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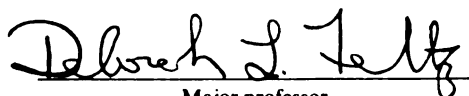
Lesbian Identity Formation  
and  
The Softball Environment

presented by

Brenda Ann Riemer

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in Physical Education and  
Exercise Science

  
Major professor

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**LESBIAN IDENTITY FORMATION AND THE SOFTBALL ENVIRONMENT**

**By**

**Brenda Ann Riemer**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment for the requirements  
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## **ABSTRACT**

### **LESBIAN IDENTITY FORMATION AND THE SOFTBALL ENVIRONMENT**

**By**

**Brenda Ann Riemer**

Softball is America's most popular team sport, with approximately five million women participating every year. Some of the women who participate in the softball environment are lesbians. Zipter (1988) wrote a book which declared that softball was not only present in lesbian culture, but that it was the national pastime for lesbians. The softball environment was created as an outlet for working class lesbians in the 1950s because the gay bars were not safe from police raids. Since the 1950s, participation in softball has grown, both in American society and lesbian communities. Besides creating a place for lesbians to meet, the softball environment can be a location where lesbians can come out to others. The purpose of this study was to examine the softball environment as a part of the lesbian subculture, and to examine whether or not the softball environment was a location which facilitated the formation of a lesbian identity. Qualitative interviews were conducted with 29 women (23 lesbians, 6 nonlesbians). The women were recruited from recreational softball leagues and were either players or spectators. The interviews were taped, and the transcriptions were examined for themes. The results of this study indicated that although the women had different initial reasons for beginning to participate in softball, a main reason for their participation as adults was the social aspect of the game. Both the lesbian and nonlesbian participants mentioned that the softball environment was a location to see their friends. The lesbian participants also believed

that softball was a positive way to meet lesbians. None of the lesbian participants could explain how they came to know that softball was a place to meet other lesbians. However, the softball environment was viewed positively by the lesbians as a place where they could safely interact with other lesbians. The lesbian participants were also asked questions about their identity and how they came to realize they were lesbians. From this data, an ego-identity model of lesbian identity was proposed. Additionally, the coming out process for the lesbians was examined and a relationship between the age of a personal realization of being different and a personal coming out was discussed.

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## **Softball**

**The ball slowly floats  
A soundless arc  
Suddenly it is struck  
By a magical wand**

**The ball swiftly flies  
A soaring eagle  
Then it lands  
In the curved leather nest**

**This dissertation is dedicated to all of the softball players, lesbian and nonlesbian, who look upon springtime as a chance to relive the sights and smells of softball. Without these women, this dissertation could not have been written.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A dissertation cannot begin without a spark. It is the spark which leads an individual to pursue a topic and to formulate a research question. The spark which lead to this dissertation topic was set by Dr. Lillian Faderman, who took the time to meet with me and discuss issues related to research on and about lesbians. Dr. Faderman encouraged me at a time when I was unsure of the direction of my work. Most importantly, she taught me, through her teaching, discussions, and her work, that research should come from the heart.

Support is essential to the completion of a dissertation. Scholastic and emotional support help encourage the dissertation writer to stay on task, especially during the periods of writer's block. I would like to take this time to thank the people who have supported and helped with my dissertation and the dissertation process.

First, I would like to thank my committee. My advisor, Dr. Deborah L. Feltz, who allowed me the freedom to choose a topic and methodology which were not her specialty areas, and who supported me through-out the dissertation process. Dr. Elaine Donelson encouraged me to read the ego psychology literature and to expand the dissertation to include a proposed model of lesbian identity. Her suggestions helped to shape the direction of the dissertation, and to make it a complete piece of scholarly work. Dr. Doug Campbell generously gave his time to ensure that the methodology was sound.

My other committee members, Dr. Sam Reushlain, and Dr. Anita Skeen helped by giving me valuable suggestions about the dissertation. Additionally, they were always available to give their support. Although not a committee member, Dr. Jayne Schuieteman gave her time to help shape the ideas and methodology in the early stages the dissertation.

My parents, Martin and Lois, have been supportive of me through-out my years of schooling. They encouraged me to return to school for my Ph.D. after I had been out of school for almost 6 years. Linda, my sister, has also been supportive, especially with lengthy telephone calls to make certain that I was happy and doing well.

Friends are important and needed if a student is to complete a dissertation. Three of these friends I met at Michigan State University. Fiona Connor-Kuntz, Jackie Goodway-Schiebler and I would spend hours discussing different research ideas and which courses to take. In-between, we would take much needed breaks from school work by having afternoon tea. Linda Lyman and Michelle Hamilton are two other friends from M.S.U. who were always there to lend support and ideas.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Cultures and subcultures have institutional artifacts which can be observed. Bars, athletic leagues, religious organizations, and lesbian/gay owned media are examples of the institutionalization of a lesbian subculture and a gay subculture (Faderman, 1991; Pronger, 1990; Zipter, 1988). The purpose of this study is to examine one facet of lesbian subculture, the softball experience, and to examine if participating within the softball environment facilitates the formation of a lesbian identity.

It would be naive to propose that an athletic arena, such as softball, is the only place where women formed a lesbian identity. However, it may be possible that the softball experience can contribute to the lesbian identity formation of some women. As Rhonda, quoted in Faderman, said, "Softball is the only consistent thing in this community. Political groups and social groups come and go, but softball will always be around" (1991, p. 338).

Softball is America's most popular team sport (Sidentop, 1990). Approximately 5 million women participate in softball every year, with some of these women being lesbians (Zipter, 1988). Softball began its popularity among women and men in the industrial leagues during the 1920s (Guttmann, 1991). The majority of the women who participated in the industrial leagues were probably single heterosexuals or lesbians, as the 1920s were a time when married women did not have the opportunity after work to stay and play ball, especially if they were mothers (Zipter, 1988).

In the 1950s and 1960s, young, working-class lesbians began to create outlets for lesbians to meet (Faderman, 1991). Softball was one of those outlets. It provided a safe environment for lesbians, without the fear of police raids which were becoming common in the gay bars. Softball became a pipeline of information for lesbians in the Marines during the 1950s, as teams would travel and warn other women of witch-hunts (military purging of suspected lesbians) (Faderman, 1991).

The softball diamond has continued to be a meeting place in the 1990s. Within the softball environment are the sponsors (many times bars), managers/coaches, players and the fans. The fans of the softball teams are composed of the non-playing partners, lovers, and friends of the players, and other individuals who enjoy watching women play softball. As one fan of softball stated, "...of course I wasn't the least interested in sports, but it gave me a chance to meet other gay girls" (Lisa, quoted in Cahn, 1994, p. 189). Lesbian teams can be found in many softball leagues, with some cities having exclusively lesbian leagues (San Francisco and Toronto, for example). The presence of the lesbians on the team, plus the chatter and vocal interplay, help to give lesbians a feeling of belonging to a community when they either join a lesbian softball team or watch one. The chatter and vocal interplay may be different between lesbians who play softball and heterosexual women who play. Many of the verbal interactions have double meanings, with sexual undertones. For example, a catcher may yell to a pitcher to pitch the ball deeper, just the way she likes it. Although the verbal interplay is for fun, it may serve as a bond between the players and the fans who understand the different layers of meaning in each interaction.

This is not to say that most softball players are lesbians or that women who play softball choose to become lesbians. Most softball leagues are made up of teams which are heterosexual, a mixture of heterosexual and lesbian, or lesbian only (with some bisexuals and transgendered women also playing on the teams). Depending on the geographical location, there may be only a few teams which have lesbians on them. However, because the softball diamond is known to lesbians as a place where other lesbians may be found, it can serve as a subenvironment for the formation of a lesbian identity. The reason for this may be because societal norms do not encourage the formation of a lesbian identity; in fact, those norms actively discourages lesbianism. The softball environment may be a place where some societal norms (such as traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity) are not adhered to, thus enabling lesbians to interact with others in a more tolerant environment.

There are many definitions of identity in the psychological literature. One of the most cited and researched frameworks of identity has been Erikson's (1968) conceptualization, which posited identity as one stage within a psycho-social model of development. Erikson theorized identity as having two parts: ego and social. Ego identity referred to how an individual maintained her or his own identity, while social identity was defined as the perception that others recognized in a person. An inherent assumption in Erikson's model is heterosexuality. Within the identity stage, if an individual is not successful in forming an ego identity, that individual may be ego diffused sexually. One possible outcome of ego diffusion is sexual confusion (i.e.: not heterosexual). Likewise, intimacy is defined by Erikson as loving the opposite sex. An

individual who is a homosexual would then be labeled ego diffused and self-absorbed. Erikson clearly did not perceive a homosexual as being a healthy person, unlike Freud who, in his letter to an American mother, told her not to worry about her homosexual son because homosexuality was not an illness, but only "a variation of the sexual function" (Freud, 1960).

Erikson's concept of identity has spawned research on his framework (Archer, 1985; Marcia, 1966). Other researchers have conceptualized identity as having different aspects, such as personal and social (Taylor & Dubé, 1986), homosexual (Cass, 1984), and lesbian (Chapman & Brannock, 1987). Much of the research on a homosexual identity has been in defining stage models with differing levels of linearity (e.g. Kahn, 1991; Sophie, 1986; Cass, 1984; Minton & McDonald, 1983/1984). These are models which assume, to various degrees, that "Stage A" must be achieved before "Stage B." A weakness of these homosexual identity models is twofold. First, the creation of an age-based stage framework has been criticized by Faderman (1984). Faderman has written about the "new lesbians" who decide to become lesbians for political reasons. These women, many in their late 30s and early 40s, are not accounted for if a researcher uses a model which has individuals passing through specific age-based stages in order to become lesbian identified. Many political lesbians choose to remain celibate, and do not pass through frameworks which presuppose sexual experiences at an early stage of development. Additionally, the stage models are based on chronological age and not emotional age. Secondly, the models assume the same process for gay men and lesbians, without taking the status or gender roles of males and females in society into

consideration, and without analyzing differences within the lesbian and gay male communities.

Other researchers, such as Chapman and Brannock (1987) and Lewis (1984) have proposed stage models of lesbian identity. Lewis proposed a stage model in which stage one was when a child began to feel dissonance about him/herself. Chapman and Brannock proposed a stage model similar to the model proposed by Lewis, but it was developmentally based. These two models differ from the models of Cass (1984) and Minton and McDonald (1983/1984) because they do not propose that their models are based on chronological age. Additionally, these models were proposed as a way to define lesbian identity and not homosexual identity. Lastly, two perspectives have been proposed for a lesbian identity which were not associated with a stage model (Cooper, 1990; Krieger, 1982). Cooper proposed that sexual and political identity were interlinked, while Krieger theorized that sexual and personal identity were linked. That is, in an overview of a general identity which is formed by specific identities, lesbian identity might consist of a sexual identity and either a political or personal identity. Krieger also recognized the importance of a community to reinforce identities and that an individual did not need a sexual experience to realize that she was a lesbian. At this time, there have not been follow-up studies to support these proposals.

An additional framework for investigating identity is through ego development. In an ego development framework, the ego is not an active mechanism in the Freudian sense. The ego can best be perceived as a developmental stage (Loevinger, 1983). Costas (1990) proposed stages of ego development for the formation of gender role

identity. Costas hypothesized three stages: preconformist, conformist, and postconformist. Within the gender role identity framework, a female in a preconformist stage would associate female with roles such as wife and mother. At the conformist stage, the female seeks the approval of others. The postconformist stage is when a female would explore and begin to realize that there are many views regarding sex roles. The highest level of gender-role identity formation is when sex roles have been transcended. This framework may apply to the formation of a lesbian identity, with women who identify themselves as lesbians falling into the postconformist stage of ego development.

Currently, scientists are researching the causes of homosexuality. The research has focused on the nature verses nurture aspects of homosexuality (biological essentialism verses social construction), and at this time there is competing evidence between a biological basis for sexual orientation and/or a single psychosocial explanation (Byne & Parsons, 1993; DeCecco & Elia, 1993). As a matter of fact, Bynne and Parsons review of the literature suggests an interactive model which includes the biological and social construction. The question of whether homosexuality is determined biologically or socially is not an issue in this investigation. At this point in time, our society still values and promotes a heterosexually-oriented development, which leads to a lesbian having to develop her identity in a different manner than a heterosexual female.

If participating on a softball team facilitates the formation of a lesbian identity, then women who identify as lesbians may be in the postconformist stage of ego development. A woman who is at the postconformist stage of ego development has

transcended society's gender-role norms and is ready to explore alternate meanings of who she is. The nature of the research question has led me to approach this investigation with a qualitative methodology. At this time, the context of softball is assumed to be a lesbian meeting place, but except for Zipter (1988) and a few personal accounts (see Faderman, 1991), there have yet to be studies which support this assumption. By using the qualitative method of interviewing, I will be able to explore the context of softball in better detail than if I were to create a written questionnaire.

A second advantage in using a qualitative methodology in this study is the lack of agreement among researchers on a model of lesbian identity. Instead of basing my questionnaire on a specific model of lesbian or homosexual identity formation, I will be able to discuss the participant's identity formation with her in depth by asking general questions and being able to follow-up with specific questions. This will enable me to determine if a proposed model of lesbian identity (for example, Chapman and Brannock, 1987) can be utilized, if an ego development model is applicable, or if a new model needs to be created and investigated.

In conclusion, the sport of softball has been institutionalized as a part of the lesbian subculture. It may be possible that for some of the women who identify themselves as lesbians, the softball experience has helped shape their lesbian identity. The purpose of my study is to examine the possible connection between the softball environment and lesbian identity. Specifically, my hunches guiding the formation of the interview questions are as follows:

1. Softball is an environment where lesbians interact with each other.
2. Lesbians who interact in the softball environment, when asked to describe their identity, will include lesbian in that description
3. The softball environment is one location within the lesbian community where women feel comfortable coming out to others.

## Chapter II

### Review of Literature

One of the most prominent researchers to influence the concept of identity was Erikson (1963, 1980). Since Erikson's formulation of "identity," or "ego identity," as it was also called, researchers have either added to Erikson's definition or have redefined identity for use in such diverse areas as ethnic and racial identity (Brown, 1990; Carter, 1990; Delworth, 1989), and homosexual identity (including gay and lesbian identities) (Cass, 1979; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Kahn, 1991).

The review of the literature is organized so that the early theory of identity by Erikson is presented first. Different types of identity, such as social, ethnic, homosexual and lesbian are discussed in the review. Within each of the topics, identity formation is reviewed. After the identity research is presented, the topic of ego psychology is introduced, and its relevance to the formation of a lesbian identity is explored. Lastly, lesbian subculture and the significance of softball to that subculture are examined.

#### Erikson's Theory

The first five of Erikson's (1968, 1980) proposed stages were associated with erogenous zones. However, unlike Freud, Erikson went beyond adolescence and proposed three additional stages which developed throughout one's life. The stages, in order, were trust versus mistrust, autonomy versus shame and doubt, initiative versus guilt, industry versus inferiority, identity versus role confusion, intimacy versus isolation, generativity versus stagnation, and ego integrity versus despair (Erikson, 1968). Each stage was represented by a crisis that the individual had to negotiate in order to become

fully developed. All of the stages were thought to develop more in the unconscious than in the conscious portion of the mind, yet could be assessed by experience, behavior, or the unconscious inner states. For the purpose of this dissertation, only the stages of identity and intimacy are discussed, as these are the stages that directly relate to the research question.

Identity versus identity diffusion. Identity is composed of ego identity and social identity (Erikson, 1968). Ego identity is not just the sum of all identities from childhood; it is the "accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (Erikson, 1980, p. 94). Social identity (or personal identity) is the perception of one's sameness and continuity and "the perception that others recognize one's sameness and continuity" (Erikson, 1968, p. 50). Therefore, ego identity is the individual's own identity and reference, while social identity includes how others perceive the individual. Adolescents who are not successful in forming an ego identity undergo identity diffusion. Diffusion can be based on occupational, ethnic, or sexual identities (to name just three). An individual who has not achieved ego identity may become racist because of identity diffusion in terms of her or his ethnicity. An ego identity "is the only safeguard against the anarchy of drives as well as the autocracy of conscience" (Erikson, 1980, p. 99). In Freudian terms, the achievement of ego identity will balance the id and the superego, and will not allow an individual to be driven by either one.

A procedure to determine an individual's identity status was proposed by Marcia (1966). On the basis of the procedure, individuals are categorized as being in a crisis,

foreclosure, moratorium, or commitment. Crisis was defined as when the individual was in the process of choosing among meaningful alternatives. Individuals in crisis were in the moratorium. Commitment was highlighted by the degree of personal investment. Individuals were identity-achieved when they had experienced a crisis and were committed to an occupation and ideology. Foreclosed individuals were characterized by expressing a commitment without experiencing a crisis. These individuals tended to become what others had expected them to become. Identity-diffused individuals were characterized by a lack of commitment.

Intimacy versus self-absorption. Intimacy is the ability to fully love with the opposite sex. Freud termed this stage genitality, and defined it as the "potential capacity to develop orgasmic potency in relation to a loved partner of the opposite sex" (Erikson, 1968, p. 102). If intimacy is not developed, an individual may have stereotyped relations, or will become promiscuous so the individual does not have to enter a full emotional relationship with his/her partner.

Although Erikson identified his stages of development with patients and with biographies of famous individuals (e.g. Young Man Luther, a biography of Martin Luther), he never systematically studied his stages to determine if there were actual personality and psychosocial differences in individuals at the proposed stages of development. One of the first researchers to investigate the validity of Erikson's work (1958, 1963) was Marcia (1966).

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**Research on Identity as Proposed by Erikson**

Marcia (1966) used Erikson's (1963) definition of the identity crisis as a psychosocial task. Marcia interviewed subjects to determine identity status in the areas of occupation and ideology. Results were analyzed using Erikson's hypothesized scale of crisis, moratorium, and commitment. After completing the interview, subjects performed different tasks, such as a stressful concept achievement test and authoritarianism. Results of this study determined that foreclosed individuals sought to identify and submit to authority. Subjects who were identity-achieved scored best on the stressful concept achievement test. The results of this study supported the identity stage, as defined by Erikson (1968, 1980). One difference Marcia found was that there may be two types of identity-diffused subjects; those who exhibited psychopathology and those who showed a lack of commitment ("playboy type") being psychologically unhealthy. Marcia found that the identity-diffused subjects who were "playboy type" were psychologically healthier than the subjects who had foreclosed.

A woman would not be identity-achieved until she either had a mate or was married and had children (Erikson, 1968). To determine if females had a different identity status than males, Archer (1985) interviewed females and males in Grades 6, 8, 10, & 12 to see how the subjects projected their plans for the future. Archer found no differences in overall identity statuses between males and females, but did find differences in the domain of family-career, with males more diffused and females more likely to be in the moratorium or achieved phase. These findings suggest that males may not have as great a psychological investment in the family-career identity as females do.

Identity can also be conceptualized as an exploratory task which can be facilitated within the context of relationships. Grotevant and Cooper (1985) designed a study to determine individual differences among adolescents in identity exploration and interaction patterns of their families. It was assumed that communication patterns among adolescents and their families would be related to identity exploration allowed in the home. Therefore, as adolescents begin to explore their identity, they will change how they interact with their parents by exhibiting self-assertive behaviors. This will in turn lead to a renegotiation between the parent and adolescent in terms of roles and communication.

Subjects in the Grotevant and Cooper (1985) study were 84 white middle class two-parent families. Identity was classified across six domains with the Ego Identity Interview given to the adolescents. The family unit was given the Family Interaction Task, which was taped to determine communication patterns within each family. Results supported Erikson's belief that "identity formation involves the definition of a sense of self as distinctive from others" (p. 425). Families were supportive of exploration by adolescents, and indicated a difference in interaction styles for females versus males. Females tended to receive less agreement from their fathers than did males (in terms of family discussions), but it cannot be inferred from the study if this difference in communication patterns was related to a difference in identity-status attainment.

The results of these studies lend support to Erikson's (1968, 1980) theoretical concept of identity. The question of whether or not females undergo a different process to attain identity achievement has been proposed (eg. Archer, 1985), but not fully

substantiated. When Marcia's (1966) work was expanded to include sexual values and standards, females who showed commitment to foreclosure or achievement were psychologically healthy, in contrast to males who needed to go through a crisis (Delworth, 1989). Research has also been conducted to determine different aspects of identity, such as personal and social identity (Taylor & Dubé, 1986), ethnicity (Waddell & Cairns, 1986), and homosexuality (Cass, 1984).

