't want something like that to happen on a team that I'm with I'm very pro uh commitment to team work and so that was really hard that was a big obstacle for me to get

through. But um I think a lot of that also was pressure from the administration I think there was a lot of pressure on me, not so much my teammates uh they didn't know about the piece of paper that I had to sign or the meetings that my coach had with the team and the athletic administrator and the president, they didn't know any of that until the following year. And when they knew about that um my teammates were a lot more um actually protective of me they were uh they thought that that was crazy they didn't agree with that, they wanted me to know that they were on my side um they were, they were great and um I kinda wish I would have done that the first year instead of having all these instances and things like that go on but ah you live and you learn I guess so.

I: Yeah, could you tell me more about how the distance from them affected the connection um you know as teammates?

P: Yeah um I ended up starting right away. I was a point guard um so in basketball that's kind of the silent captain rule you call out the plays, you call out the defenses, you kind of do a lot of the grunt work you pass the ball you don't score a lot but you pass and you make assists and nobody really knows your name but without it a team really can't run. And that says, it made it hard for them to trust me and that's the biggest thing uh coming into a school where they had been playing together for the last two years uh they were successful the year before. Not having that trust kind of put a stop on our success that year. And um it was well about I don't know maybe three quarters of the year in um they ended up trusting me more and ended up saying um you know we'll let you lead us, we'll let you bring the ball up the floor and we'll let, we'll listen to you when you do something we'll do what you say uh that trust wasn't there until almost three quarters of the year. Where at [1st University] when I first went there I came out at a get together I had that summer before my freshman year so I got it out of the way right away and that trust that bond was there immediately uh it took a couple weeks to get used to the way we played together but that trust was still there and um but the school that I transferred to not so much. And so it made it hard for our success rate and for our out- of- practice bonding activities such as getting together for dinner um team building exercises in the summer um all that was kind of put on hold because of my tension that I had with them so yeah, kind of folded in half.

I: Yeah can, can you tell me more going back to I guess your first university what more about what that was like how there was that trust more immediately you felt more accepted right away.

P: I felt, uh I felt more accepted right away because usually it was being it was what I wanted my first experience being in a city, in a community where uh people didn't know my name and they often knew that I was gay. Um my home town was small, my dad was a doctor uh my mom was [?]. They were really well known I was successful in sports and um my grandfather was a successful businessman in that town so I really couldn't go anywhere without somebody knowing who I was. So when I ended up finding out, figuring out that I was gay and [?] um I had to keep all that down and I wanted to go to a school that I could be who I was without having to be secretive and [1st University] really gave that to me and um then on top of it to go to a school that big uh to not really belong to anybody I was kinda shy in my nature so I wasn't extremely outgoing and um have that immediate trust that immediate friendship right away uh made that

transition from my school a lot easier. So um even though the coach and I had, had a lot of hard times and we had a lot of fights and um we had a lot of distrust between the two of us uh the friendship and the trust that I had with my teammates uh made it worth it and it made that transition a lot easier for me even though I ended up um loving the second school I went to uh the first school was great for my ideal my transition and having that trust right away at that school uh just made it a lot easier like how big it was it gave me confidence to be outgoing to um find friends in other dorms, to uh interact with people that I really wouldn't interact with uh because of that new found confidence because I already had a group that I belonged to um it's kind of the same way with a sorority or fraternity you get that immediate group of friends and then everything else kind of falls into place after that and um having that right away was great and uh not having that at [transfer university] that sucked and um.....

I: Yeah.

P:it made my first year there really lonely. I had friends at [1st university] but I was far enough away that I couldn't see them as much as I did before um about half way through the year we did that you lose contact you're not in the same world their in, you're not taking the same classes, you not bumping into each other dorms you're not doing any of that and I didn't know anyone at [transfer university] and everybody knew about me. And um that made it really hard because I knew they knew who I was and the only thing that I knew that was that I was gay and that was it and um people that were open to it people that were accepting would talk to me at class and others who weren't would sit across the room and stare at me. Um so it was hard not to have that immediate friendship that immediate group of people at [transfer university] but um I was confident enough in myself that being my junior in college that I knew where I was going and I knew what I wanted to do so it was okay for me to stick my head down and go to the [?] in classes but um it still wasn't the ideal experience that I would want.

I: Yeah, wow that sounds really difficult you know to have everyone you know, know something you know so big about you and just have people sit across the room and staring or else accepting, I mean it seems pretty isolating.

P: It yeah it definitely was. It definitely was. [?] for me but um yeah uh that was hard.

I: Now I was also wondering if you could tell me a little more about um your coach at um the first school that resentment um that kind of built when she found out that you were gay.