### Social and Ethnic Identity

Identity has been proposed to have two components (Erikson, 1968; Taylor & Dubé). Erikson (1968, 1980) proposed ego and social identities. Taylor and Dubé (1986) defined the components as personal and social. Personal identity was the component unique to the individual, while social identity was comprised of those aspects of the self which were shared with all who occupy the same social category, such as gender or ethnicity. Taylor and Dubé hypothesize three strategies for attaining a strong personal identity when having multiple social identities. Individuals in the first strategy would limit the number of social groups with which they identify. The second strategy was characterized by interacting with a number of social groups whose members were the same, thus limiting the differences in contact individuals. For example, an individual may have different interests, but each "interest group" would be comprised of similar members, thus limiting the diversity of the groups. The third category was to interact with different social groups whose members had similar values to the individual. Individuals in this category would interact with a number of social groups, but the members between groups would be heterogeneous. After comparing Francophone and

Anglophone Canadians, Taylor and Dubé found that both groups used the second strategy the most, with the Francophones having a stronger central social identity than the Anglophones.

Personal and social identity (as defined by Taylor and Dubé, 1985) are components of an individual's overall identity, but also are factors in how individuals respond to either criticism or compliments. Personal-identity feedback was defined as being directed at the individual, while social-identity feedback was directed at some social aspect of the individual, such as race or gender. To examine if subjects would respond differently, Taylor and Dubé constructed questionnaires with scenarios of an individual receiving either personal or social feedback. Overall results of this study showed that individuals respond more negatively if feedback is unjustified. Surprising to the authors, subjects reacted more negatively to social- identity feedback, both positive and negative, than to negative personal-identity feedback. The authors also found that subjects were more apt to interpret stereotypic behavior or discriminatory behavior to a social identification, but less so with personal identification. In non-laboratory settings, this difference in behavior can be observed, for example, in women who say that women are discriminated against even though they themselves have never experienced gender discrimination.

Social identity has also been defined by Tajfel (1981) as a relationship between the individual and her or his social groups. The social groups to which an individual belongs give emotional meaning and value to the individual, while the individual is cognizant of belonging to that particular social group. For individuals who belong to

certain ethnic minorities (which are viewed as being of lesser importance or worth by the dominant ethnic majority), being part of a negative minority will lead to the group members trying different strategies to enhance self image (Rosenthal & Hrynevich, 1985), such as being compared favorably to another ethnic minority. Rosenthal and Hrynevich interviewed subjects from two ethnic minorities in Australia (Greeks and Italians). Their results indicated that for adolescents, ethnic identity may be an important factor in the creation of individual self-definitions and identity. The results also supported Tajfel in that one's ethnicity was perceived as being a valued social group for the subjects. An additional explanation for the creation of an identity for an ethnic minority may be cognitive dissonance (for a review of cognitive dissonance, please see Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). For example, an ethnic minority may look at the focal element (minority), perceive the dissonant element (minorities have less status in this culture), and create a consonant element (I am a valued social group in this society).

An aspect of Tajfel's (1981) work has also been used to determine how social identity affects an individual if that particular social group is viewed negatively (e.g. Ethier & Deaux, 1990; Gaskell & Smith, 1986). Tajfel contends that individuals will strive to maintain a positive social identity, and when a social identity is negative they will look to change the identity by either moving out of the group (individual mobility), changing the image of the group (social creativity), and/or changing how the group is perceived in relation to other groups (social competition). In a test of Tajfel's social identity theory, Gaskell and Smith interviewed Black and white males to determine how social identity was defined. Subjects listed several identities, with ethnicity not being the

major social group. Both social creativity and social competition were described by the Black subjects, with individual mobility not mentioned by subjects as a way to improve the negative identity ascribed to Black males. Gaskell and Smith questioned the usefulness of Tajfel's theory because the ability to predict an individual's behavior would depend upon the group identity to which the individual related.

Situational aspects of social identity and the question of whether individuals process multiple social identities were investigated by interviewing Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland (Waddell & Cairns, 1986). Traditionally, Protestants tended to identify with Britain, while Catholics identified with Ireland. For the sample tested, social identity did not change by social situation. Protestants felt more British when the I.R.A. committed a violent act, but Catholics did not feel any less Irish even with negative publicity towards the I.R.A., and did not demonstrate a change in identity due to negativeness.

The lack of significant results in the Waddell and Cairns (1986) study might be attributed to the formation of ethnic identity. Ethier and Deaux (1990) have hypothesized that ethnic identity is formed at an early age, which would make it more likely to stay static even during times of negative reactions to the social identity. In their study which examined Hispanics at a predominately white college, Ethier and Deaux found that the strength of ethnic identity in collegiate students was related to how the students had been socialized, and if they were from a predominately Hispanic neighborhood. Gender differences were also found, with males perceiving more of a threat to their social identity of "Hispanic" than did females. If females are able to reshape their social

identity so as to decrease perceived threat, then it may be argued that they are using social mobility to change the negative label of "Hispanic" to a positive one.

Ethnic identity has also been studied as a generational phenomenon, with the third generation becoming more ethnic than the second generation (Hanson, 1952). Second and third generation Japanese-Americans were investigated to determine if Hanson's hypothesis was valid (Newton, Buck, Kunimura, Colfer, & Scholsberg, 1988). The results of this study did not support Hanson. The third generation (Sansei) were not more ethnically identified than the second generation (Nisei). The Sansei in this study were more individualistic, and had increased acculturation more, than the Nisei.

Both Tajfel's (1981) theory and Hanson's (1952) theory have been studied without conclusive results. Social identity also has been generally theorized as being shaped by the dominant culture in which the individual lives (Brown, 1990; Mays, 1986). For example, Blacks in America have been defined by a white culture which reduced them to slavery. Because of this, Blacks are searching for an identity that they can define rather than having the identity defined for them by whites (Mays, 1986). Similarly, biracial children in America may be more aware of their ethnicity than others because outsiders cannot neatly categorize them, for example, into a "white" category or a "Black" category (Brown, 1990). These children, although they may identify themselves with the minority group to which they belong, will perceive that they are in a marginal position in society.

It is interesting to note that most of the research on social identity has been conducted with members of minority groups (Brown, 1990; Ethier & Deaux, 1990;

Newton, Buck, Kunimura, Colfer, & Scholsberg, 1988), with the assumption being that the group in the majority would not have to process a social identity. More recently, some researchers have investigated white racial (ethnic) identity to determine how the perception of being white interacts with racism. Both studies hypothesized a stage model, with the result of a more secure identity leading to decreased racism (Carter, 1990; Sabnani, Ponterotto, & Borodovsky, 1991). These results are consistent with studies which have identified adolescent males as being the most likely to "queer bash," as they are searching for power and a positive identity (Comstock, 1991).

A weakness of the social-identity literature is that it fails to examine how a social identity interacts with personal identity. When does an individual identify in terms of social groups versus as a unique person? And what are the behaviors associated with different social-group identity? Additionally, social-identity research tends to be focused on ethnicity, which may be a trait which is visually present to others. As Delworth (1989) noted, the literature does not adequately explore how individuals who possess more than one identity, such as Asian-lesbian, develop both identities, and if those individuals choose to identify with both roles. It may be that individuals with a nonvisible identity (such as lesbian) may choose to include lesbian in their personal identity but not in their social identity.

### Causes of Homosexuality and Homosexual Identity

The scientific debate over the cause of homosexuality will be briefly mentioned before the topic of homosexual identity. The reason I am mentioning this body of research is because the debate over biological determinism and social construction (nature

versus nurture) is extremely topical at this time. To date, research has not been conclusive on either side of the debate (Byne & Parsons, 1993; DeCecco & Elia, 1993). Even though the current debate over biological determinism and social construction is receiving national attention (cf., LeVay, 1991), it is not an issue in my investigation. Our society still values and promotes a heterosexually-oriented development. Therefore, a girl/woman would still need to develop her lesbian identity in a different manner than a heterosexual female.

The process of forming a homosexual identity (sometimes termed "coming out to oneself" in the literature) has been researched by a number of social scientists (Cass, 1979, 1983/1984, 1984; Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Kahn, 1991; Minton & McDonald, 1983/1984; Sophie, 1986; Troiden, 1984). Models of homosexual identity have common themes such as stages of confusion and acceptance of being a homosexual (Cass, 1983/1984; Minton & McDonald, 1983/1984; Troiden, 1984). Model differences occur in their linearity and number of stages. For example, Cass proposed a linear, six-stage model of homosexual identity formation, while Minton and McDonald proposed a four-stage model which allowed room for regression. Troiden also proposed a four stage model, but likened it to a spiral, with movement in and out of the four stages.

Models of homosexual identity also differed in the proposed stage of life in which homosexual identity begins to be formed. Minton and McDonald's (1983/1984) model began at the first year of life and continued until an acceptance of a positive gay identity was formed. Cass (1979, 1983/1984) began her model at the point where an individual

began to experience confusion about her/his sexual identity, while Troiden's (1989) model began where an individual began to feel different from others.

Differences between models could also be examined through the definitions of self-concept and identity offered by the theorists. Cass (1983/1984) defined homosexual identity as "a clustering of self-images which are linked together by the individual's idiosyncratic understanding of what characterizes someone as a 'homosexual'" (p. 110). This differed from self-concept, which was the sum of an individual's thoughts and feelings. This definition clearly marked the beginning of identity formation at a time when an individual was aware that such an identity was possible. Minton and McDonald (1983/1984) defined identity (from a symbolic interactionist perspective) as "the way in which the individual perceives, knows, and feels about the self" (p. 92). Interestingly, the first stage of this theory occurred during the first year of life, a time when an individual does not have a sense of self apart from the environment (Habermas, quoted in Minton and McDonald, 1983/1984). Troiden (1989) also developed his model from a symbolic interactionist base. Self, in this model was "an individual's consciousness of his or her own being" (p. 100). Self-concept, in this model, was defined as a component of the self and was the perception one has of oneself. Identity (self-identity) "refers to organized sets of characteristics an individual perceives as definitively representing the self in relation to a social situation" (p. 102). Specifically, then, homosexual identity would be perceiving oneself as a homosexual in a particular social setting. This model emphasized both the acceptance of being perceived as a homosexual and presenting oneself as a homosexual.

Homosexual identity has also been theorized in the context of defining what is a homosexual. Berger (1983) defined a homosexual model, which was presumed to be applicable to both males and females. The underlying assumptions of the model were that all homosexuals go through identity confusion (due to a heterosexist society), and that sex and militancy (buttons which display gay and lesbian slogans, for example) were precursors to self-acceptance. Other researchers who combined lesbian and gay identity with common themes were Herdt (1989), and Tremble, Schneider and Appathurai (1989). These authors theorized that homosexuals would feel different and alienated (Herdt, 1989), and that gay identity would be, in part, shaped by culture and ethnicity (Herdt, 1989; Tremble et al., 1989).

A weakness of the models of homosexuality is that it is assumed that gay males and lesbians go through the same identity formation process, without taking the status of males and females in society into consideration, and without analyzing differences within the lesbian and gay communities (cf: Brady & Busse, 1994). Therefore, before reviewing models of lesbian identity, it may be useful to discuss the role of women in a heterosexist society and the lesbian community.

In a heterosexist society, heterosexuality is presumed to be an individual's sexual preference (Rich, 1980). A feature of a heterosexist society is patriarchy, which creates an imbalance of power between males and females. All individuals in a patriarchal society are raised to believe that males have certain attributes which a female should respect and be submissive to, such as the male's ability to deny or force sexuality (Rich, 1980). As long as females use males as a reference point and are male identified, it is

not possible to realize autonomy as human beings (Radicalesbians, 1970). A by-product of being a part of a heterosexist society is that females have been defined in terms of males instead of separately. The previous models of homosexuality were an example of this. The models can be viewed as models of gay identity with lesbians included because researchers in a heterosexist society assume women can be defined in terms of males.

### **Lesbian Identity**

The topic of lesbian identity formation has been approached from different perspectives. Researchers have examined models of homosexual identity to determine if the models were applicable to lesbians (Kahn, 1991; Sophie, 1986), and have proposed models/frameworks for lesbian identity formation (Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Cooper, 1990; Krieger, 1982; Lewis, 1984).

A developmental model of lesbian identity formation was proposed by Lewis (1984). This model was similar to models of homosexual identity formation in that it was a linear stage model. Lesbian identity formation was proposed to begin in childhood (4 or 5 years old) when the child experiences a sense of dissonance. A weakness of this model, which was acknowledged by Lewis, was that some lesbians do not undergo dissonance as children and change their identity sometime during their life. For these women, this model would not describe or predict their lesbian identity during their lives.

An additional stage model of lesbian identity has been proposed by Chapman and Brannock (1987). This model was similar to Lewis' (1984) model, except that it was not developmentally based. Two perspectives which were not associated with stage models were proposed by Cooper (1990) and Krieger (1982). Independently, both Cooper and

Krieger identified components of lesbian identity that would separate its formation from a male model of homosexual identity formation. For example, Cooper determined, through interviews with lesbians, that the lesbian identity was more than a sexual identity; it also had political undertones. The women in Cooper's study rejected traditional feminine roles because they were felt to be restrictive. Krieger hypothesized that the lesbian lifestyle was linked with personal identity which was made up of more than sexual components. Krieger also stated the importance of a community in reinforcing an individual's sense of identity, and that a woman could form a lesbian identity without having a sexual experience with another woman.

The stage models of identity development have been criticized because of their developmental basis (Faderman, 1984) and the lack of support for developing identity in specific stages (Kahn, 1991). Faderman has centered her criticism of the developmental models on the lack of applicability to women who have become lesbians through radical feminism. Faderman critiqued the stages proposed by Minton and McDonald (1983/1984) and concluded that for many lesbians, identity was believed to be a matter of choice, not developmental, sexual destiny. For these lesbians, a developmental stage model would not describe the process of their identity formation. Then again, some lesbians may be in denial about their lesbianism being a sexual, developmental destiny which self-reports would not ferret out.

The literature raises many questions about the applicability of both age-based stage models, and models derived from Erikson's work with regard to the formation of

a lesbian identity. In light of these concerns, a model from an ego psychology perspective may help to explain the formation of a lesbian identity.

### Ego Psychology

The ego in ego psychology is different from the ego in Freud's theory, which strove for balance between the id and the superego. The ego cannot be easily defined in this model and represents a stage of development within an individual (Loevinger, 1983). Although Erikson was an ego psychologist, Loevinger's model differs from his because the stages are not age-related. Loevinger (1976) proposed seven stages of ego development: impulsive, self-protection, conformist, self-aware, conscientious, individual, and autonomous. In comparison to Erikson (1983), an individual at the conformist stage (girls and boys in adolescence) is looking for approval and social acceptance. At this stage, individuals define what is right by social norms. The last two stages, individual and autonomous, are where individuals deal with independence and issues of identity (Cohn, 1991). The difference between this model and the models previously discussed is that this model is not chronologically based.

An ego developmental perspective has been applied to the creation of a model of gender role identity. Costos (1990) created a model which has roots in Loevinger's theory of ego development. A three-level stage system was proposed, with preconformist, conformist, and postconformist being the levels, with stages within each one. At Level 1, or preconformist, (predominately children), an individual sees things concretely from an egocentric point of view. With regard to gender identity, at Stage 1 of Level 1, external features are the sex-role markers. At Stage 2 of Level 1, global

roles are understood with regard to the sexes, such as policemen being associated with boys/men. At Level 2, the conformist level (at Stage 3), norms are embraced by individuals and social conventions are used to explain differences between males and females. An individual at Stage 4 of Level 2 begins to place masculine and feminine characteristics on individuals. The end of Stage 4 marks the time when an individual begins to have dissonance about people and the stereotypes in which he/she believes. Individuals begin to develop their own set of beliefs about sex roles/differences at Stage 5 (Level 3, postconformist). Lastly, Stage 6 occurs when traditional beliefs about sex roles have been replaced and individuals are not defined or stereotyped on the basis of being male or female.

Applying Costos' (1990) model to lesbian identity, a female at the preconformist stage would not see herself as a lesbian. Differences between "masculine" and "feminine" females would be noticed, but the female would not label females as being different. At the conformist stage, an individual may begin to believe she might be a lesbian, but would not socially announce herself as one because of the social norms against homosexuality. The postconformist stage would be where a female would announce to others that she is a lesbian. I propose that a lesbian goes through additional stages, similar to the first three, once she comes out to someone. Within the postconformist stage, the lesbian would enter a stage similar to the conformist stage at Level 2. At this time, the social norms she embraces are those of the lesbian community she has either read about or gained access to. The next step would be when the lesbian acknowledges the norms of the lesbian community, but begins to question her need for

approval from others in the community. Lastly, the lesbian understands the complexities of the different norms and roles of the lesbian community and does not view them as immutable.

### **Lesbian Identity and Softball**

The concept of a lesbian identity, as defined by Miller (1992), is a social construction of the Western world (Miller, 1992). Miller described four preconditions necessary in a society for a gay and/or lesbian identity to occur: personal freedom & social tolerance, economic development which allows for independence and social mobility, social and political status for women, and a decreased power of the family and religious institutions in defining all aspects of an individual's life. Miller did not address the question of how some individuals manage to form a lesbian identity without the preconditions being met.

The difficulty in understanding the formation of lesbian identity lies in the fact that the maturation process of children in American society socializes individuals to be heterosexual. It then becomes a guess as to when to predict that an individual will question her/his socialization and break off from the creation of heterosexual identity. It is also important to take into consideration the differences between women in terms of when they first identify as lesbians. For example, a female child in junior high school may feel emotions towards other females and may or may not recognize these emotions as lesbian feelings. If the emotions were recognized as lesbian feelings, the child may then attempt to meet other lesbians and to find sources of support. Another female might be a 40 year old who has had children. This woman may discover, through reading or

meetings with other women, that she has feelings for women and decides to pursue a lesbian identity for the rest of her life. The questions of identity then become the following: What sources in an individual's life contribute to the formation of an identity? How do these sources interact? In relation to the ego psychology model, this woman would be at the postconformist stage (she recognizes herself as a lesbian) and would be entering the conformist stage of lesbianism.

"Identity is that essential core of who we are as individuals, the conscious experience of the *self* inside" (Kaufman, 1985). Identity may change as individuals grow and have new experiences, and individuals may differentiate between their personal and social identity. One experience which may influence personal or social identity for a lesbian is being a participant or spectator at a softball game.

Softball is America's most popular recreational team sport (Sidentop, 1990). Since 1934, the participation rate has grown from more than 200,000 to 27 million, with women comprising at least 5 million of the participants (Zipter, 1988). A percentage of the 5 million women who participate are lesbians, who refer to softball as the Lesbian Pastime. Zipter refers to softball as being one of "the most universal and yet least examined aspects of our lesbian culture" (p. 14). A lesbian community is composed of lesbians who have a social network, a shared group identity, and institutions such as places and organizations for community members (Lockard, 1986). A community is viewed as available for those lesbians who wish to participate in it. The shared values of the subculture may mirror feminist values, and the institutional bases may include organizations, women's centers, bookstores, and softball leagues. A community is thus

defined and referenced through a female model. The process of self-definition and a rejection of societal ideology was theorized by Ettorre (1980) in her book on lesbianism. In a heterosexist society, lesbianism poses a threat to the social order. In the process of self-discovery, the lesbian discovers power, and with that power, discovers her sexuality. The lesbian then seeks economic independence from men and refutes the common sexual ideology (p. 250). A community is important, for as Warren (1974) states, "Gay identity, then, involves affiliation with a gay community ..." (p. 152). Softball serves as a community institution for some lesbian communities. For the lesbians who do not play, it is a form of entertainment and a place to socialize. It is also a place where women can freely root for other women and enjoy watching women's bodies in motion.

Historically, softball was one of the most popular sports for women in the industrial leagues, which were established in the 1920's (Guttmann, 1991; Zipter, 1988). Zipter has hypothesized that many of the women who played softball in the industrial league could have been lesbians because married women generally stayed at home and raised their children, and, therefore, the majority of the participants were single women during the 1930s to 1950s.

A reason for softball's attraction for lesbians has been the relative safety of attending a game in a park verses going to a lesbian bar (Faderman, 1991), especially in the 1950's and 1960's when raids on bars by the police were frequent. Although there has been an increase in the number of community institutions for lesbians, such as bookstores and coffee houses, the softball diamond remains one of the most popular, especially in cities and towns where other institutions cannot safely exist.

An alternative view for the popularity of softball in the lesbian community has been proposed by Palzkill (1990), who states that sport is a medium in which women can overcome a contradiction between femininity and sport only by becoming lesbians. Palzkill interviewed highly skilled women athletes from what was then known as the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany). In this study, Palzkill defined being a woman as fulfillment of the "feminine sexual role and stands in contradiction to the existence as a sportsperson" (p. 225). Palzkill concluded, from her interviews, that because sport is a masculine domain, women athletes do not identify as women. To overcome the contradiction between being a feminine woman and an athlete, women choose a lesbian existence. However, it may be that some women who believe themselves to be lesbians choose to participate in a sport, such as softball, so that they may meet other lesbians. This may, in turn, enable a woman to feel more comfortable about coming out to herself and in the creation of a lesbian identity and in coming out to someone else. The purpose of my study will be to investigate the meaning of the softball environment to lesbians, and to determine if the softball environment plays a role in the formation of the lesbian identity. Specifically, my hunches guiding the formation of the interview questions are as follows:

1. Softball is an environment where lesbians interact with each other.
2. Lesbians who interact in the softball environment, when asked to describe their identity, will include lesbian in that description
3. The softball environment is one location within the lesbian community where women feel comfortable coming out to each other.

## Chapter III

### Methodology

The purpose of this study is to examine the possible connections between the softball environment and lesbian identity. I have chosen to approach this study with one qualitative methodological approach: the qualitative interview. The premise for choosing this methodology is that the softball environment is assumed to be an important component of some lesbians' lives, with few studies dedicated to the investigation of this assumption (Zipfer, 1988, for example), and the possible connection between softball and lesbian identity has yet to be examined. Therefore, by using a qualitative interview methodology, I will have the opportunity to explore, in detail, how lesbians who participate in softball perceive these topics. This chapter is divided into two sections. First, the qualitative interview methodology is discussed, and then the methodology of this study is explained, beginning with the description of the participants.

#### Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews are different from quantitative interviews. The interviews are open-ended and either unstructured or semi-structured. The relationship with the participant is closer in qualitative interviewing than the distant relationship in quantitative interviewing. The instruments used also differ between the two types of interviews. A quantitative interview might take the form of a questionnaire or inventory, while the qualitative interview is verbal (for a complete description, please see Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Qualitative interviews are different from questionnaires. Gorden (1980) described the questionnaire as being an extension of the interview. The advantages of

the interview over the written questionnaire are (a) the interviewer can motivate the participant to share information, (b) the interviewer can ask additional questions to gain an interpretation of the participant's responses, (c) there is greater flexibility in questioning, (d) there is greater control over the situation (question order, for example), and (e) the interviewer can evaluate, through both tone and nonverbal cues, the validity of a participant's responses (Gorden).

Qualitative interviews have the "potential to offer a more human, less mechanical relationship between the researcher and the researched" (Jayaratne & Stewart, 1991, p. 90). The reason for this may be because the qualitative interview is a conversation, which allows for the interviewee to give her or his opinions and feedback. The atmosphere for the interview is best when it is nonhierarchical (Jayaratne & Stewart; Oakley, 1981) because the individual being interviewed feels more comfortable and can perceive that the researcher is interested and involved in the interview. This is not to say that the interviewer gives up all control and allows the interviewee to discuss nonrelevant topics. Rather, the interviewer creates a non-threatening and caring environment which creates the sense of empathy and cooperation.

Similar to other methodologies in both the quantitative and qualitative traditions, there are weaknesses in the interview methodology. Interview data are both concurrent and retrospective, and the memory of the participants is crucial. A participant may not remember her/his experience, or may remember an altered version of an event which is favorable to her/him. On the other hand, the distance between events and the interview may help the participant understand and explain an event (Meyer, 1991). Becker (1969)

discussed how data in a qualitative interview are dependant on the credibility of each informant, and how questions asked may elicit different responses. Becker also stated that each researcher had to take into account her/his role in the study in order to accurately interpret the data.

The interviewer must establish rapport with the interviewee. Rapport must first be established by visual cues to the participant, which includes how the interviewer is dressed and how the interviewer sits in relation to the participant. Nonverbal cues are also important, and the interviewer must be careful not to give judgmental looks and other disapproving body signs while the interview is taking place. The interviewer must then spend time conversing with the interviewee until the individual feels comfortable and is conversing.

Bias in the interview may also take place, either on the part of the interviewer or interviewee. The interviewee may respond in a socially desirable way, or may try to give the answer that she believes the interviewer desires. Meyer (1991) recommends asking the same question in several ways to ferret out the socially desirable answers. The interviewer must be aware of possible bias imbedded in the questions. The questions must be organized and worded so that the interviewee is not led to or prompted for answers. The interviewer must also be aware of non-verbal behavior during the interview which may signal to the interviewee that one response is better than another.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were 24 women who played on a summer slow pitch softball team and 5 who were present at women's slow pitch softball games as spectators.

Nineteen out of 24 women softball players identified themselves as lesbians, while 4 out of 5 spectators interviewed identified themselves as lesbians. There were four Women of Color participants: three of whom identified themselves as lesbian players, and one was a lesbian spectator. Lesbian spectators were interviewed in order to gain a perspective of lesbians who may perceive the softball environment as a lesbian meeting place, but who choose not to play. Nonlesbians (players and spectator) were interviewed in order to gain a perspective from women outside a lesbian community. Years of softball experience (for the players) was not a factor in choosing participants because I was not investigating a cause and effect relationship between number of years playing softball and the formation of lesbian identity. However, this type of demographic information was still gathered from participants.

The participants in this study ranged in age from 26 to 49 years old (Table 1). This range was chosen because individuals who are currently undergraduates in college or younger (24 and below) may be forming a lesbian identity in different ways than lesbians who are older, and the younger cohort may be beyond the scope of the present study. Since the Stonewall riots of 1969 and the beginning of the gay liberation movement, there have been numerous political and community supports or disapprovals for gays and lesbians. The nature of coming out, visibility, and identity formation has, and continues to, undergo change. For example, in some cities there are support groups for high school gays and lesbians, and in the past year there has been greater visibility in the media for lesbians. Therefore, for this study, the younger lesbians (24 and younger) were not included.

**Table 1****Age Range and Participation Type****Age Range****Lesbian Players**

|       |                                                    |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 26-29 | Molly, Jo, Shawn, Ellie, Jessie, Elizabeth, Sandra |
| 30-34 | Kris, Judy, Bob, Bambi, Lynn, Skinny Puppy         |
| 35-39 | Gloria, Maxine                                     |
| 40-45 | Betsy, Sylvia, Chip                                |
| 46-50 | Marianne                                           |

**Lesbian Spectators**

|       |                |
|-------|----------------|
| 30-34 | Lois           |
| 35-39 | Isis, Sue, Kay |

**NonLesbian Players and Spectator**

|       |                                  |
|-------|----------------------------------|
| 26-29 | Julie, Lauren, Jane <sup>1</sup> |
| 30-34 | Marie                            |
| 35-39 | Coach                            |
| 46-50 | Ginger                           |

<sup>1</sup>Jane is a nonlesbian spectator

### **Recruitment of Participants**

Lesbian softball players and lesbian spectators were recruited through advertisements in two lesbian newsletters which are published in city A (which will be called Umpira to protect confidentiality). These publications were sent to lesbians who subscribe to the publication and who live in the midwest. Respondents to the advertisement were chosen, in part, by their proximity to Umpira. The rationale for this recruitment strategy was that the lesbians who receive the newsletters may be more clearly identified as lesbians than lesbians who choose not to receive the publications, because they are allowing their names to be on a lesbian mailing list. The term further refers to a lesbian who has come out to herself and others, and is comfortable having her name on a mailing list. However, advertising for subjects was seen as potentially reaching a broader audience of lesbians than merely contacting lesbian teams of which I had personal knowledge. Advertising can potentially reach a larger number of women, creating a more diversified response. Nonlesbians (and lesbian softball players/spectators) were recruited through an advertisement in a free magazine/newspaper published in the city of Umpira.

Only one lesbian softball player who saw the advertisement called me. My next step was two-fold. First, I advertised in two of Umpira's lesbian bars. The owners/managers of each bar gave me permission to hang a flyer on the wall. When I returned to the bars, I noticed that my name and phone number had been taken from the flyer, but I still had not received any calls. At this point, I decided that I needed to attend softball games in order to recruit participants.

I contacted individuals who I knew played in women's slow pitch leagues and received their schedule of games. I went to three leagues in three different cities (Umpira, Outerfeldja and Battonia), and observed the different teams. I decided to wear clothes and jewelry which would easily identify me as a lesbian to the lesbian participants, but would not be so obvious that I would not be able to recruit nonlesbians. I wore a t-shirt with a popular character from a lesbian comic strip and a watch with a pink triangle on it. As I approached one group of five players (from a team which I had heard was mostly lesbian), one of the players recognized and commented on my shirt. That gave me the access I needed to discuss my study with the group. All five group members signed up as participants. The most common response that I received was "so you're the woman that placed the ad. Sure I'll sign up." Apparently, the women were willing to be participants, but needed face-to-face contact before signing up.

One interesting finding in the recruiting process was that a nonlesbian participant (whom I recruited at a game) informed me that the lesbians on her team thought that my advertisement was fake. The lesbian players had discussed the advertisement after one of the games when they were at a bar, and decided that I was looking for phone numbers, not research participants. Other comments I received were, "you were the one with the ad? Our coach gave us the sheet, but after a few beers we didn't know if it was just a joke. Who would want to talk to softball players - they have I.Q.'s of 90. You're the one."

I also was able to gain access to one team because I happened to know one player on the team and she encouraged a few of her friends to sign up and help me out. When

I did not know anyone on a team, one factor that would lead to individuals signing up was if a person on that particular team mentioned that she knew how difficult it was to get participants. This seemed to motivate others to sign up. In total, participants were recruited from a total of seven teams (2 from Battonia, 2 from Umpira and 3 from Outerfelja).

I called each possible participant the day after I received the name and phone number at the ballfield. I explained my study in further detail, described the interview process, and explained confidentiality to her over the phone. I also informed each participant that I would be taping the interviews. The last step of the phone call was to set a day, time, and place for the interview. All participants were given a confirmatory telephone call the day before their interview. Of all the women contacted, one rescheduled, and only two were no-shows.

### Confidentiality

I verbally explained my study to each participant when she arrived for the interview. Following the verbal explanation, a written consent form was shown to each woman (Appendix C), who was asked to read and sign it. Each participant was then asked if she had any questions or concerns about the study, and was reminded that the interview was going to be taped. Only one participant declined to have the interview taped, and detailed handwritten notes were taken instead. Each participant was identified by a pseudonym of her choosing, and her real name did not appear verbally on the tape or in any of the written notes. The participants were informed that the name they chose

would be the one used in the study. Each participant was also assured that I would be the only one to listen to the tapes.

### The Interview

#### Site

The nature of the study dictated that the site for the interviews be a place where the women could feel comfortable and, especially for the lesbians, safe. At the conclusion of the introductory phone call, an interview site was selected. Interviews took place in the cities of Umpira, Outerfeldja, and Glovetown (none of the interviews took place in Battonia). Interview sites were selected on the basis of location for the participants, confidentiality, and ease of conversation. Some of the sites selected were bars (two lesbian/gay bars), parks (in different cities), offices, and coffee houses. At each site, except for one interview, interviews were conducted without being interrupted. The one interview which was interrupted was at a bar. The "waitress" came to the table about 3/4 of the way through the interview and yelled, "what did she say, what did she say?" I shut the tape off, laughed, and told her that it was confidential. After the "waitress" left, the interview continued without a problem.

#### Rapport

A critical component of interviewing is having good rapport. The fact that I play softball helped me to develop a rapport with the softball players. For example, many of the participants asked me during the introductory telephone call if I played softball. When I informed them that I was playing in a league in Battonia, they would ask me about the league, what it was like to play in that city, and how the team was doing.

After the interviews with the nonlesbian players, they would sit and talk to me about softball leagues and what the differences were between city leagues. There was only one nonlesbian participant with whom I did not feel I had positive rapport with during the interview. Lauren was answering the questions in an earnest fashion until I asked her about stereotypes of softball players. At that point, her expression changed, her body position became closed, and she stated that she didn't want to answer. After that portion of the interview, I felt that she did not open up and wanted to finish the interview as quickly as possible. Yet after Lauren's interview was completed, she spoke with me for over ten minutes about the softball league in Battonia.

My rapport with the lesbian participants was positive. There was eye contact throughout the interviews, and many were willing to share details about their lives without any probing on my part. In fact, they seemed to be excited that someone would be interested in talking to them. Much of the rapport was brought about because of my being an insider. When I interviewed the lesbians, I wore jewelry such as a lamda earring and/or a watch with a pink triangle on it, both symbols of the lesbian community. For some interviews I also wore t-shirts which referred to a state's Lesbian/Gay pride festival. During the interview, many of the participants would answer questions with the words "you know" or "you've been there," which told me that they knew I was also a lesbian and understood what they were describing. One of the lesbians, whom I knew slightly, asked me some questions about myself after the interview was over, and we sat and talked for an additional 30 minutes. Other interviews ended and we discussed future events in Umpira and other cities.

### **Length**

It was anticipated that the interviews for the lesbian players would take the longest, then the lesbian spectators and then the nonlesbian participants. On the average, the interviews for the lesbian players took 50 minutes, lesbian spectators, 45 minutes, and nonlesbian participant interviews lasted 35 minutes. The differences in times was due to the different number of questions and the types of questions. Many of the participants were surprised that the interviews did not last longer, and offered to stay and discuss more questions with me. Some even offered to participate in a second interview if I "required" more information.

### **Design and Instrumentation**

The interview was set up to be semi-structured, as I wanted to make sure that certain topics were covered but did not want to inhibit the women from taking thoughts and ideas in different directions than I planned. To help break the ice at every interview, I asked each woman what name she would like to be called during our time together. This question was the one pondered most of all. Participants took anywhere from 10 seconds to 2 minutes thinking up a name. Two participants said I could use their real names, but after I insisted on an alias, they came up with one. One person picked a name she always wanted to be called (Bambi), while another chose the name she hated the most (Bob). After the participant decided on a name, I began the interview.

A pilot interview was conducted to determine if the questionnaire covered the topics necessary to explore the hunches. The pilot interview was conducted with a lesbian spectator. The questionnaire was modified after the interview was analyzed.

Three questions were added: did you ever feel pressure to conform as a lesbian; did you know lesbians played softball; and have you ever read the book, "Diamonds are a Dykes Best Friend?" The last question was added because Zipter's book is available in Umpira, and familiarity with the book could bias some answers.

Listed below are the broad topic areas and a few questions from each topic area. The first group of topic areas, or proposed themes, was for the lesbian participants. The nonlesbian participant questions follow. I left the questions open-ended and with room for discussion and follow-up questions, depending upon the answers given by the participants. Full questionnaires are located in Appendix D.

#### 1. Questions for lesbian participants

**Is the softball environment known as a place where lesbians can meet?**

When did you begin to play softball?

Why did you choose softball over other activities?

What do you enjoy about softball?

Do women use the softball environment to meet other women?

Have you ever used the softball environment as a place to meet other lesbians?

**How does a lesbian define her identity?**

How would you define the terms homosexual, gay and lesbian? Do you consider yourself to be a lesbian?

When did you have an idea or feeling that you could be (use participant's term of choice) homosexual/gay/lesbian?

**Is there a connection between the softball environment and a lesbian identity?**

Do you think that the softball environment can be a place for a woman to come out as a lesbian?

**Questions for non-lesbian participants**

**Is the softball environment known as a place where lesbians can meet?**

When did you begin to play softball?

What do you enjoy about softball?

Do you think women play softball to meet other women?

Are you aware of lesbians on your team? On other teams in your league?

**What is a lesbian?**

How would you define a homosexual/gay/lesbian?

How do you identify yourself?

**Analysis**

Qualitative analysis is cyclical. Before I began the interview process, I had hunches about what I might find. These hunches led to my broad topic themes and questions. I transcribed all of the interviews. I had originally wanted to transcribe each interview directly after the interview concluded, but was unable to keep up with tapes. All tapes were transcribed within 2 weeks of the last interview. After each interview was transcribed, a printout of the transcription, plus the interview questions, and all comments I had written during the interview or directly after were stapled together. All packets were then read to uncover common themes and assertions.

## Chapter IV

### Results and Discussion: The Softball Environment

Three hunches guided the interview process. These were (a) softball is an environment where lesbians interact with each other; (b) the softball environment is one location, within the lesbian community, where women feel comfortable coming out to others; and (c) lesbians who interact in the softball environment, when asked to describe their identity, will include lesbian in that description. The analysis of the interviews is divided into two chapters, with subthemes in each. In the first chapter, I discuss the softball environment. The second chapter addresses the concept of identity and identity formation. Where appropriate, responses from each of the three groups (lesbian softball players, lesbian spectators, and nonlesbian softball players) were included.

#### The Softball Environment

##### Reasons for Participation

The participants were asked when they began to play softball and the reasons they chose softball, as opposed to other sports. Many of the answers reflected the age of the participants. The age range of the participants was 26 to 49 years old, with a mean of 34.4 years. Therefore, many of the women interviewed in this study were in high school before Title IX (for a summary of Title IX, see Boutilier & SanGiovanni, 1983) came into existence, which effected the opportunities available for girls in sport.

For some of the participants, baseball was the initial sport played, only to realize that with age came the lack of opportunity to continue participating. As one lesbian participant explained:

I started with t-ball right around 7 or 8, then I went to little league and played baseball a couple of years, and when I got into junior high is when I started playing softball....More opportunity to play. (Jessie)

Jessie played baseball until she reached junior high, when softball became the accessible sport for her. Other softball players were discouraged from playing baseball in grade school. As these lesbian participants stated when asked about why they switched from baseball to softball:

Because they [grade school] wouldn't let me play baseball. [Was softball offered to girls?] Not at first, after a while they decided there were too many girls who wanted to play baseball so they made softball a choice. (Skinny Puppy)

Cause they didn't let us play baseball in high school, they didn't let girls play baseball in high school. (Lynn)

I've always been athletic, I've always been a tomboy, I was a year younger than my brother and always played baseball with his friends and him, uh, so when I got into high school back then there were limited sports available and softball and basketball, I don't even know if there was anything else, at any rate, that's what I did. (Betsy)

Another lesbian respondent used the baseball environment to compete with the guys in the neighborhood. As Chip explained:

I use to play hardball with the guys you know, uh, ... I guess I have a one upmanship with the guys, you know, and that type of thing.

These responses are similar to the ones Zipter (1988) found in her interviews. The girls participated in baseball because softball was not available, but were then discouraged from participating in baseball once they entered school, at which time, softball became the next viable option for girls wanting to continue playing a sport similar to baseball. The women Zipter interviewed also discussed how siblings and parents influenced their playing softball at a young age. One lesbian respondent in my

study recalled how she took up the game so her dad would be proud of her. Bob recalled:

My dad use to take me down to the ballpark that was not too far from my house because he'd like to go watch, so I'd go along with him just to have some time with him ... I'd watch the women softball teams and I was, he was so interested in it I always wanted to, um, do something that he would be proud of, so, then I heard of, at the summer recreation schedule in the mail there were organized teams in there for my age group [10], ... I had two older brothers so I was always physically able to do stuff better than a lot of the girls in my school ... so, I always knew I'd be good at it so that's what started me.

Others recalled playing with their brothers or friends in the neighborhood, and participating on 4-H teams while growing up. Both a lesbian respondent and a nonlesbian respondent explained how softball was a common sport played by children in neighborhoods. As they stated:

Over 30 kids in the neighborhood, sports which used as many people , can use more than 10 players. Basically between kickball and softball. Think now we would have played soccer, but back then soccer wasn't known. (Judy)

Well, we have a big family, and we have actually enough to make a team almost, it's just another activity you play when you have a lot of kids and uh, you need something to do. And we moved every 2 years, and ball was a common denominator in every neighborhood, so that's what we did. (Coach)

Lastly, the influence of the junior high school gym teacher was explained by Bambi:

There wasn't a lot of sports for girls. It was like, softball, track and field, and volleyball. Softball was the fall sport and I wanted to play. Mostly basketball and softball. I liked team sports....It was through school....I suppose I liked the gym teacher who taught it. Her name was [x], it's like the same reason in high school softball, the coach was like a dyke, they called her a dyke or something, some great lesbian terminology and I wasn't aware of any connection, I mean, I didn't know that women were with women, but I liked the idea. I liked the strong

women on the teams, I thought they were an incentive, I probably had a crush on them, you know.

The participants were asked when they began to play softball and the reasons they chose softball as opposed to other sports. The preceeding quotes are examples of the influence of the family and adult role models in the participation of young girls and softball. Additionally, many of the participants had played baseball before softball, only to discover that there were not any school or recreational opportunitites for girls to continue with baseball. At that point in time, the participants switched to softball.

Most of the lesbian and nonlesbian participants played softball continuously from school (fastpitch) to community recreational leagues (slowpitch). One lesbian recalled having to quit playing as she entered puberty:

Well, um, for me I think it's probably a similar story for a lot of young women. I was discouraged by the time I got to the end of my elementary school career, middle school, junior high school um, girls just didn't play sports. It's not what we were suppose to do. So, I um, bought into that whole thing and didn't play until I got to where I could make my own decisions and said yes I do want to play softball. (Elizabeth)

Elizabeth would have liked to have continued playing softball, but because of parental pressure (and pressure from some of her teachers), she stopped. The pressure to quit playing softball was brought on because softball was not considered a feminine activity by Elizabeth's parents. When Elizabeth was in college she decided to begin playing softball again.