P: Uh yeah uh it actually mmm at first it wasn't that bad um it wasn't as big as I thought it was going be I thought oh okay no big deal you know I have another teammate that's lesbian things are okay I wasn't you know obviously she doesn't have a huge problem with it she doesn't want anything to do with it but I'm pretty sure she can be tolerant of it. Um I ended up becoming friends with the other teammate and um we ended up talking a lot about her experiences and she ended up having the same problems that I was having with our coach such as um people that are of the administration at [1st university] uh knowing things about us that we've never told them such as um there's a lot of confidentiality uh with a coach and a player that you expected to have,

uh for us that wasn't there and uh and it was not there uh classmen, professors uh when they would call my coach to let them know this was the grade I had in class this is how I was doing when she would check up uh it was one of the first things that they would find out about me um it wouldn't be what my major was, it wouldn't be where I was going, how I was doing at practice it would be they had to learn that I'm a lesbian that I'm gay and I'm out and proud about it and I have a girlfriend that I hold hands in public and I do all these things and I go to gay bars and I have gay friends and um that really became my identity to her and it uh it was it ended up causing tension with my family um my family didn't know my first year there and so uh my coach I later I found out that my coach ended up talking to my parents about it uh in a phone conversation that I didn't know anything about um and ended up talking about my sexual preference and uh my parents ended up finding out before I even told them so um but I didn't find that out til I don't know maybe a year ago so that, that was hard for me to swallow confidentiality was definitely not there. It wasn't there for my teammates and um it became hard when it came to the administration aspect of it as far as athletic directors uh tutors uh for our classes uh it was a well known fact that there were two lesbians on the basketball team there was [Jen] that was a friend of mine and um and that was really hard although I mean at the same time it outted me to a lot of people I didn't even need to be outted out to. And I made [?] friends in gay community a lot easier, but that was really the only good part to it. [?] my coach would call my high school coach to talk about it or call my AAU coach or call my parents or talk to my other teammates about it um and it really was the only thing that I was to her was gay and um that sucked a lot so but it happens and uh you don't expect it to happen I didn't expect it to happen so it kind of [?] but having someone else there who went through it made it a lot easier uh in having that trust that commitment and that friendship already made dealing with my coach a lot easier for me you know.

I: Wow. Sounds like quite the betrayal by your coach, uh it's pretty big. Um well I'm wondering if maybe I can summarize what I've heard you say so far and then you can, you know, add anything that maybe you haven't um mentioned yet or you know correct anything that you've heard so far. Does that sound okay?

P: Yeah go ahead.

I: Okay so it sounds like you know started out with talking how you know the recruitment process and you were torn between two schools. And you first went to the division one school and that in some senses it was there was trust there immediately and you were accepted with your teammates but then as soon as your coach found out um you know that did not go well or was a lot of resentment you later found out she told your parents and your identity really was only at the lesbian in your coach's mind but your one teammate especially that was also out really you know helped that process and really classes and teammates and everything else was smooth there um and then later um for two years I think you said you transferred to the division three school um that was a private school where they actually had you sign this contract um about how your lifestyle to keep that to yourself um cause it you know it didn't go with the community that they had so you weren't able to be out and proud a lot of that came from the administration but it was also that first year was really hard with your teammates um there was a

distance between them but then um you were able to trust it was difficult at first and they were also very um you know supportive of you um and I guess I'm just hearing a lot of the process for you the administration and the coaches made everything a lot more difficult for you um but overall it seemed like your teammates were a lot more supportive. Does that seem to fit your experience?

P: Yeah that's great yes.

I: Yeah is there anything that you'd like to add?

P: Um I think that pretty much covers it I guess yeah. Pretty much how it went down. I uh I mean is there something that you would want to ask me is there some sort of topic you wanted me to talk about but other than that I don't have anything else to say?

I: Okay no yeah I just really wanted to learn about your experience and if you feel like that fits with it then that's good.

P: Yeah, yeah that's good that fits. Yeah.

APPENDIX C

Research Team Member's Pledge of Confidentiality

Heterosexism and Homonegativism in Sport: A Phenomenological Investigation of Athletes Who Identify as Lesbian

As a member of this project's research team, I understand that I will be reading transcripts of confidential interviews. The information in these transcripts has been revealed by research subjects who participated in this project in good faith that their interviews would remain strictly confidential. I understand that I have a responsibility to honor this confidentiality agreement. I hereby agree not to share any information in these transcripts with anyone except the investigator of this project, Marie Shaw (336) 202-6634; the research advisor, Dr. Mark Hector (865) 974-1984; or other members of this research team. Any violation of this agreement would constitute a serious breach of ethical standards and I pledge not to do so.

Research Team Member

Date

Research Team Member

Date

Research Team Member

Date

Research Team Member

Date

Research Team Member

Date

Research Team Member

Date

VITA

Marie Elizabeth (Lloyd) Shaw was born in Rochester, NY on April 18, 1981. She was raised in Rochester and graduated from Churchville-Chili High School in 1999. From there, she went to the State University of New York at Binghamton and received a B.A. in psychology in 2003. Then, she went to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and received a M.S. in exercise and sport science, with a concentration in sport psychology, in 2005. Marie is currently pursuing her doctorate in counseling psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and she is completing her pre-doctoral internship at the University of Tennessee Counseling Center.