Not all of the women played softball as children. For these women, softball became an activity after high school. Two of the women had feelings they might be lesbians when they decided to take up the game. Their responses were:

There was a defense committee who court watched and there were a lot of lesbians on the committee but they weren't all lesbians, but this detective came up to me one day at a break during the court trial and, big man, and he says, don't you play softball? And I said no, I don't. But, you know, that's interesting, it must be somebody who looked like me. I didn't get it, I didn't know what he was trying to get at the time. And uh, he says I'm sure you play softball, and it was real sarcastic. He says I coach a women's team. And I said, no, I don't play softball. And he just kept up, you know. So later on I got with a bunch of women who were both straight and lesbian and bisexual. And I said, so what's the deal with detective so and so, I said, he just kept asking me about it and it was really weird, it wasn't like he really wanted to know the answer, you know, because it was already asked and answered. And they said because there's some dyke teams. You know, and he was just trying to intimidate you probably by continue like thinking that the only reason I was on this defense committee because I was a radical feminist, lesbian feminist and it wasn't a valid uh, thing to be defending her, basically. So ever since that time I was interested because I had started to explore it myself anyway, which nobody knew about except me. Then I got to know some lesbians in the community who played softball and then I started to play. So that's how I got, actually, the initial impetus to play. (Sylvia)

Well, they asked me to because they needed some players and everything, and I liked the sport period of softball and baseball and I don't know why...but I guess I knew there was something different inside of me and I just wanted to be around people at that time. (Chip)

Both Sylvia and Chip began participating in softball as adults. Common to both women was a feeling of being different and wanting to explore themselves and to be with other women. The desire to meet lesbians or interact with lesbians was a common theme for either the lesbians who had taken some time off from the game or for lesbians who began playing as adults. As two women remembered:

I love the sport, I like to be around women [lesbians], it was a good chance to go out and meet people and do something I really like to do. And, it was hard for me to find a team to be on after I had been out of it for so long and I didn't know very many women. I wanted to play ball so I sorta asked around until I found someone who was on a team and had places for players. (Bambi)

I don't find softball to be that much of a strategic sport, but most of all, I like, that even when you're playing it's social. You know, when I'm out in the field I can yell stupid comments to our pitcher or to the other team. I guess I like that it's the kind of sport where you can joke around while you're out there and still play a decent game. In that way, that's something about softball that I think for me is unique. When I play women's ball there's just something different about it. Especially when it's an all women's team and we don't have a man coaching us or anything like that. I like being out there and having space with other women even if it's just one hour per night per week. That's just really nice. You just don't get that. (Sandra)

The lesbian participants desired to meet or interact with other lesbians in the softball environment. This was an important reason for them when the lesbians who decided to begin playing softball as adults. The lesbian participants were not the only ones who discussed the social aspect of the softball environment. As one nonlesbian participant stated:

I find it enjoyable, I find it relaxing, get outside and enjoy a sport that I like to do very much. We're together, we enjoy each other's company, we go out afterwards and have dinner, so, we really have a nice time. I can say we bought a card for our sponsor. One of the girls wrote thanks for allowing me to have a social life this summer. It's really a time for people to get together and enjoy each other's talk, the talking that goes on, seeing what people are doing, conversations, you know, the social part of it. We just get out there and like to have fun. (Lauren)

The reasons for continued participation as an adult (for all lesbian and nonlesbian players) ranged from the social aspect of seeing everyone to perceiving the game as a physical challenge. Elizabeth explained:

Softball has always been a challenge for me. It's like I, even though I've been playing for a long time I still, I don't consider myself to be a natural athlete and so every year it's always a challenge to push myself back out on the field and you know push my limits and continue to improve. I'm almost 30 years old and I still feel like there's room for improvement and that I actually can achieve and that's exciting to me.

One lesbian respondent covered many of the reasons given by all the respondents when she stated why she currently plays softball:

Well I think the camaraderie. I mean the team I play for doesn't necessarily play for...we like to play to win but we don't get upset when we don't necessarily. I mean, it's, there's a certain amount of healthy competition but the important thing is to have fun and do your best and uh, I think number 1 it keeps your body moving, it's keeping you out there doing some exercise, which I think is healthy for anybody, uh, probably not as much as one should, but at least it's something if you're not doing anything else. Number 2, it's fun, it's fun to be around people who are supportive of you and your lifestyle and you of them. There's a certain camaraderie that tends to that. And I like to do things that are physical and I just like to, I like the competition I guess, a little bit. I mean it's kinda fun. It's nice to associate, I think it's important also that we're pretty much regarded as a lesbian team and we interact with straight women. And I think that there is a positive, uh, 'cause we're pretty good sports out there generally speaking and it breaks down some stereotypes. (Sylvia)

In this quote, Sylvia touches upon the themes of softball as a social environment, softball as a fun activity, softball as supportive of lesbians, and softball as a location where stereotypes about lesbians may be broken down because of the interaction with nonlesbians. The last reason mentioned by Sylvia is interesting because of the assumptions embedded in the reason. Sylvia assumes that the nonlesbian teams know that her team is a lesbian team. She also assumes that there are stereotypes which, when broken down could foster better understanding between the lesbians and the nonlesbians.

The reasons for participating as an adult were more diverse than the reasons the respondents gave for playing as children. The early years of childhood playing were highlighted by softball being one of the few sports available to girls. For some of the respondents, softball was played only because they were not allowed to play baseball. Parents and siblings also influenced the learning and playing of softball. For those

lesbians who took up the game as adults, the desire to meet or interact with lesbians was the reason for joining teams and learning how to play. Although there were many reasons for continued participation, the social aspect of the game was the most often cited by the respondents, with enjoying the competition and the challenge to perform well also mentioned often for both the lesbian and nonlesbian participants.

Women who play softball usually have a choice of what team they want to be a part of. Some join teams to be with friends, while others may join to be competitive or to meet new people. The participants were asked if they played on or watched a lesbian team, and if it mattered to them if they did or not; while the nonlesbian participants were asked if they were aware of lesbians on their team or in the league(s) they played on.

All of the nonlesbian respondents, except for one, stated that they knew of lesbians on their team or in the league. Interestingly, women on the same team gave different answers. One nonlesbian player stated an emphatic "yes" (Julie), while her teammate responded, "No, not that I'm aware of" (Lauren). A nonlesbian spectator knew there were some lesbians on the teams she watched because she asked a player on the team that she knew. When asked why she would ask another player if there were lesbians on the team, she responded:

I don't know. I think I didn't want to say something to them that would make them think of me as being weird or just like why did you ask that. I didn't wanna, didn't wanna intimidate anybody or say the wrong thing, I guess. I just wanted to feel comfortable with who was who. Hey, that's cool, not a problem. I myself just wanted to know....And I said hey, that's neat. So then that way I didn't, I thought I would feel really different between these and them and it's just like, they're all the same type and they're all the same people. I don't have a problem with them, so, but, I don't know. For some reason I did want to know who was who and no big deal to me. (Jane)

Jane's quote is an example of how a nonlesbian player may interact with her lesbian team-mates. She was not sure what to expect from the lesbians, which may mean that she had never interacted with a group of lesbians before. Jane asked a lesbian who she was friends with for the names of the women who were lesbians before she interacted with the team to ensure that she would not say something which was not appropriate, such as asking about a boyfriend or husband. Once Jane interacted with the lesbian players, she realized that the differences she thought would exist were quite small and didn't inhibit friendships. Except for Lauren (who did not know if any of her team-mates were lesbians), all of the nonlesbian respondents were comfortable playing on the same team with their lesbian team-mates.

All of the lesbian respondents except one played on or watched a lesbian, or predominately lesbian team. The one lesbian player who did not, explained:

I have found that when I'm on lesbian teams, I've found it to be more difficult for the players to focus, because there are usually relationships going on and it has seemed that inevitably somebody's relationship has gone bad and that it affects, it ends up affecting the whole team. So actually, it kind of works out better for me not to play on lesbian teams.  
(Betsy)

Betsy desired to play on a team without lesbians because of the possible repercussions of a bad relationship on a team. Betsy's quote was fascinating because she had been married. While she was married, her husband coached her recreational softball team, and when they separated it caused a division within the team, with Betsy having to find another team on which to play. She did not give any examples of lesbian teams being divided because of relationships gone bad. None of the other lesbian players mentioned the possibility of a team not playing well (or getting along) because of internal dating and

relationships. Within the players who play on a lesbian team, some explained that they would only play on a lesbian team, while others stated that it wouldn't matter. For those lesbians for whom an all lesbian team was not a priority, a common theme was stated by Gloria:

Doesn't matter to me that all of them be lesbians, it's not like I have to, I've played on mixed teams before. It's real important to me that I be able to be out and that I not have to change my behavior at all. And in fact, we do have, you know, a few straight people here and there play, but, I, I think it's important to me that a big percent be lesbian. That's part of what I'm looking for.

The lesbian players did not want to have to change their behavior on the field. As long as the straight (heterosexual) ballplayers let them be out, they were willing to play on nonlesbian teams. The lesbians who preferred to play on lesbian teams wanted to be able to joke about women partners and to be able to converse about their lives. They also felt the softball team was an extension of their lesbian community. Bambi elaborated on the community theme when she said:

Because I like to be part of my community. Because it makes me feel more connected, more in touch with my, people who have the same interest. It's like my culture, I think of it like there use to be tribes of people and they were all alike and they had all their common interests and they did things and they believed things or they worked together and I think society now is that way only they don't realize it. Every group has its own definition and characteristics and I like to be on a lesbian team because it supports those things. I mean I fit, I feel comfortable, I can be myself, I can be out, I don't have to do anything but be myself. (Bambi)

A lesbian spectator, Kay, stated that she preferred to watch a lesbian team, and that she tried to identify the lesbian teams when she went to a park. Kay defined a lesbian team as:

They have women coaches, they seem more focused on the game and there's not a whole bunch of kids hanging around. When you play straight teams, husbands and boyfriends on the fences, kids in the dirt bothering you, boyfriends and husbands saying obnoxious things.

Kay's reference to husbands and boyfriends saying obnoxious things was directed at comments made by the men to their own team as well as to the lesbian teams. The lesbians who desired to play on, or watch, a lesbian team wanted to specifically interact with lesbians and to be a part of the lesbian community. This was in contrast to the lesbian players who stated they would not mind participating on a nonlesbian team if the nonlesbians were open to them.

#### The Softball Environment as a Lesbian Environment

A possible indicator of whether the softball environment is perceived as a lesbian environment is how individuals characterize women who play softball. Participants were asked to describe a female softball player and a stereotypical female softball player. Within the responses to these two questions, the terms butch, fem, and dyke were mentioned. Respondents who used those terms were asked to define what they meant by using the terms butch and fem. The term butch was mentioned by both lesbian players and lesbian spectators. Butch was defined by one respondent as:

I would say strong, athletic women that walk with a purpose and care about what they're doing, are invested in it, obviously separate from men at least for those few moments in time. (Kay)

An additional description of butch was:

Just a physical picture would be stocky build, stocky to slim build, generally short hair or practical hair, generally a bit of a swagger to the way they move. I mean they have a real sense of self and they don't, the women I know who play softball don't tend to slink around when they walk. They walk with a real presence. (Lois)

The term fem was mentioned once by a lesbian player, who was explaining that she considers herself to be more fem than some other players. She attempted to define fem as opposed to a hard core softball player:

I don't know. I struggle with this all the time. Oh, not anything that I particularly buy into. But stereotypical fem which would be maybe not such a severe short hair-cut, not such a harsh demeanor, or intensity on the field. (Sandra)

One lesbian struggled to come up with a definition of the word dyke. Skinny Puppy explained that dyke embodies a look and an attitude that other lesbians can recognize in a woman. Dykes looked other people in the eye when talking to them and did not look afraid. Dykes also brought an aggressive attitude on the field. This description is similar to the definitions of butch, in that both terms refer to strong women with a sense of self.

The majority of the respondents stated that there was not one particular type or look of a softball player. The respondents had a hard time trying to form a single description, and most of the descriptions were broad in nature. For example:

Describe a female softball player. Okay. A female softball player, I mean there is such a wide variety, some people are very athletic, others are not. Especially on our team. We've got some young, some old, some thin, some heavy, some, we've got a variety of people. I guess one thing everybody has in common is that they like to get together and play a game. (Maxine)

That's a tough one. Softball players come in all different shapes and sizes. I mean that's, like on the team I play on we've got people from 27-28 years old to over 50 playing on the team and we probably have the highest average age of any of the teams that we play against and it's really fun, not everybody is like some slim trim go get 'em kind of athlete. We've got people at all different skill levels, all different weights, ages, sizes, you know and so I guess a softball player is just anyone who enjoys picking up a softball and a mitt and getting out on the field. (Elizabeth)

Describe a softball player? That's a tough one. I guess, look at me, I'm a softball player. But there's such a variance of who softball players are, what they look like, how they act. You can go from the housewife leagues with the kids on the sideline to the lesbian teams where you have all the dogs on the sidelines instead of the kids. Big and small, they've got it all. (Bambi)

As seen from the vignettes above, the descriptions of a softball player were vague. Common to the descriptions was that there was a wide range of players in terms of age, looks and size. In contrast, the descriptions of a stereotypical softball player ranged in response from no stereotype (from both lesbians and nonlesbians) to Skinny Puppy's tongue in cheek response of, "about my height, short dark hair, looks like a dyke." Respondents who answered that there was not a stereotype were in the minority. Most of the participants stated there was a stereotype. The following three responses were stated by nonlesbian players:

That most women softball players are lesbians. I think that's a stereotype that's fairly common. I honestly don't know [if there is a look that goes with it]. I've never separated people off that way so I don't, to me, a person's a person. Sometimes they play ball, sometimes they don't. So I don't really think of them as looking differently. I think it's a mistake for people to categorize people based on what they look like. It's always been a mistake and always will be a mistake and I don't think you can tell what's inside by what's outside. I don't know if it matters a whole lot. (Ginger)

When people ask me how my games are going and they're not softball players, or they are guys, I get the impression they think it's kinda a rough neck sport. I've heard comments about women being scary or dykey, or something like that because they take their ball seriously. (Marie)

My own personal belief is that was first stated by some man who was jealous that a woman was better than him. I tend to see that in a lot of different areas, not just sport, there's something wrong with the person if they are good at something that's not stereotypically a male or female thing. (Julie)

The quotes by Ginger, Marie and Julie are examples of how they perceived a stereotype about female softball players. These women articulated a stereotype, but were not able to describe what the stereotype would look like. Jane elaborated on the topic of stereotypes when she said:

I think there's a stereotype about female athletes. Definitely. The whole lesbian thing comes into play. At the recreational leagues, I don't think it's as big, but once you start going into Division I and Division II, they tend to think the more better you are the more lesbian you are. I hear that a lot actually. (Interviewer: by who?) From just a lot of people. They just think if she's good, she's a lesbian. Well, that's not true.

Some of the lesbian respondents who believed there is currently a stereotype of softball players were more specific in their answers as to why there might be a stereotype associated with the game. For example:

Being gay is associated with the game, and whether that's good or bad, I think that you're automatically, if you don't have long hair and you're not on a co-ed team and you know, you don't paint your fingernails and you don't wear make-up and that and that, that being gay is associated with the game. And I think it's definitely a men's stereotype [on women]. (Shawn)

There are stereotypes that people create in the sense the jock image. Whether they're straight or lesbian or whatever. It kinda flies in the face of all those things little girls weren't taught to be when they grew up, when I grew up, anyway, and I was born in '54, so I grew up with the image that one at the age of probably 15 and older should not be out being a tomboy, doing those sorts of things, that one should be mild and meek and reserved. To a certain extent it's more acceptable to do the softball thing now, but there's still....I was called a dyke and didn't even get it, so I think that there are straight women out there who play softball that are probably accused of being a dyke, you know, so there's a certain amount of image thing with regard to any women who do sports that they are susceptible to being stereotyped as jocks and unfeminine when quite frankly a lot of the women I play with are very feminine. (Sylvia)

Sylvia and Shawn indicated that the stereotype could be attributed to women who do not conform to society's feminine ideal. Short hair and the lack of make-up, for example, may lead to assumptions that the woman is a lesbian when she is in the context of the softball environment. Gloria elaborated on why there may be more lesbians who continue to play when they are in their 30s:

I think some people have an attitude that a lot of dykes play softball. But that's not necessarily true. I know a lot of straight women who play as well. It's true, where there is softball, I think especially as women get older, into their 30s, it's more likely there will be more lesbians that continue playing. Of course, a lot of us are not involved in raising children and that type of thing. I mean, some are, but a greater percentage are not, so I think we tend to look more to our chosen family rather than our blood family as far as people we interact with. (Gloria)

A nonlesbian player indirectly lent support to the belief that more lesbians will play into their 30s when she said:

I probably will never give it up until the time that my daughter gets into sports and that won't be for 7 years so maybe I'll be able to play into my early 30s until she becomes active in school and then it's time to hang up the cleats, you know. (Maxine)

Gloria and Maxine touched upon how age might be a factor in who plays softball and the stereotypes about softball. They believed that the older women became, the less likely a nonlesbian player would continue playing because of other commitments, such as a family. These women assumed that most nonlesbian women would not play after they were 30 years old, and that the older women playing softball would more likely be lesbians. Two lesbian players had an insightful perspective on the stereotype of softball players. When asked if the people on their team or on the league fit the stereotype of the aggressive, butch, softball player (that they described), they responded:

The ones that you tend to notice first tend to fit that description because they're the more outgoing, the more aggressive....I'm starting to see it more, where, there's some of the really talented people on other teams don't fit like the physical stereotype of short hair, you know, jock look. (Gloria)

It's like, on my Thursday night league there's a lot of women who I would say appear to be more feminine, but play like; but maybe it's because that's what I'm attracted to is more butch women so that's what I notice more on the field than the women I would consider to be more feminine. (Bambi)

One lesbian spectator discussed her preference for butch women when she stated:

There is a stereotype and that's also my favorite type. I like the athletic butch type, and that's probably the stereotype, and it's also part of the fun of watching the game is to go out and watch the women play. (Kay)

The attraction to the butch softball players by the lesbian participants may be looked at from the opposite view in that the butch players are the first players noticed by the nonlesbians and the male spectators which may be why the stereotype about softball players focuses on the butch, or masculine aspects of the participants. The responses indicate that the women who participate in the softball environment are aware of the stereotype of female softball players. There appears to be some credence to the stereotypes for the players who are aware of it, especially the lesbian players and spectators who stated that the women who fit their stereotype are the players they enjoy watching on the field.

In addition to stereotypes, softball could be considered a lesbian environment if participants in the environment had ever wondered if they were lesbians because they played; or if they had been cautioned by others against participating. The nonlesbian participants had never been cautioned about playing softball, although one was asked if

there were lesbians on her team. The lesbian participants, as a whole, had not internalized the belief that playing softball was a sign of lesbianism. Two individuals who did internalize the belief remembered:

I don't think those were my thoughts originally. I mean, it was just crammed down my throat. I think I had the feelings before any of that. And then I heard that so much from my mom when I had the feelings it was frightening to me so I just withdrew from that. [Was there anyone else who felt that way?] Oh yeah, I think, cause I played different sports all through high school, I think a lot of people thought, you know, if you are an assertive woman and like to do those kinds of things, you won't put up with a lot of shit from men, must be because you're a dyke and that's pretty standard I think. (Gloria)

Because I played softball? I never thought about I could be lesbian. But I always knew there was something different about me as compared to other girls who quit playing softball earlier. And I wasn't sure what I thought about that, but I knew that there were times I had to be very careful to prove that I was a woman and that I was a girl. There were times it wasn't appropriate to beat the boys, there were times it wasn't appropriate for me to be so intense and want to play well and be a good ballplayer. So I knew all those things, but I knew they didn't translate to my sexual identity at all, but there was some dissonance, but I didn't connect the two as connected to my sexuality, but I did connect it to something that was different about me, as a person. The term that I always heard was tomboy and I didn't like it. (Sandra)

Gloria had been cautioned against playing softball by her mother, while Sandra knew she was different than other girls who quit playing softball. This is different from the nonlesbian softball players who had not been cautioned about playing softball by their friends or families. The feeling of being different while growing up was also discussed by Marianne. Marianne, newly coming out in her late 40s, alluded to feeling "different," but did not believe that playing softball and being a lesbian were related. She stated:

Not at all. When I was a teen-age, 17, 18, 19 and not sure of what was going on inside of me and knowing that it was a little secret tucked away, I still enjoyed softball intensely, and none of my friends at the time knew that they were, if they were. So that's kinda silly to assume.

Other participants, although not having a personal encounter with the assumptions of others, thought that some outsiders might think softball and lesbianism would go hand-in-hand. For example:

From what I understand, yeah, I would imagine so. I think that softball has traditionally been connected with lesbians, although I think that if you take a wider look,...make that assumption about any women's sport because I think traditionally society would say well if you want to play on a women's team something must be wrong with you, you don't want to play with the guys, you must be a lesbian. It's that old trap of, you know, you don't need us so you know, there must be something wrong with you. (Jo)

Yeah, I could see where they would, could see where they would [assume softball and lesbianism]. That whole notion of, you know, recruitment and you know, converting someone somehow and I think a lot of that comes from people not understanding what the coming out process is like. All they see is that person that they knew perhaps who started playing softball then all of the sudden they're lesbian you know. It's like I can see where that would throw someone, it's a matter of education, people just don't know. (Elizabeth)

One participant remembered how the softball players at Other School College (OSC) reacted to the perception of softball player as lesbian:

I remember when I came to college that I had a lot of friends on the softball team who were very paranoid that they played softball because that was the image....I remember that people were coming that I met as freshmen were really paranoid about it and it seemed to me that the way the coach was recruiting she was trying to get away from that stereotype as well. From recruiting people who weren't dykey, in terms of short hair cut over the ears to people with long, poofy hair and were, you know, dress up really nicely and they didn't look like dykes. (Ellie)

The women at Other School College seemed to be aware of a connection between softball player and lesbian. They were also aware of the butch stereotype, in that they did not wear their hair short or wear clothing which could be associated being butch.

There appeared to be, then, among the lesbian participants, knowledge of a perceived softball player as lesbian label. One participant stated earlier in her interview that after a high school softball game she was called a dyke by a student, but did not believe that her participation in softball was a factor in that episode. Yet others recalled brothers, parents, or others mentioning the supposed connection between softball and lesbianism.

If, as Zipter (1988) wrote, diamonds are indeed a dyke's best friend, how does a lesbian know about the softball-lesbian connection? Most of the respondents were unable to specify how they knew; they just did. For example:

You know, I don't know. I don't know why. I don't know why a lot of lesbians play softball. I guess a lot of athletic women are softball players. I don't know why they're gay, I don't know why, but they are. And it's known. It's pretty common knowledge that the majority of them are gay. (Molly)

I guess before I played I didn't really pay that close attention to it. You know, I went to a Catholic school and we just started to have girls sports. Like when I was a junior, senior in high school. And I did try out for softball but I wasn't very good and I don't think there were very many lesbians from my school who played on a team, so I don't think I paid any attention to it. [Was she surprised when she started meeting lesbians through softball?] I guess maybe I was kinda surprised. The friend who asked me to play was a lesbian and she introduced me to other people, the more I played the more I realized that on all these teams were lesbian teams and it was like, oh, this is great. (Maxine)

Molly and Maxine were not able to articulate how they knew about the softball environment as a lesbian environment. Once they began to participate, they realized

there were other lesbians on the teams in their league. One respondent discussed how softball was a code word in the military. The use of softball as a way for lesbians to connect to each other in the military was discussed by Faderman (1991), when lesbians in the 1960s used it to warn each other of lesbian witch-hunts. This respondent recalled:

I don't know. I guess in the back of my head I always thought that's where the lesbians went, was softball. Maybe someone told me, maybe another gay woman in college told me, but my lover in the (military), the key word to ask a new woman in the shop was do you play ball. And one of the women in her shop answered, no, I don't but my room-mate does. So it's a dead give-away. And in the (military), at least that branch of the military it does seem to be a code word for are you gay, do you play softball. (Lois)

The knowledge of softball as a lesbian friendly environment appears, then, not to have a common source. Most of the recollections were pyramid in nature; a friend knew about softball who told others, who told others. Some of the respondents accidentally discovered that other lesbians were participating. They joined a team and then realized they were not the only lesbians playing. Other lesbians were told by friends, or were asked by lesbians they knew to sign up to play. For women in the military, participating in softball was a way to meet and communicate with other lesbians, even though the acknowledgement of their lesbianism could result in being discharged.

### Friendships and Softball

If an environment is considered friendly to a minority group, it may be a location where friendships can develop. When participants were asked if women could meet other women at the softball location, both nonlesbian and lesbian respondents interpreted the question as "women" meaning "lesbians." For example, a lesbian and a nonlesbian respondent respectively stated:

Oh, yeah. I've heard people say that. I never thought about it because when I first started playing, I mean, I haven't identified myself as a lesbian until the last 6 years, so I played through that, I played softball for all those years without that, well, it depends on what you mean by meeting women. If you mean meeting in a social way, I think I did. I guess that's not true because when I played in my hometown I played with people I knew. But I think when I moved to (New State) that was part of my purpose. Partly I wanted to play and partly I wanted to meet people and that seemed like a good way to do it. (Gloria)

I think some do. It's just like any other thing. You choose things for your own personal interest. I have never felt threatened by that. I know some people who play on a women's league that I don't play on that feel threatened by that because women they know are lesbians they think that they (the lesbians) are there to meet them, well, they're not. (Maxine)

The confusion within the question was clarified for both sets of respondents. Lesbian respondents were asked a second question: did they believe lesbians could meet other lesbians at the softball location. Both sets of respondents differentiated between meeting new friends and playing with friends. Most responded that the softball environment was a place to be with friends, as teams were made up of friends from outside softball. For example:

That's a good possibility. I think a lot of people tend to join teams if they already know somebody or a few people. They're invited, I don't think it's real, people build teams and they have friends and contacts when they build teams. But it's not unusual for someone to want to get out and socialize and join a team. (Marie)

The majority of lesbian respondents stated that the softball environment was a place to meet lesbians. This response differed from the first question about friendship in that the lesbians now stated that lesbians did play (or watch) softball to meet lesbians.

One respondent said:

Absolutely. I've moved to towns and had other women call me when they move to towns, one of the first questions they ask is where are the softball

games, and they're not talking about coed games. They want to know where the women play, where the lesbian teams are. I just had somebody call me a week ago and that was the first question out of her mouth. (Lois)

Another lesbian respondent tried to explain why lesbians meet at softball games. She stated:

Gay women or...athletic women or softball players aren't always gay, but are a lot of the time. The circle is so small and society doesn't allow us to openly express things but society does allow softball. And that's acceptable. And then to go to a softball game to meet women is okay with society. I think there's nothing bad about that, but to go to a bar to meet women, being a women, there is a problem with that. (Molly)

Some of the lesbians discussed the softball environment as a place to meet possible romantic partners. When asked if lesbians use the softball environment to meet other lesbians, Mikey stated:

I met my current lover at a softball game. As a matter of fact, she was playing on two different teams and I happened to be friends with people on both teams. Met her and we started talking and I ended up going out.

From the responses of the participants, the softball environment seems to be a place where women can meet other women. For the participants, the friendships were in place before playing softball and softball became a place to interact with each other. The lesbian players and spectators saw softball as a place not only to gather with friends, but as a place to meet other lesbians, a way of finding the lesbian community, and as a place to possibly meet a future partner. One lesbian player summed this up when she responded:

Oh yeah, I think they cruise other women. I think you're there and you're checking it out and you're seeing who's there and it's a big social gathering. We go out afterwards, we have a couple of beers or we...some of the teams have bonfires and it's a bonding time, it's a socializing time

after the game whether you win or lose. I think it promotes friendships, relationships and it's not the bar so I think people are more comfortable with themselves. (Bambi)

The softball environment as a lesbian environment has been discussed in terms of descriptions of softball players and softball as a place to meet lesbians. This portion of the results will discuss whether lesbians are more out when they are in the softball environment. By out, I am referring to displaying, either physically or verbally, oneself as a lesbian.

### The Softball Environment as an Out Environment

Only one respondent believed that the affection shown on the diamond by lesbian teams was asexual and less predominant than on nonlesbian teams. The majority of the respondents were either out in every area of their lives (so could not be "more" out), or were more out on the softball diamond. For example, these respondents explained:

Absolutely. Sure. There's a time and place for comments and actions. And I think actions, or gay actions or homosexual actions the place for that might be on the softball field or in a bar or at home. It certainly wouldn't be at a shopping mall or at my employers or at my place of work. (Molly)

Because I know, with the team that I'm on, where it's mostly, if not all, lesbian oriented, I don't have any fear of rejection as far as who I am as a lesbian because these people are the same way. Whereas in another situation, if I were to say something or do something that would mark me as being lesbian, with people present who might reject me or that part of me than I would feel more apt not to do that. (Lynn)

I would have to say yeah. We tend to be, at least on the team that I'm on, we tend to be really affectionate with one another and I think it's more so than I've noticed with other teams who may have some lesbians but who are mostly straight teams. We hug on each other, kiss on each other, are very supportive of one another, and not that any of that would be considered out, but, it's that whole thing they think a lot of straight women, because they're playing sports, buy into this idea that because

they're playing sports they may be perceived as lesbians and so don't feel quite as open to express their emotions and that sort of things. I guess some people see us hugging and kissing on each other and they go, oh, dyke team over there. (Elizabeth)

The softball environment, for Molly, Lynn, and Elizabeth, was a lesbian environment where they could find acceptance, be out to each other, and show affection. Elizabeth's comment is revealing in that she is aware that the team behavior can be interpreted by others as lesbian behavior. However, that does not reduce the amount of affection shown on the softball diamond, and indirectly supports the notion that the softball environment is a lesbian friendly environment which gets tacit approval from nonlesbian teams. None of the lesbian participants recalled an instance when a nonlesbian team shouted at them for being lesbians or commented on their behavior. Yet, in a different situation (such as a grocery store or in a library), the reaction to the affection would probably be negative. Another respondent discussed that she is out, but uses caution because of her fear of being assaulted. Isis explained:

I'm out pretty much in my whole life. I'm out in my work, I'm out to everyone I work with, I'm out to most of my family, I'm pretty out most of the time. But I would say out in like general public walking around, (x) and I do not hold hands. We don't hold hands, don't hug each other at the grocery store. We don't do that sort of stuff. I'm paranoid about doing that sort of thing. I'm afraid of being attacked, hurt, physically assaulted. So, I do conform in those situations and on the softball field I'm more relaxed about that situation. I feel like there's enough of us that if someone said something insulting to me or tried to follow me to my car or something there would be enough people there to defend or whatever, in that sense that would be true. Although we don't hold hands at the softball field, I do feel more okay about speaking loudly.

In contrast, some women felt they could talk, flirt, and show affection on the diamond & in the stands without cause of concern. One respondent smiled when she gave this example of why she wasn't paying attention on the field:

I was out in right field the other day, and I wasn't paying attention. There was this cute girl walking across, behind the fence, and I was watching her and (x) 's standing next to me and yells, "I got it" and I'm like, thank god, cause I wasn't paying attention. I was comfortable to say to her sorry, hon, I was girl watching just for a minute, lost track of where I was. (Bambi)

The above quote is an example of being verbally out at a softball game. An example of being physically and verbally out was recalled by Sandra:

The woman I'm seeing right now was coaching 3rd base in a game and I was rounding 3rd base and I thought she said slow up so I slowed up and then she said go, so I ran home. And I ran back and everyone was laughing at me because I'm known for not listening to my coaches very well and I just said really loud to everybody, I thought she said hold up, she must have meant hold me, and I went over and gave her a great big hug and was very affectionate with her. I probably even kissed her and that was right there on the field. I had no problem with it and the rest of our team had no problem with it. So, there are things like that, that I'll do that I probably wouldn't do in other spaces and have never done in basketball and other sports that I've played because they haven't been so predominately lesbian.

The respondent from above (Sandra) touched on the fact that she would show affection on the softball field but not in other sport settings. Somehow, the softball environment may be different from other sports. Lesbian participants were asked if there were other sports or activities that could be considered lesbian. Lesbian respondents answered that there were other sports, such as rugby, basketball, volleyball, soccer, golf (the followers of the LPGA), shooting pool, and "any sport that requires strength, except the ones you wear little dresses in or skirts" (Skinny Puppy). Nonsport activities

included womyn's [feminist spelling of women] festivals, anything associated with being masculine, such as using power tools, gay pride marches, motorcycles, bars, and outdoor activities. The respondents then explained why, to them, softball was different:

I think because more women can participate. I mean rugby is really super jock kind of person. Somebody who really is physically fit, where that's not true in softball. I remember in the earlier days some of those women couldn't even hit balls, I was one of them, or play well, but you were still able to be on the team and have fun. (Sue)

More people can play it....So lots of the spectators are often people's lovers or partners or intimate friends or friends, close friends. And so softball, you know, you've got ten players on each team instead of one and so you just bring more people. It's a more communal activity than tennis. (Kay)

There are more players on the team. It's an outside sport where you can just go and watch and really not, you can mingle, you can lay back, you can stay unobtrusive if you want. The weather's usually warm, the people are outside, not only are there the players on the field, but there's the spectators who come to the field. So you have quite a bit of people to observe, you know, if you are coming to a game just to observe. And if you know somebody on the team that's a lesbian, you know, there's a network there. And once you get into the network you are getting into the people who don't necessarily play softball. Once you get into those people, then there's other interests that kinda people group around be it music, dance, any other interest, that people have in common and that gets you possibly into other networks of people because people know people and so forth. You can meet a lot of people that way if you're really interested in meeting somebody. (Lynn)

Softball was different from the other activities because of its inherent social nature. Softball has a minimum of 10 players on a team, so at any given game there is the potential to interact with at least 19 players. For softball players who live in locations in which the weather is not conducive to playing all year, softball is a chance to be outside in nice weather (as compared to a northern winter, for example). The softball environment is conducive to spectators, who can not only interact with each

other, but also with the players. Historically, the softball environment has a history with the working class, not only with the lesbians of the 50s but with the workers of the industrial leagues in the 20s. Softball is still considered by some to be a working class sport, as an individual who wants to play does not require a lot of expensive equipment. to play.

### **Summary of Results and Concluding Remarks**

The initial reasons for participating in softball differed for the women interviewed. Most of the participants played either softball or baseball as children, while a few played for the first time as adults. A few of the participants had experienced being told that they were lesbians because they played softball. However, this assumption of a softball/lesbianism cause and effect was acknowledged by the majority of the respondents. Therefore, it would be hasty to dismiss the possibility of a wider range of girls and women being told they are lesbians because they play softball. Vic (a woman who came out in the 1940s) recalled that her parents attributed her being gay to her joining a women's baseball team (quoted in Kennedy & Davis, 1994). It is possible that this belief of cause and effect was more likely to be stated in an age cohort or geographic cohort not sampled in my study. The lesbians interviewed, however, did not support Palzkill's (1990) assertion that sport is a medium in which women could overcome a contradiction between femininity and sport by becoming lesbians.

Women who participate in the softball environment meet friends at the games. These friends can be women they've known and have formed a team with, or women they have recently met at the softball field. The lesbians interviewed believed that

softball was a positive way to meet other lesbians, and that was one reason stated as to why they played or watched softball. This belief is supported by the women Zipter interviewed in 1988, and by Marla, a woman interviewed in Kennedy and Davis (1994), who used both softball and basketball as a way to meet friends [lesbians] in the military during the 1940s. For the lesbians and nonlesbian participants, the social nature of the game was a reason for continued participation. As Alix Dobkin said, "softball is the singly greatest organizing force in lesbian society (quoted in Zipter, 1988, p. 76).

The lesbians who participated in my study were a select group in that the majority of them were out in every aspect of their lives. The softball environment was another place for them to be themselves. It was common for these out lesbians to change their behaviors only when the behavior could jeopardize their safety. Many of the lesbians Zipter (1988) interviewed were also out (for example, many of the respondents in her book are identified by their real names), and recollected how they could be demonstrative on the softball field. For example, one woman in Zipter's book discussed hugging the players on other teams when they arrived at 3rd base (her position), while one team played the song "Leaping Lesbians" before each game. It is not known at this time what percentage of lesbian softball participants are closeted (lesbians who do not allow others to know they are lesbians) or out, and how the qualitative interview format might be more likely to attract lesbians who are out as participants.

The question of how lesbians know the softball environment is a location where they can meet other lesbians cannot be definitively answered. Most of the lesbians knew because they realized some of the women they were playing with were lesbians, or

because a friend told them. One possible explanation is that lesbians have heard the stereotypes about women who play softball, and therefore are drawn to that environment. Another possibility may be in the image of heros. In centuries past, the image of the goddess (or the goddess trilogy) may have been a heroic image for women. Later, the amazon might have served as a heroic model for women. For modern day lesbians, the softball player may embody the heroic image of the strong woman. Although this topic is outside the limits of this current study, it may be one avenue for discussion to help answer the question of how lesbians know about the softball environment.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have provided evidence in support of the assertion that softball is an environment where lesbians interact with each other. The lesbians in this study stated that they participate for social reasons, and that the softball environment is a place to meet lesbians. This was also supported by the work of Faderman (1991), Kennedy and Davis (1994) and Zipter (1988). The next chapter will discuss lesbian identity, an ego identity model of lesbian identity, and the interaction between lesbian identity formation and the softball environment.

## Chapter V

### Results and Discussion: Lesbian Identity and Lesbian Identity Formation

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the formation of lesbian identity and how it may interact with the softball environment. In the first portion of the chapter, how the participants described their identity is examined. In the second section of the chapter, how the lesbians came to a personal realization that they were lesbians, and how they came out, both to themselves (personal coming out) and to others is discussed. Within this section, the issue of conforming to fit in with a lesbian community is discussed. In the third portion of this chapter, how well the data fit with the proposed model of lesbian identity is examined.

#### Lesbian Identity

All participants in the study were asked to describe their identity. Some of the participants answered right away, while others needed an explanation of the question. I rephrased the question in the same manner to all participants who asked for clarification and/or an example. The rephrased question asked participants how they would create a mosaic of who they are. Two participants asked for an example. The example given was, "I'm Jewish, I'm a scholar, I'm a softball player." After the example, all but one participant were able to answer the question. The single person who could not answer, began to answer once, then stated that she did not like the question, at which point I suggested that we continue with the interview and return to the question at a later time. She agreed, and at the conclusion of the interview when I asked her to describe her identity, she once again stated that she could not.

The lesbian participants were very deliberate and thoughtful in their answers. Unexpectedly, some of the participants gave a sophisticated response which gave the impression that they had thought about their identity at an earlier time in their lives. All of the lesbian participants, except one, included "lesbian" or "gay woman" in their descriptions of themselves. The one individual who did not use the term "lesbian" or "gay" preferred the term "soulful" instead. Betsy used the term because:

Well, no. That's why I put soulful in there. Um. It, I was going to touch on it earlier. I don't know that I could say 100% lesbian. I lean more that way, but, if I click, if it clicks with a man, then I have interests there as well.

Betsy preferred the word soulful instead of what she called a sexual label, such as lesbian. She became familiar with the term soulful when:

Yeah, yeah. I was just kinda reading that in the Advocate [a gay/lesbian magazine] in the Melissa [Etheridge] interview about their relationship and I thought, I could agree with that. Um. It's on the record now, my last sex partner was a man, so I mean, it's whatever I would, whatever sex I would feel comfortable with.

Interestingly, when Betsy was asked earlier in the interview which term she preferred, she stated lesbian and did not mention the term bisexual. The choice of terms preferred by Betsy may be due to the acceptance of certain terms within the lesbian community, which historically does not support women who describe themselves as bisexual.

Kay, a lesbian spectator, described her identity, and how her view of lesbian fit in with her identity.

I'm a third generation immigrant woman. In that realm that fits into who I am as a person. I am first a person, I am second a lesbian, and um, third comes in my heritage. I make distinct differences between women and lesbians as I think that women are heterosexual people and lesbians is a yet to be written about category. It's not the same thing as woman.

Woman and lesbian are not the same thing. Female and lesbian are inter-related biologically but woman is a constructed term and lesbian doesn't fit into that construction in my mind, so lesbian is being constructed. But homosexual womanhood is not being constructed. You know, women who have sex with women, or women who make love to women are not being constructed, that's just an activity. But lesbian as a political entity is being constructed and I don't think it's finished.

Kay's description reflects her view of herself as a political lesbian. In her life, she had been married and has two sons. Kay had her first sexual experience with a woman at the age of eleven, and referred to herself as bisexual (and continued to have women sexual partners) until her mid20s. Her coming out was political, after reading feminist writings, and her feminist beliefs are reflected in her description. Similarly, three of the Women of Color lesbians included ethnicity in their description of identity (the fourth, Kay, described herself as a third generation immigrant woman), and Sandra, a Latina, was equally as insightful as she explained:

Woman would be big. Latina. I want to say athlete or something like that, because physical activity will always be a big part of who I am because I need to be around people who want to be outside and be active. But I don't like the term athlete because it's so culturally constructed. But maybe, I don't know, active or something like that. But then I think my, but lesbian doesn't to me cut it for now, and it's been that way for the past year. For the ease of communication, I will identify as lesbian but I think right now, I would say lesbiana before I would say lesbian. I don't have another term right now that words for me without getting wordy and saying something like sexually open minded woman who loves women, you know. I don't know what else to call myself.

Both of the Black lesbian players included lesbian as a part of their identities, along with African-American (Elizabeth) and Black (Marianne). Marianne made this comment about being Black and lesbian:

I think that makes it a stronger me because it's not just being a lesbian, it's living in this society in America, being Black and lesbian. It just, yeah, I think it makes a stronger person, I think the lesbian makes me stronger. That's why I decided to open up and let the world see who I really was before it may possibly be too late.

The Women of Color saw their ethnic heritage as an integral part of themselves which combined with their lesbianism to create their essence. Similarly, the lesbian respondents (caucasian) could not separate themselves from being lesbian. Unlike a hobby or business persona, they considered their lesbianism to be their self. For example:

Oh, yeah. I mean it's a really important part of my identity. I mean, it has an impact on my life all the way around. It impacts my relationship, it impacts my benefits, it impacts the homophobia, everything. You have to overcome, I mean, I had to overcome a lot to be really comfortable as a lesbian and to be out and to be who I am. I mean without regard to where I am but to always be who I am (Bambi).

Yep. I think it really does define me. There was a huge change from when I, from who I was before I realized who I was until after I came out. I was more confident, I was more at ease, I had a lot more self confidence. It, it's amazing, you know when I was in high school I just never felt attractive or anything like that to anyone and then I came out and I realized there were a lot of people who were attracted to me, it was like, wow, this is cool and I, it made me feel really good, so I think from coming out and realizing what I was feeling before and what I'm feeling now, uh, that there's substance to it and it means something and it made me feel a lot better, it made me be the person who I am. It's definitely part of me, definitely (Ellie).

In contrast to the lesbian participants (two of whom had children), two of the nonlesbian players included their families in their identity definitions. Julie and Ginger described themselves as:

There would be, of course, my self, my family would be in there, my family, the different things I'm involved in, the music that I do, the softball, the job that I do, the friends that I choose to have, different

things that have been influences in my life, literature, that sort of thing.  
(Julie)

Part little kid, still loves to play. I love the outdoors, always have. I love animals. I have a dog, that's a pretty special dog. I love my family. So part wife, part mom, part professional, I love teaching. I love what I'm in, love the field which is cardiac rehab and teaching.... (Ginger)

The remaining nonlesbian respondents described themselves either along one trait, such as competitiveness or working class (at heart). One woman (Lauren) replied that she was Methodist, but that response may have been given because of my example to her, which included being Jewish. None of these remaining respondents mentioned themselves as being a mother or spouse either (which 3 out of 4 were).

The responses of the nonlesbians and the Women of Color shed insight on people's identity definitions. The experience of living as "other," or as a minority, may keep that part of an individual's identity at the forefront; possibly because an individual is reminded by the dominant culture that she is "other." The nonlesbian participants did not describe themselves as heterosexual, while none of the respondents who were of European ancestry described themselves by their heritage or as white or caucasian.

The use of the terms "lesbian," "gay," and "soulful" by the lesbian respondents may be an indication that they have formed a lesbian identity. The formation of their identify will be analyzed next.

### Personal Realization and Coming Out

The lesbians I interviewed had their personal realizations at different points in their lives. There seemed to be three separate time periods for having a personal

realization. The first was in grade school, where some of the respondents first felt different. For example:

Not understanding it, about 10. Not understanding it as the word lesbian comes down to a word. But within the feelings about myself, around 10, for sure. But I have memories as far back as my first year in school, in kindergarten, falling in love with, I even remember her name. It's been a part of my life, I think, entirely (Marianne).

Oh, when I was real little. Oh. Grade school. I used to watch Here Comes the Brides and I wanted to be Bobby Sherman because I really liked his friend Candy (Skinny Puppy).

Probably around 4th or 5th grade. I remember the word lesbian came up somewhere amongst my school friends and I remember looking it up in the dictionary because I didn't know what it meant, and I remember feeling very uncomfortable and uneasy about that, that these people were laughing and ridiculing, and I didn't feel very comfortable with that. I mean I might not have really known back then. I guess I've always known I was kinda different, I was a tomboy and I wasn't into most things that my mother would have liked me to be into. I didn't like the clothes she bought for me (Maxine).

I think I had it when I was in grade school. I don't think I knew what it was, but I think I had the feeling way back then (Gloria).

A commonality among these respondents was the feeling of being different. These lesbians knew they were not like their friends, but they couldn't explain or understand why at that young age.

The next age grouping where respondents first felt different were the teen-age years. These respondents were similar to the first group in that they knew they were different but didn't understand why. These respondents had to work through their feelings of being different while going through puberty. Some examples from this group are:

Let's see. Probably the first inkling was I don't know, when I was about 12 or 13. The infamous crush on gym teacher story. It seems to be very common. But I didn't actually come [out] until I was 19 (Elizabeth).

I think back now, early on, probably when I was, probably 13 or 14. Just a feeling that, I would always look at the guys walking around I would look at the girl friends and I thought for a long time that I was really weird, very strange. It wasn't until college that I started realizing what it was because it wasn't, where I come from is very small, very small town, people just didn't talk about stuff like that, it was never mentioned. I don't think I ever heard the word gay until I left for college. So to feel what I was feeling was really strange for me, because I didn't understand it at all (Ellie).

Junior high school was when it first occurred to me that girls became really focused on boys and although I shared that and I went through you know, I had boyfriends all the time and stuff, I really liked being with my girlfriends. I really liked hanging out with them and had lots of them. And I think it was sometime around junior high that I just kinda thought, I'm not quite feeling what everybody seems to be feeling, or it just didn't seem quite the same for me as it did for them, you know. If they were real involved with some boy or something. And, I had boyfriends all the way through junior high and high school, lots of them, the series that everybody goes through, but it just didn't touch me emotionally, it just wasn't there for me. I guess it was when I was about 22, 21 or 22, when I finally realized that women were an option. I just really think it hadn't occurred to me (Isis).

When I was pretty young. Boy. I really kinda knew. I would say probably I was around 15 or 16, it scared me, terrified me too much. I remember reading about it in the (name of city) Womyn's [feminist spelling of woman] health collective and took it out of the library and was terrified and then I identified myself then but I couldn't come to terms with it. I probably, actually didn't really come out until I was 22. About the time I started playing softball (Sue).

Well, I don't know. I had a few boyfriends in high school, but you know, wasn't ever really there. I had a lot more fun with my female friends and my best friend in particular. And, I don't know. Actually there was one point where I kind of broke up with my boyfriend over my best friend. He was jealous of the time we were spending together and I wasn't gonna give her up for any guy, so I ended up breaking up with him (Jessie).

The women who first realized in the middle school - high school age range either dated boys during this time or dated no one. None of these women had a personal coming out until they were out of high school. A personal coming out is when an individual accepts that she is a lesbian and begins to explore her lesbianism.

Having a personal realization post-high school was the commonality among the participants in the final group. For example:

Well, I was married at the time and had started playing basketball, recreational basketball when I was living in (city). I was playing recreational basketball and started just going to a bar, a straight bar, shooting pool, after basketball games. We were kinda mixed, as straights and lesbians on the team and we had a male coach. At any rate, we were shooting pool and I enjoyed this one woman giving me special attention while I was playing pool (Betsy).

I would have to say when I was 27, although that was not the point in my life when I started having sex with women. I started having sex with women when I was 11, so I don't count when I was a heterosexual woman having sex with women. I count from the time I realized there was a lesbian community and decided I was a part of that community and needed to get off my ass and do what I was suppose to do (Kay).

A really cute woman [made me think I was gay]. The men I dated were all gay, 5 out of 5 in college. And I went to therapy and through therapy I realized that I wasn't attracted to the men I was going out with. I was going out with them because they were fun and because they were gay. And that made me realize that I had been like, denying a part of myself (Lois).

Well I first heard the word right around when I was 18 or 19, actually when I was 18 was the first time I ever heard the word. Before that I always hung around with women, I never dated any guys simply because I wasn't interested, never dated any guys, never went to bed with any guys cause I just simply wasn't interested, it wasn't something that I wanted to do, although at that point in time I had never been actually with a woman and the thought hadn't really occurred to me although I knew I liked the closeness of the female friends I had and then the first time I heard the word lesbian, I was like, hmm, and it just kinda rolled around

for awhile and then, like shortly after that was my first relationship with a woman. And I've been there ever since (Bob).

The women in the post-high school group were diverse in coming to a personal realization. They represented married women, women who had boyfriends until their realization, and women who never dated men, but until their 20s never realized they were lesbians. The lesbians in this group were able to put a name to their feelings, which helped them to come out to themselves after their personal realization. Kay differed from Besty, Lois and Bob because she had experienced sexual relations with women at the age of 11. Kay's comments emphasized the difference between having sex with a woman and forming a lesbian identity. Interestingly, Kay was the only participant who had sexual relations with a woman before realizing she was a lesbian.

As stated earlier, a personal realization is different than a personal coming out. An individual may realize she is a lesbian, but may not accept it. For example, Gloria had a feeling in grade school that she was a lesbian, but did not come out to herself until she was 29. She stated:

Oh man, it took forever. I went through a series of crushes on women for years and years and years not really labeling it as that and it took me until I was, I think 29, and I was married, but I think one of the big things that happened was when I lived in (state), there was a woman that I was really attracted to and then it was easy because I could just be around her. And then I moved back here and as much as I missed her, I started kinda thinking, hmm, I wonder what that's about and I got into counseling and started talking about how much I loved being around women and how unhappy I was just in general in my marriage. Just started thinking about it and talking about it. Actually, it was about the first time I'd ever let myself say any of that out loud. I came from an environment that my mom was just so crazy. She thought I played sports and that meant I was a dyke and she just pushed and pushed and pushed and in reaction I said no no no no no, I'm not a dyke. Oh, that would be terrible. So it took me a long time I think to get to the point where I could think that

wouldn't be terrible and I could actually say it out loud. And then after I talked about it for awhile and realized I could even act on it if I wanted to.

Gloria may have come out to herself at a younger age if her mother hadn't pushed her so hard not to be a "dyke." Gloria's experience is an example of how family pressures may defer lesbian identity exploration and formation until such time as when the woman can safely explore her identity.

Elizabeth, Jessie, and Sue had their personal realization in their early teens, but did not come out to themselves until their 20s. A commonality for these lesbians was how they describe a process of moving from a personal realization to a personal coming out. They recalled:

Mostly I just kind of sat on it and I let it, I let it percolate, you know, it was like, I would get these flashes through the years between the time I first went oh, could I, yeah or no no no, to the time I actually said well, yeah, I guess I am. Mostly I just sat on it and I let it percolate until on some level I knew I was ready to deal with it. I mean, in the intervening years I had many more crushes, fell in love with my best friend in high school and all that kind of good stuff, you know never put that label on it and there were just a few things that helped me kind of ease into it. I was able to spend the summer before I actually came to that realization, I was actually able to live by myself for the first time and have the time and space to think about myself and reflect on my life and that was a big help, that was a big help (Elizabeth).

It was a long time. I was back in high school when that happened. Then in college I was with a woman but it was still like denial and in college [there were] other lesbians and I guess I became more comfortable with it. And stopped fighting it, I suppose. So it was probably my senior year in college (Jessie).

It was a process. It was a long process. I think, I know I had a real close friend and she was actually probably identified as bisexual at the time, and I remember falling in love with her and her sending me flowers and everything and at that point I finally said to myself you know, you've

got to come to terms with this. And that's when I did to myself. I came out to myself. But before that it was a struggle, I mean I tried to fit in, and dated men, I was sexual with them, you know, I tried to be straight, and I was very unhappy (Sue).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the lesbians who had their personal realization as adults had the shortest time frame between the realization and their personal coming out. As they recalled:

It was through therapy. It didn't really take me that long. The therapy wasn't because I was dealing with issues of being gay but it was through therapy that I realized I was a lesbian and I didn't have a real hard time with it and once I realized it I was at college, and a very high percentage of that college was gay, a small religious college, and there were quite a few lesbians and gay men on the campus. So it was pretty easy for me to come out. There was a good bar system and a good softball system (Lois).

It was through a friend, oh, boy, this could be a long story. I'll keep it short. My friend [male friend] who I met when I lived in (state), anyhow, he came, he was gay, he came out to me several years prior, and he had come over to visit for Christmas holiday and I was talking to him a little bit about this woman and he said well, not necessarily this time, but some time you might want to follow your heart instead of your head. The marriage was going bad and it just, I just decided to, when, I said I wanted to separate from my husband, I decided to call this woman up. And just found that I enjoyed her company, it wasn't any big revelation, it was just something that seemed very comfortable (Betsy).

I think kinda in a way, I always was, I didn't have a, I wasn't thinking in one direction, in a heterosexual direction and then all of the sudden realize that, what the word lesbian was and that I might be that and then head in that direction. I was always in the lesbian direction although I didn't put that term to myself, you know. But I can never remember not being in that direction, so, I didn't have a big realization one day that all of the sudden I was this because I always was that and it wasn't any, it was more like a homecoming for me once I started finding other women who felt the same way as I did once I started seeing that there was a whole culture out there of lesbians, that there was a whole society, there was a whole support network, there was a whole city of lesbians that are out there, that I didn't realize were out there before, so it was kinda like a homecoming to me, the realization I had (Bob).

That [personal realization and personal coming out] probably happened at the same time. I know most people say well they came out at the time they became sexual with same sex partners, but I don't count the sex part as being relevant. I came out when I opened my eyes and realized that heterosexuality was wrong, and institutionalized and a bad idea, so when I came to that realization that was when I came out. So it was totally political for me (Kay).

A commonality of these recollections is that as adults, the realization and personal coming out was a comfortable process. It makes sense that a child or young teen-ager would have the most difficult time because the lesbian subculture is not valued in American society, and there are limited resources and opportunities (depending where the youth lives) for young lesbians. Lois and Betsy had assistance (therapist and friend) in reaching their personal coming out. Once they felt support, they were ready to come out. Bob did not have a guide to help her move towards a personal coming out. Rather, she came out when she realized there were other women like her with a culture. Finally, Kay could be described as a "political lesbian," a term which Faderman (1991) used to describe why chronological theories of lesbian identity formation could not be applied to all lesbians.

Coming out to others is the process of informing people that an individual is a lesbian. The process may be painful for some people, as the news is not always welcome in families, among friends, and at the workplace. Coming out to others takes place after an individual comes out to herself. Coming out to others can take different forms, such as verbally telling people, or wearing identifying clothes (a t-shirt about lesbian safe sex, for example), and may occur in stages, such as telling a few people at

a time over a period of many years. One respondent, Bob, discussed how she has never initiated conversation about coming out to others:

I've never, I've never walked up to a person, whether it was a family member or friend or anybody and said, there's something that I have to tell you, so, I, in a sense, haven't come out to anybody. Anybody who ever asked me the question I've never ever denied it, including family members, including close friends, including a lot of people that were close to me that I lost over the issue once they came to the realization of what I was, and, I don't ever try to hide it. I would never ever ever deny it, but I don't go around broadcasting it either.

Bob was a minority among the respondents. One common theme was coming out to a few friends and waiting before coming out to family. Ellie stated:

In terms of my family, recently. In terms of people that I hung around with, basically all my friends were gay, so they were just waiting for me. "God, it took you long enough" and that truly was the response when I really started coming out, so, it was very easy environment for me to come out in because most of my friends were gay anyway.

Similar to Ellie, Jessie's family also knew about her lesbianism. Jessie also waited before telling her family. She responded:

As far as friends, around that time. Maybe in a couple years. My family, it took me awhile. 21-22 at that time, they all figured it out before I told any of them. I was probably around 26-27. [I decided to tell them...] I wanted to share my life. I was going off to see my friend all the time and I wanted them to know why. I told my sister at that point, and she was dogsitting my dog all the time and she might as well have a reason. So I told her and then I told my other sister. Then I told my father last summer because he was coming out to stay with me. And I said if you're going to come out and stay with me there's probably something I should tell you and that's when I came out to him. I have two brothers and I've never really verbalized it but they know, I don't know, I guess I haven't fully come out to my entire family yet.

Sandra felt forced to tell her mother about her lesbianism. Sandra told her mom before she had an understanding about herself, which inhibited her from coming out to others for an additional two years. Sandra recalled:

I was forced to come out to my mom and my sister, so my family knew immediately before I was even sure that's what was going on for me. So I was coerced into coming out to all of them because my mom felt I needed to, I really think that made me shelter myself even more, for my own coming out and doing it on my own volition. So I guess, gosh, I didn't really start coming out really until 2 years later. There were certain people in my life that I told, other people that I knew were lesbian that I knew were safe to tell, but as telling, as far as just not hiding it any longer and not being careful and those kinds of things, it took about 2 years.

Marianne, the 49 year old lesbian who is using 1994 as her coming out year, told a few close friends when she first came out. Marianne is now coming out to more people. As she said:

I'm not referring to myself anymore as straight. I will not allow my family or friends to refer to me as anything but a lesbian. Because I finally have accepted myself and I have 5 children and they have all accepted me. I have a lovely mother and she has accepted me. Daily as I run into old friends and stuff and explain to them, they're accepting me.

An additional pattern in the coming out process was coming out to others (friends and family) right away. As these lesbians recalled:

Oh god, I was ready to ride on the white horse. And blurt it, you know. I was around softball people and just sort of like, is she, isn't she, how do you tell. So it just, I don't know, just integrated itself you know....I've told my niece and my sister and my brother and my brother-in-law. My mother I think knows but she doesn't, you know what I mean. Like she doesn't want anyone to put it in front of her but she'll say things, statements, and I think she's pretty cool about it. She really likes my lover. [When did you come out to your family?] I finally realized it and I finally admitted it to myself and I think I called within that week's time and just said this is it, whether you love me or hate me, it's your problem if you hate me. They said if that's where you want it and you're happy with it, we still love you (Chip).

Not too long after I had my personal coming out. I happened to be in a ... classroom, I finally decided that yes I was a lesbian, dyke, and fortunately for me I kinda had a ready made community because in this ... class there just so happened that there was about 10-12 other lesbians in the class and when the issue came up in class and discussion homosexuality, all of us just came out that day, it was really wonderful, it was a freeing experience and so I met a lot of people through that class (Elizabeth).

I had been out as a quote unquote bisexual for a long time, although I didn't use that term. I was a heterosexual married woman who preferred sex with women, and I said that vocally ever since I can remember. But, as soon as I realized that there were lesbians in the world and that there were women living together making family units, then right away I got my life in order right away. It only took about two weeks ... to everybody who listens (Kay).

One woman (Bambi) not only discussed when she came out, but also the reasons why she thought it was important to be out:

From the beginning, I mean I didn't know, like a lot of things in my life, I was a naive person, I grew up in the country, I was really naive, so I didn't understand the taboos as much. So I came out to my mom and people at work. I've never been very closeted. I mean, I'm more out now than I've ever been because I tell people....I won't let them assume I'm straight....That gays, lesbians, we're just like everyone else, it's only your stereotypes that perceive us as something we're not. In order to break those stereotypes down I feel I have to come out because I know some people can't, and people are pretty receptive to me.

### Conformity and Activity within a Lesbian Community

Costos (1990) placed conformity in Stage 3 of Level 2 of his model of gender role identity. In Costos' model, conformity is the embracing of socially constructed norms to explain gender behavior. It may be possible that lesbians embrace the norms of the community when they come out. The majority of the lesbians in this study were aware of conformity standards in their lesbian community. Many of the respondents smiled and nodded their heads "yes" as I asked them if they had ever felt a need to conform to what

they thought a lesbian was, or if they felt a need to conform to what others thought.

Sylvia quickly said, "the uniform" when I asked her the question. She explained further:

I think there was a little bit of that back then. Sure in the 80s it was an androgynous uniform. Plaid shirts and Birkenstocks and jeans and short hair, but there was a need for that at that time. I mean it seems like every culture that we've been in there's a great tape out right now, something about lesbian fashion, you ought to see it, it identifies the butch-fem phenomenon in the 50s and 60s and how it went on to the androgyny and now it's you can be what the hell whatever you want to be because you are more free to do that. But at the time when I came out, we were doing the androgyny things because it wasn't just a lesbian thing, it was also the women's movement was very much involved in breaking stereotypes of what males can and cannot do and what women can and can't do and so women started dressing more like the traditional male dress which women dress that way, not necessarily because men dressed that way but because it was the most comfortable clothes and why should they get to wear them, you know. And then it became a uniform after that, I think and when that happened it had it's purpose in identifying people to you, so that you could relate on the street, you could feel comfortable, you could say hey, you know, you might not ever see that person again but you felt good, you felt part of something when you walked by them and you didn't feel totally alienated. And it was a political statement, so you were doing two things at once....Well, we're getting to that point, where people feel more comfortable and they're demanding to be able to be just who they want to dress like, what they want to dress like without having to wear a badge.

Sylvia's explanation touched on the connection between what some lesbians wore and the women's movement of the 80s. Specifically, the look was androgynous. The androgynous look of the women's movement then became the uniform of the lesbian community Sylvia interacted with, which is one sign of conformity within a lesbian community. Sylvia wasn't the only person who described a "uniform." Interestingly, Isis and Sue described what a lesbian was suppose to look like, but also said that it took awhile for them to move beyond conforming. As each of them stated:

I felt a lot of pressure from the lesbian community. Not from the straight community. Lesbian community at that time you were suppose to wear suede hiking boots with the red laces, flannel shirts and jeans, bib overalls, kerchiefs in your hair, and short hair. You must have short hair. And my hair when I came out was down to my waist, so that was a big deal, cause of course I went and got it cut off immediately and bought this very dykey looking hat to wear. [How long did you stay in that conformity circle?] I still feel that pressure from the lesbian community to look a particular way but I have thrown it off for about 8-10 years...I've been rebelling (Isis).

I think that was a part of coming out and I, it probably still is to new dykes. I know back then we wore like, jeans and the, some kind of boots and you know, flannel shirts and short hair. You know, I have long hair now, well, kinda medium, but you know, that was unheard of. There wasn't any lipstick dykes back then and I think it was partly too so we could all fit in and we felt a part of the group. That was real important. [How long did you stay in that conformity circle?] Maybe 4-5 years, maybe not quite that long. I was feeling comfortable to where it was okay to wear a dress or something. Or, like shave your legs, those kind of things where you were p.i. [politically incorrect] or p.c. [politically correct] you know, all those issues. That took awhile, but I think that whole community was moving that way too. I went through a period being very separatist and I thought that was very healthy but I see some women stuck there or choosing to be there maybe, where I've moved past that.... (Sue).

Sylvia, Isis and Sue discussed conformity as a function of personal appearance. Another view on conformity within a lesbian community was offered by Kay. Kay felt pressure when she came out. She discussed the rules of lesbianism when she said:

That was the shocking part for me. I didn't realize there were rules about how you had to be a lesbian. ...In the early days back then I had been taken to task quite a few times about what a lesbian really was and how I couldn't possibly be a lesbian because I had been married and because I had boy children. And it took the lesbian community probably 10 years to come around to the fact that we were really out there and we were really dykes and we made some bad decisions when we were younger. [Is the conformity pressure still there for people first coming out?] Absolutely. I don't think that has changed. I think as long as white middle class academic feminists rule what lesbianism is, than I think there's always going to be that problem. They just have realized recently

that there's difference. Sexual differences and that people are different. And that people are different and that there's different classes of people and different religions and different races and socially constructed races and that all of that can fall within the realm of lesbianism. And I think that white, academic feminists are just realizing that while they were building their little world, there had been previously and continued to be, and will be in the future, a whole lesbian community that exists without them and without their analyzing it.

Kay's analysis of conformity was from a political viewpoint. She challenged the lesbian community to accept women who had been with men, women who had children, and that all women are different.

A few of the lesbians recognized the conforming nature of their lesbian community but did not feel the need to conform. Molly described her reaction to coming out:

When I first came out it was almost a relief. It was "Thank God!" Now I know what's the matter with me. I didn't fit in in high school, I didn't fit in with the boys, or I didn't fit in with that group. And I was real lost. I was real confused where I did fit in. Finally I said this is the spot and I can be me and I can fit in and people can like me for being me and not because I'm anybody else.

Similar to Molly, Lois discussed how she dealt with conformity:

No, I've never been a good conformist ever, and I tend to have a knee jerk reaction to if I go in to a community where, say, shaving your legs and arms is the norm, then I don't shave, and if I go somewhere where shaving your legs and arms is not the norm, then I do shave. and it's simply a reaction to what other people tell me to do - what is normal within our lesbian community.

Lesbians may acknowledge a lesbian community and the conforming pressure which may be a part of the particular community. However, not all lesbians are active in a lesbian community. Active was broadly defined (for participants who asked) as receiving newsletters, being involved in politics, or attending lesbian events sponsored

by a community. The majority of the lesbians described themselves as somewhat active in their community. One woman, Molly, described her reasons for not being active:

I'm new to this community, I think is one of the reasons. Two, I'm not politically involved in any type of politics, it's not something I have a real big interest in, be it a government issue or a gay/lesbian issue, I'm not really involved in it. And three, I have a real big fear of losing my job. That's my biggest fear in the world is that I'm going to lose 10 years of work and my career because of my sexual orientation....I support the issues. I almost feel like a hypocrite sometimes because I'm not more active. I honestly, sometimes I think I'm not playing my part and if more people weren't like me we wouldn't be having the struggles we have today. I tell myself, or I act the way I think I can act and I try not to hide from the people I think it's important to. I'm not a pretender to the people that I care about or care about me. Other areas I am, I don't play games, I don't make up a story, I don't have a husband, or a boyfriend or somebody that I take to business meetings, but I don't also, not openly honest with the people I work for. The only person I am not open with is my employer.

Molly believed that being out (except at work) helped her make up for the lack of community involvement. Similar to the finding by Rosenthal and Hrynevich (1985) with regard to ethnic identity, another explanation for Molly's behavior could be cognitive dissonance. This type of response was not common among the lesbians who were not active. The responses were diverse, such as Marianne's reason:

Raising children, wanting to make sure that their values were their own. Making sure they were not driven by who I am but driven by themselves. And now that they're all grown and can make their own decisions, I decided it was time I became myself.

Marianne was in the process of exploring the ways in which she could become active in the lesbian community. She explained:

I'm learning. This is not only the first year that I've been out to the community, it's the first summer, so I'm just learning the ways. I met my first group of the community this summer, so mostly I'm watching

and learning how to be active. I've not done very much for and within the community, and I don't know how. Like I said, I'm learning.

A third example of why a lesbian might not be active in a lesbian community was offered by Betsy, who differentiated between being politically (politically correct) and non-politically (politically incorrect) involved. Betsy said:

Not politically. I mean I work for (company) that was, that got me active in some degree in the women's community and selling music at the music festival and at different concerts. And then playing on some lesbian softball teams. To some degree in the non p.c. sector maybe I've been more active.

It is interesting that Betsy mentioned playing on some lesbian softball teams, as she was the one participant who expressed interest in playing on a nonlesbian team because of the distractions on a lesbian team. When asked if she would ever want to be more active, Betsy replied:

It's hard to say. I, perhaps. Boy I know I push this to the limit and we get our rights taken away and I just sit here and say oh, yeah, I will go out and fight for that cause and I have yet to do that but I am pro-choice and I'm still not sure what it's going to take for me before I step out the door and start screaming about that. There are certain political issues I think inside I want to get more involved but when it comes to time and they're calling on my phone to do that, well, I don't have time right now, so I don't, I think I will, but I don't know what it's going to take yet.

In contrast to the nonpolitical involvement of Betsy, Sylvia is active because she finds it's necessary for change. While Betsy does not believe she has the time to be active, when Sylvia was asked about her specific involvements, she replied:

Well I am on the board of directors of the (city) association for human rights which is a gay and lesbian organization that does a lot of work. First of all they have the gay hotline, gay and lesbian hotline and they have, we have the fundraisers to fund certain things. Right now I'm also on the mayor's advisory board, for gay and lesbian issues and I'm also on the equal rights task force which is a task force that grew out of the

mayor's advisory board to deal with passing a ordinance after we had a community meeting and the mayor issued an executive order to not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation within the city and now we're asking for an ordinance so that nobody outside of the city can discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation, so I'm very much involved. We meet almost every week, with one group or another or maybe both, just to maintain that, so I'm very much involved on that level.

Sylvia's involvements were on the local government level, and she hoped to create change through governmental channels.

A common theme as to why the lesbians were active was the sense of being a part of the lesbian community. Sandra, Kay, and Isis explained:

It gives me a sense of belonging to a community, it gives me a sense of pride in who I am. Gives me a sense of, almost a sense of safety and comfort with myself and my various identities because for the most part, although the lesbian community has it's problems just like any other community, but I think it's a very open minded and diverse community. Respectful of all kinds of diversity. I enjoy being in a community like that, I enjoy interacting with other people who are different than I am and yet who I might have something in common with (Sandra).

Community is family, so you know, you can't not be active in your family. It doesn't make sense to do that, so. I think we have a responsibility to be active in our community, to be openly vocally, visually active. So I do what I think is my responsibility (Kay).

I want to be a part of creating our community, creating different aspects of our community. We did a lot of political work back in the 70s, but that was a reflection of the 70s in general. All the different movements we were involved in. The women's movement, the lesbian movement evolved out of that for me, you know, I know it existed before but for me, that was my connection is that I had a real political connection to women before I had a physical or sexual connection and I know everybody doesn't come from that place but that's the place where I came from. So I just feel I like to be a part of, I like to be part of the community in some way. Nowadays I try to do it in fun ways and to be part of the social, creating fun for us because we've been very serious for very long and we also need to know there are other parts of us. We need to create our fun, good times together. The whole thing we had to go

through about accepting each other's differences and you know, different places that we come from and still be okay, we're all still legitimate lesbians and everything, you know, that's been hard to grow through that, it's made me withdraw in some ways from parts of the community, I just don't want to hear that trip anymore, and so I really, I stand back more than I use to, but I still feel a part (Isis).

The lesbian community was a place where lesbians could feel a part of a community with common interests. It was also a place where lesbians felt a feeling of family and family responsibility to each other.

All of the lesbians who were interviewed acknowledged a lesbian community. A common interest among the participants, whether or not they perceived themselves to be active, was attending Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Pride Day festivities, which take place every summer, in many cities across the United States. The reasons for attending Pride ranged from "a day to be outside" to "political reasons." For example:

Because it's fun being around lots of queer people. It's neat to be out in public like at (city) and walking around down there at the (place) with your girlfriend and holding you hand around her and stuff like that and everyone else around there is doing the same thing. Plus you get to see, the fashions are outrageous (Skinny Puppy).

Oh, it's kinda of a celebration, you know, being able to get together with hundreds of other gays and lesbians and let people know that we're here. And it's also a political statement for me to support those kinds of events and march and do all that kind of good stuff, cause again it's a way of letting people know that we're not going to hide who we are and why the hell should we (Elizabeth).

Like the march, I guess I want people to know that we are everywhere and we are everyway. I mean I know, like, when I went to Washington [D.C.], what I kept saying to the friend who was with me was we're not just here for us, we're here for the people back home too. You know, we're representing them as well. I guess I just want the rest of the world to know that yeah, there are a lot of us and you know, we don't fit into just any certain stereotype (Maxine).

I think that part of it is that sometimes you get the feeling that lesbians have been kicked around so much by general society that it's that one little instant of a moment that you get to say, that's not okay, so and it gives you, when you walk away from it you feel kinda refreshed and you have a really good feeling as you're walking away from it (Bob).

I went last year, I went the year before, and I came this year and I went to the march in Washington D.C. I wanted to go to Stonewall [New York] so bad, but I had an out of town conference in Chicago, Monday and Tuesday, and I couldn't do it. I couldn't get to New York and Chicago and back and be rested for a two-day conference, but I didn't want to miss it. It's phenomenal, the energy. Except it's really frustrating. I know that at the March on Washington, there were at least a million people there, 1-1.5 million and they reported in the 100,000s and it's like, give me a fucking break, we count, stop, stop putting us somewhere where we're not. Accept, you know. And it's the same as the percent question, well what percentage of the population is gay or lesbian. What difference does it make (Bambi).

Gay/Lesbian/Bisexual Pride Day festivities hold different meanings for lesbians who choose to attend. The opportunity to spend a day surrounded by other lesbians/gays/bisexuals, to celebrate one's sexuality, to show nonlesbians that it's acceptable to be lesbian, and to show nonlesbians (male and female) the sheer numbers of lesbians/gays/bisexuals were all reasons to attend and to feel positive about being a lesbian.

In summary, not all of the lesbian participants conformed to the norms of the lesbian community of their city or town. However, the lesbian participants were aware of the standards set by their community, and some chose not to conform. Sylvia discussed conformity within the lesbian community from a historical perspective which helps to shed light on why lesbians would leave one culture (the heterosexual culture) with its' norms and values and begin conforming within the lesbian subculture: to self-identify with others. Other participants alluded to conforming so that they could fit in

and feel like a part of the group. The lesbians who were the most active were the most familiar with the conformity issue, which is not surprising. These were the women who had integrated themselves into the community and were active, both politically and socially. Therefore, they spent the most time within their local community so would feel the most pressure (either stated or not) to conform.

In this chapter, I have discussed how the participants described their identity and how the lesbian participants came from a personal realization to the step of coming out to others. The data presented will now be discussed with regard to how it fits with the proposed model of lesbian identity. The proposed model of lesbian identity was based on Costos' (1990) model of gender role identity, based within an ego identity framework.

**Lesbian Identity Formation: A Proposed Model**

| <b><u>Level</u></b> | <b><u>Stage</u></b> | <b><u>Name</u></b> | <b><u>Description</u></b>                                            |
|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1                   | 1                   | PreConformist      | Individual understands female as defined by societal norms.          |
|                     | 2                   |                    | Female may believe she is different from others                      |
| 2                   | 1                   | Conformist         | Female lives as a heterosexual                                       |
|                     |                     |                    | Female understands society's stereotypes about lesbians              |
|                     |                     |                    | Female may think she is a lesbian, but does not act on her awareness |
| 3                   | 1                   | PostConformist     | Female realizes stereotypes about lesbians may be false              |
|                     |                     |                    | Female forms her own set of beliefs about lesbians                   |
|                     | 2                   |                    | Female comes to a personal realization that she is a lesbian         |
|                     | 3                   |                    | Female comes out to herself                                          |
|                     | 4                   |                    | Female comes out to others                                           |

| <b><u>Level</u></b> | <b><u>Stage</u></b> | <b><u>Name</u></b>     | <b><u>Description</u></b>                                                                                                            |
|---------------------|---------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 4                   | 1                   | Lesbian Conformist     | Female conforms to the lesbian community's definition of lesbianism<br>Female acknowledges norms and values of the lesbian community |
| 5                   | 1                   | Lesbian PostConformist | Female begins to question norms and her need for approval from the lesbian community                                                 |
|                     | 2                   |                        | Female acknowledges community and may be active, but no longer feels the need to conform<br>Female has established her identity      |

The levels and stages of the model are not based on chronological age. Females could go through the process of forming a lesbian identity at any age, and there are not time limitations for leaving a particular level or stage. The model is seen as being fluid. An individual may come to a personal realization that she is a lesbian, but because of religious beliefs, for example, may choose to continue living as a heterosexual. For this individual, the process of forming a lesbian identity would stop until she chose to explore her lesbianism at a later time. This model is also contextual. The lesbians interviewed were involved in the softball environment and were out to others within this environment. It is possible that a lesbian may come out to others within the softball environment, but in a different setting may be out only to one person (such as employment) or not out at

all. Lastly, this proposed model is for lesbian identity formation and does not attempt to describe the identity formation process of gay males or bisexuals.

The lesbian participants in this study were not asked about societal norms about being female, or about stereotypes about lesbians. Therefore, Level 1, Stage 1 and Level 3, Stage 1 cannot be discussed in terms of the data. The lesbian participants in this study believed they were different from others. The feeling of being different took place at diverse ages. At the point of feeling different, the lesbians entered Level 1, Stage 2 of lesbian identity development.

Until the lesbians in this study had their personal realization, they lived their lives as heterosexuals, Level 2, Stage 1. Many of the lesbians dated males in junior high and high school, and some were married. While living as a heterosexual, these women may have had thoughts about being lesbians, but did not act on their awareness.

All of the lesbians interviewed could remember when they first had a personal realization that they were lesbians. This is an important stage in the model, as the individual at this point can stay living as she is, without coming out to herself, continue through the model until she creates a lesbian identity, or she may move to a previous point in the model if she chooses to repress her realization. All of the lesbians in this model had moved past the personal realization stage, so comparisons of individuals who make different decisions at this point cannot be made at this time.

Level 3, Stages 3 and 4 are when the individual comes out to herself and then to others. At this point in time, the woman is ready to begin to explore living as a lesbian in society, and wishes to meet other lesbians. The lesbians in this study had all

come out to themselves and to others. This is not to say that lesbians must be at this level to participate in softball (or on a lesbian softball team), but that the women who volunteered for this study were at this level..

A lesbian community was acknowledged by all of the lesbian participants. Some of the lesbians were more active within a community than others, but all were aware of norms within their community. Conforming to the norms and values of a community describes Level 4, Stage 1. At this stage, an individual may wear clothes or jewelry which designate her as a lesbian to other lesbians. For example, some of the lesbian respondents discussed "the uniform" of the lesbian community. The women who had conformed to the community standards, then discussed questioning the norms of the community (Level 5, Stage 1), and moving away from the norms to create their own identity (Level 5, Stage 2). However, moving away from the norms did not mean that the individual was not participating within the lesbian community.

In conclusion, the model of lesbian identity formation presented is in its infancy. Some of the stages of the model have support from the data presented earlier in this chapter. In the last portion of this chapter, an examination of whether there is a relationship between the softball environment and lesbian identity formation is provided.

#### The Softball Environment and Lesbian Identity

The softball environment was examined to determine if it was a place where lesbians could experience one of the stages of identity formation, namely coming out to others. The lesbian participants were asked if the softball environment influenced their

coming out, and if the participants thought that the softball environment could be a place for other women to come out, after they had their personal coming out.

Approximately half of the lesbian participants stated that the softball environment had an influence on their coming out to others. Some of the lesbians discussed softball without being prompted by the question, while the majority of the lesbians began to discuss the influence of the softball environment after I asked about it. The women who responded that the softball environment had an influence on their coming out emphasized the support they received from the other players. Lois, a lesbian spectator, responded:

Yeah, it made me feel attractive, which is something I didn't feel when I was in the heterosexual phase of my life, and softball made me feel wanted. [How did it make you feel attractive?] Women flirted, and I think the jocks are one of the biggest flirts going, so, and it just made me feel very pretty and that's, I think that may be what helped me really love softball, is that because I don't fit the athletic look and women knew I was gay, well, it was fun to flirt with me.

Lois began to attend softball games to meet and interact with lesbians. Once she began to watch the games, Lois began to feel attractive and wanted because the lesbian players flirted and spoke with her. For Lois, the softball environment became a place to come out to others (Level 3, Stage 4) and an influence on how she would eventually define herself as a lesbian (Level 5, Stage 2).

Support from lesbians who were in the softball environment was a common reason for playing softball. Three of the lesbian players stated:

Support. People who were in the same environment as I was and leading normal lives. Because most of the women that I started playing with had careers and everything, and it was a legitimization of, and even coming out as late as I did, there was a lot of myths and things that I didn't know and that meant a lot to dispel a lot of myths and to see they they're normal people just like anyone else (Ellie).

I played on this other team that was 1/2 lesbian and straight, and maybe some somewhere in between. There were opportunities to get involved with women on that team that I had never had those opportunities before or they weren't so visible....because it was okay to be lesbian or not to be, to just be yourself, and to express, feeling and intimacy towards another woman, straight or gay, lesbian, ... it helped me come out within a lesbian community and within a gay affirming community too.... (Sandra).

...we were working in the garden together, we had just met that day and the lesbian said, listen I've got to go to a game. I said what kind of a game do you got. She said I play softball and this is our first practice. I said oh, man, and she said, do you want to join, we need members. I jumped on it because I retired from softball some 14 years ago, not thinking I had the strength to continue and I wanted to at least try it. And quite by accident, just happened to be in the right place at the right time. [How has this interacted with your decision to come out to others this year?] It's been progressive. And this team, the women on this team gave me the strength. They let me see that it was not a scary thing (Marianne).

The support these women received from the softball players helped them to come out to others and to enter the lesbian community (Level 3, Stage 4; Level 4, Stage 1). A commonality among the lesbians who did not perceive softball as interacting with their coming out was that they already had come out to others before joining a team. Yet, along with the other lesbian participants, they spoke positively of the softball environment as a place where a lesbian could come out to others (Level 3, Stage 4).

Bambi, who joined a lesbian softball team after coming out, stated:

I think it's probably a phenomenal place for that. I mean, I think, when I think about a lot of the women that I've been with, I mean who have always been aware of being different, of their, I'll say their lesbian sexuality without knowing that's what it was, and so that's sort of where they met, that's sort of like the place to go to meet other lesbians, to come out, and I think it's been that way for a long time. I mean I've heard older dykes talk about, you know, we'd go down to the softball field and we'd cruise and we'd look for women to pick up, that's where we knew they'd be, and they all hung out there. So they sort of formed

their identity at those places. And then...they went on with their lives in the direction they needed to go, but that was like a foundation. Had I known, I mean, had I known that was a place to meet lesbians, I probably would have been there. But it wasn't like I was a big time player in high school, it wasn't like I was, I've always only been okay, I've never been exceptional, I'm not with the state champions, or those things and that's the way it is. Had I been more aware of it I think I probably, would have been a good opportunity, I think it's probably a great opportunity for young lesbians to go.

Bambi discussed how she had heard older lesbians discuss the softball environment as a place to come out and meet other women. Bob also agreed that the softball environment would be a positive place for a woman to come out to others. Bob responded:

I think mostly because the women, the lesbians that play on softball teams tend to be strong lesbians, um, because they are so readily identified by the public. Um, so I think that would actually be a good place for a younger woman to come out to because it's, there's quite a bit of support there. On top of, you already have one thing in common, everybody loves to play softball, that's why you're there, so um, you get two forms of support.

Molly agreed that softball could be an environment to come out to others, but also emphasized that a woman has to come out to herself first:

Women that play softball together raze each other, sometimes you can raze each other a little more openly about, not so much sexual things but girlfriends or looking at women or or that blonde that's playing second base and it kinda loosens things up, it makes it less serious. And at the same time I don't think you can come out some place and say I'm going to join a team so I can come out 'cause you have to come out to yourself before you come out with everyone else.

In contrast, Lois discussed women who played softball who were not out. In her discussion, Lois separates the terms gay and lesbian, with gay women meaning women who lived with women, but were not open about their relationship or their identity. Lois explained:

But from what I understand on the teams, there can be some internalized homophobia. I've heard of teams that won't go to gay bars because they don't want to be known. I knew a coach of one of my lovers teams. She and her room-mate, big quotations around the word room-mate had been together for 25 years, and they still drove separate cars to the games, they maintained as much separateness as they could, and yet they went camping on the week-ends together, their dogs were their dogs. It was a real strange thing to watch, it was real interesting to see how somebody could have built up such a homophobic lifestyle when they were indeed, they were gay, they weren't lesbian. And they were gay women. It baffled me.

The women Lois described were not lesbian identified, although they seemed to have elements of a lesbian lifestyle, such as having a lover and having certain shared items (house, camping equipment and dogs, for example). Although the softball environment may be freeing for some women to come out, for others, it may give them the opportunity to interact with women they know to be lesbians, but they do not choose to identity as lesbians themselves. Zipter (1988) mentions that for women who are closeted, "lesbian political and cultural activism can be too public and, therefore, too risky" (p. 83). For these women, softball was a way to be around other lesbians without having to come out themselves. The "gay women" would be at Level 3, Stage 3. They would acknowledge to themselves that they are gay, but would not make any attempts to let others know about them. These women would not form a lesbian identity until they could reach a personal acknowledgement that they could come out to others as lesbians.

In conclusion, for some of the lesbian participants, the softball environment was a location where they could come out to others. For these women, the opportunity to be involved with softball was available at the time of their coming out to others. All of the lesbians believed that the softball environment could be a place to come out to others,

except for Lois, a spectator. Lois believed that the softball environment was friendlier to the spectators than to some of the players. However, none of the lesbian players discussed any teams or players who appeared homophobic. From the data presented, the softball environment may be one of many locations for lesbians to come out to others after they have a personal realization and come out to themselves.

### **Summary of Results and Concluding Remarks**

In this chapter, I have discussed personal definitions of identity, the coming out process, identity formation, and the interaction between the softball environment and lesbian identity formation. The results are summarized in this section.

All of the participants were asked to discuss their personal identity. Some of the participants had a difficult time with this question, and were given further explanations. All of the lesbians except one (who used the term soulful) included sexual orientation in their definitions. None of the nonlesbians used the term heterosexual or any terms with similar meaning in their descriptions about themselves. Kay, a lesbian spectator used the term heterosexual to describe herself before she became a lesbian. Likewise, all the Women of Color mentioned their ethnicity, while none of the participants from European descent chose to mention their ethnicity. One nonlesbian mentioned that she was Methodist, but that answer was most likely prompted by my example of being Jewish. The results support the assertion that lesbians who play softball perceive their lesbianism as part of their overall identity. An additional explanation may be that lesbians who had formulated their lesbian identity self-selected to participate in this study. An additional finding within this portion of the study was that minorities tended to include their

minority status in their description about themselves, while individuals in the cultural majority did not. Analyzing this result along with the supported assertion, it may be that individuals will state their minority status when asked to describe themselves.

A consistent pattern of coming to a personal realization for lesbianism was not found, as the lesbian participants came to personal realizations at different points in their lives. This finding supports the critiques which have been stated against age-based models of lesbian identity formation. It may be possible that in a culture where lesbian identity formation was as valued as heterosexual identity, that all lesbians would have their personal realization at the same age. However, because American culture does not value (or teach) lesbian culture, girls and women who may be lesbians have to discover their lesbianism within themselves at different times. The time periods stated by the respondents in this study were grade school age (5-11 years old), junior high and high school age (12-18 years old), and post high school (19 years old and above). Most of the lesbians did not label their feelings as "lesbian" when they first had their personal realization, but they remembered feeling different from their peers, and many of the lesbians had boyfriends or husbands before they had their personal realization and personal coming out.

There was a pattern to how the lesbians had their personal coming out after their realization. The earlier the personal realization was, in terms of age, the longer it took the individual to have a personal coming out. This result is what might be expected, as children and youths may have more to lose by coming out at an early age (loss of family support and ridicule in school, for example) than an adult. Also, if adults have a

personal realization, it is more likely that they can place a label on what they are feeling, and that they would have increased access to explore a lesbian community.

Coming out to others may take different forms. Some women may choose to only come out to others when they are asked if they are lesbians (Bob, for example), while others may tell friends and family. Two distinct patterns of coming out to others were reflected in the data. The first pattern was coming out to friends, and then waiting to come out to family. Ellie and Jessie were examples of this pattern. Both told friends almost as soon as when they had their personal coming out, but waited approximately 5 years before telling their families. In contrast, some of the participants told both their families and friends right away, such as Chip and Kay. These women saw their coming out as a celebration, and wanted everyone to know. The lesbians in this study did not represent lesbians who choose not to come out, what Lois termed "gay women."

Lesbians who come out and enter a lesbian community may be active or peripheral to the community. Almost all of the respondents were aware of Pride activities and participated in them; however, few were involved with the actual planning or any of the organizing aspects of the community. The activity level of a lesbian within a community did not seem to reflect the conformity level of that individual. Most of the lesbians were aware of the standards and values of their lesbian community, and could describe the fashion styles of it. Some of the lesbians chose to conform to the community standards for a period of time, while others recognized the conformity and chose not to be a part of it.

A proposed model of lesbian identity formation was explained earlier in this chapter. This model is based on Costos' (1990) gender role identity model, based within an ego identity framework. The three levels Costos described in his model, preconformist, conformist, and postconformist, were adopted for the lesbian identity model, with two levels added: lesbian conformist and lesbian postconformist. The data from the lesbian respondents appeared to fit the model; however, additional research needs to be conducted to determine if the model is reliable, valid, and if it should be expanded or reduced. The data did not support the models of homosexual identity, many which proposed that sexual behavior came before a lesbian identity could be formed. The majority of the participants in this study did not discuss having sexual relations with a woman during their time of having a personal realization, coming out, or being active in the community. The absence of sex in my model may point to a difference between the identity formation of gay males and lesbians, as many of the studies on homosexual identity used men as subjects (see Brady & Busse, 1994 for a current example).

Lastly, all of the lesbians in this study believed that the softball environment could be a place for women to come out to others. The softball environment was seen not only as a place where lesbians could find other lesbians, but where they could find lesbians who were strong and supportive of each other, whether as players or spectators. Some of the lesbians in this study had positive experiences coming out to others in the softball environment, and many alluded to softball as being a healthier environment than bars. Therefore, the assertion that the softball environment may be a location for

lesbians to come out to others was supported. However, it is not the only environment where coming out can take place.

In conclusion, in this chapter I have discussed the assertions that lesbians would include their sexual orientation in a description about themselves, and that the softball environment is a location where lesbians feel comfortable coming out to each other. A proposed model of lesbian identity was also discussed. I will provide a discussion of the implications of this study in the next chapter.

## Chapter VI

### Conclusions and Implications

The purpose of this dissertation was to examine one facet of lesbian subculture, the softball environment, and to discover if participation within the softball environment facilitated the formation of a lesbian identity. An additional purpose of this study was to examine the interview data to determine if a model of lesbian identity formation could be proposed. In this chapter, I will summarize the findings of this study, and discuss implications and possible future research directions.

#### The Softball Environment

The women in this study were asked when they began to participate in the softball environment. There was not one pattern of history, as the interviewees began participating in softball at different ages. Some began in childhood, either with baseball or softball, while others began to play the game as adults. One reason they gave for their continued participation, both as players and spectators, was so they could interact and socialize with their friends. The nonlesbian and lesbian participants tended to be on teams with friends whom they first met outside the softball environment. However, the lesbian participants were more likely to join a team so that they could meet new friends. Most of the lesbian participants who joined a team with the intent of meeting new friends specified that they were looking to meet other lesbians.

Most of the lesbian participants were unable to describe how they first knew that there were lesbians in the softball environment. Many recalled having been told about softball by a friend who was involved in the game. Interestingly, most of the participants

(both lesbian and nonlesbian) could not give a precise description of a softball player, but they could give a description of a stereotypical softball player. The stereotype most often given was that of a lesbian, which, if it is a widely known stereotype within general society, might explain how some lesbians first learn that lesbians play the game, there may be some truth to the stereotype. Even with the knowledge of the female softball player stereotype, the question of why softball rather than other sports or activities was pondered by the lesbian participants. Although they were able to name a few other sports and other types of activities, in which lesbians participated, softball stood out from the rest because of the number of women who can participate at one time, most people can play it, and the pace of the game allows both players and spectators to interact.

Without a doubt, many lesbian softball participants interact with each other. It was not uncommon for the lesbians in this study to discuss the fact that they joined a team because their partner was on it, or that they met their current partner at a game. Some of the lesbian participants discussed how they enjoyed cruising other lesbians at the softball games. None of the nonlesbians discussed ever having been approached by a lesbian participant at the softball environment, which implies that although some lesbians may "cruise" the games they participate in, either as players or spectators, they do not approach a woman unless they are certain she is a lesbian. As a matter of fact, some of the lesbian participants spoke of being able to tell a lesbian team from a straight team and knowing who was a lesbian participant. Some signs of a nonlesbian team that were given included men coaches and men in the stands (assumed to be husbands or boyfriends).

These results support the assertion that lesbians use the softball environment as a place to interact with other lesbians. The interactions which occur are multi-layered, and outsiders to the lesbian culture might not perceive a joke told among the players as being overtly sexual. An interaction may be as innocent as a catcher talking to a batter, while another interaction may be an overt flirtation between a spectator and a player.

Lesbians participate in all types of leagues, from all-lesbian leagues to co-ed leagues, with reasons for participation ranging from social to serious competition. The lesbian participants perceived softball to be different from other lesbian activities and from other sports. As stated above, the question of why softball is different compared to other activities has no definitive answer, but the reality of softball as an environment where lesbians can interact is a phenomenon in American (and, perhaps, Canadian) culture, which has some implications for both the participants and the game of softball.

To begin with, the stereotype of a female softball player is that of a lesbian. Additionally, the game of softball is perceived to be more masculine than feminine (Kane, 1988; Metheny, 1965). If the stereotype is known to individuals who have never participated in softball (for example, the parents of a junior high school girl), girls might be discouraged from participating in softball. This could lead to girls who consider themselves feminine (in the cultural sense of the word) deciding not to participate in the sport, while teens who realize they are lesbians may participate in the hopes of meeting others like themselves. The net effect of this would be lesbians participating in the sport, thus confirming the stereotype which exists. This is not to say that lesbians should not

participate, but that the game of softball itself should be enjoyed and played by all individuals, and stereotypes about the game should not discourage participation.

Secondly, the softball environment appears to be one location where open lesbians and nonlesbians work together, either as a team in the hopes of winning, or as opponents, in terms of coming together to play. The softball environment may serve to lessen heterosexism and homophobia among nonlesbians, as they are given an opportunity to interact with lesbians, especially as teammates. Not all nonlesbians who participate in the softball environment will change any pre-existing beliefs they have about lesbians, but softball may help to facilitate communication between teammates and new friends about lesbians.

Additionally, softball is a recreational sport in which anyone can participate. All of the spectators in this study had played softball, and the players played on different teams with different ability levels. Because of softball's popularity in the United States, parks usually offer softball leagues for both serious (Class A and B) and nonserious and/or lower ability (Class C and D) players. The effect of offering leagues where women who have never played before can participate is twofold. First, lesbians who wish to meet other lesbians in the softball environment can participate even if they are not tournament level players. This enables more lesbians to interact as players within the environment. Secondly, softball may be an outlet for women (both lesbians and nonlesbians) who have never participated in sports. Women may see softball as a way to increase their activity level while interacting with other women (in contrast to exercising at home with a video, for example). After joining a softball team for the first

time as an adult, some women may experience throwing a ball correctly, something not taught to them as young girls growing up. The effect of this may be the exploration of a woman's physicality.

The results offered support for Zipter's (1988) book, which glimpsed into lesbian culture and the softball environment. One facet of the environment which I did not question was practice. Although not all teams practice, recreational softball teams may practice once or twice a week, and players may be more overt in their interactions at practice than at the games. Additionally, participant observation would be one method of investigating differences in interactions between games and practice, and interactions between teams.

### Lesbian Identity

All participants were asked to describe their identity. All of the lesbian participants, except one, included the term lesbian or gay in their description. The one individual who did not, used the word "soulful" as a way to describe herself. This individual was also the only lesbian participant who stated she was not 100% lesbian. In contrast, none of the nonlesbian participants included their sexual orientation in their identity description. A similar response pattern was detected with ethnicity, as all of the Women of Color mentioned their heritage, while none of the women with Western European ancestry mentioned their ethnicity. It may be that individuals state descriptors of themselves which are different from the cultural mainstream, perhaps because they are reminded of their otherness in American society.

The lesbians in this study came to a personal realization about their lesbianism at different times in their lives. This may be because they are forming an identity which is not considered within the cultural mainstream, so it is an identity which is formed when an individual is prepared to go against the cultural norm. Many times this personal realization was a feeling of being different from others, but this difference did not yet have a name. Personal coming outs occurred at three different age ranges for the lesbian participants; childhood and preteen, teens, and as adults. The age of the personal coming out appeared to be inversely related to when a lesbian came out to others. Lesbians who came out as preteens, for example, waited until adulthood to tell others, while lesbians who came out as adults often told others right away. It makes intuitive sense that a lesbian who is not autonomous in her life would wait until she was on her own before telling others, including her family. This also means that the lesbians who came out as preteens (junior high age) went through puberty trying to hide a part of themselves from their peers (and peer pressures) and their families.

Coming out to others as a lesbian brings a different type of peer pressure to a newly out lesbian. A lesbian community may have its own set of norms and values that it expects others to conform to. Most of the lesbians in this study agreed that there was pressure to conform to the standards set by the community, and some could describe in detail what the standards were. The lesbians in this study who had conformed to a lesbian community stated that it took them from 3 to 7 years to stop conforming.

Whether or not a lesbian conformed to a community's standards did not prevent her from being active in the community, at least on a peripheral level. Although most

of the lesbians in this study were not active in a political sense, they were still participants in activities such as the annual Pride March/Parade. The lesbians in this study referred to their lesbian community as a part of their family, and the lesbians who were the most actively involved stated that they believed in helping out their family.

The lesbians who participated in my study were self-identified; that is, when they were asked at the beginning of the interview if they were lesbian or nonlesbian, they stated lesbian. The stating of their lesbianism to me was one indication that they were lesbian identified, and their responses were analyzed to determine if a model of lesbian identity could, at this time, be proposed. A five-level stage model of lesbian identity, based on Costos (1990) model of gender-role identity was proposed. In contrast to earlier models of identity (e.g. Cass, 1983/1984; Minton & McDonald, 1983/1984), this model is fluid; individuals can go back and forth within it. One reason why individuals may move between levels is that the model is contextual. In different contexts, individuals may act differently. Lastly, the model is not age dependent. That is, individuals do not reach a set stage at a certain age. As seen in the results, the lesbians in this study all came to their personal realization, personal coming out, and coming out to others at different ages.

An additional difference in the proposed model from some of the earlier models of identity is that this model was proposed for lesbians and not for all persons falling under the umbrella term of "homosexuality." Although some researchers have proposed lesbian models based on solely lesbians (Chapman & Brannock, 1987; Cooper, 1990; Krieger, 1982; Lewis, 1984), there is current research which assumes the same process

for both men and women. For example, Brady and Busse (1994) created a Gay Identity Questionnaire which measured homosexual identity formation. This questionnaire was piloted with gay males (18 subjects) and then given to 225 male subjects, and Brady and Busse state that it is a reliable measure that can be used by clinicians to identify homosexuality in both males and females. Secondly, some earlier models, including the questionnaire by Brady and Busse, incorporate sexual activity in an early stage of identity formation, which means that sex act is a precursor to identity formation. None of the participants in my study discussed sex as being a precursor for their personal coming out, and some of the participants were fully identified before having their first sexual experience with a woman.

Specifically, within the proposed model of lesbian identity, a female would be at the preconformist level when she believed in society's normative female description (heterosexual). At Level 1, Stage 2, the female may believe she is different from others, but does not pursue why she believes this. Level 2, Stage 1, is the conformist stage. The female lives as a heterosexual, and understands society's stereotypes about lesbians. She may think she is a lesbian at this time, but chooses not to act on her belief. At Level 3, Stage 1 (postconformist), the female realizes stereotypes about lesbians may be false and she forms her own set of beliefs about lesbians. At Level 3, Stage 2, she comes to a personal realization that she is a lesbian. The female comes out to herself at Level 3, Stage 3, and to others at Level 3, Stage 4. When first coming out to others, the female conforms to the lesbian community's definition of lesbianism (Level 4, Stage 1, lesbian conformist), and begins to acknowledge the norms and values of the lesbian

community. The final level (Level 5) is Lesbian PostConformist, when the female questions the norms of the lesbian community and her need for approval from the lesbian community. At Stage 2 of Level 5, the female acknowledges the lesbian community and may be active, but no longer feels the need to conform. At this point, she has established her lesbian identity.

The results supported the assertion that lesbians who play softball perceive their lesbianism as part of their overall identity. The lesbians in this study self-identified as lesbians, and the majority used "lesbian" as a descriptor when asked to describe themselves. Lesbians who play softball may be at different levels of identity formation, but those who have achieved a personal coming out will most likely use the term lesbian to identify themselves.

The assertion that the softball location may be a location for lesbians was supported in that all of the lesbians interviewed believed softball to be one of many locations where a woman could come out to others. However, most of the lesbians in this study came out to others prior to participating within the softball environment.

The proposed model of lesbian identity formation is in its infant stage. However, some implications of this model should be discussed. First, the proposed model lends support to the existence of a lesbian subculture within American society and to the lesbian as more than a sexual being. Sex was not discussed by the participants as a precursor to the formation of their lesbian identity; a sexual relationship did not create a nonlesbian or a lesbian by itself. Although many lesbians do have active sex lives, sex with another woman is a physical exchange which may or may not be of interest to a

lesbian. In contrast, a nonlesbian woman does not have to have sex with a male to know that she is a nonlesbian.

All of the participants were aware of a lesbian community, whether or not they were active in one. This finding lends support to the belief that there is a community structure available which lesbians can discover and where she can interact (Zipter, 1988). There was evidence of community pressure to conform to what a lesbian "should be." This pressure was recognized and dealt with differently by the participants. Some conformed and then separated, while others recognized the pressure and did not allow it to affect them. Interestingly, many of the participants were able to discuss the reasons why conformity took place, and understood how it affected them. Even so, the lesbian communities discussed by the participants seemed to have standards for their members, which might be as constricting to some as the mainstream society.

Future research on lesbian identity should examine identity formation among different geographical areas of the United States, and should attempt to interview lesbians of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Although this study attempted to interview women from age 26 and above, there were no women interviewed who were over 50 years old. Lesbians in their 40s and 50s would be important cohort groups to interview because of the history of softball and its history with the lesbian community, as it was in the 1950s when lesbians first used softball as a way to meet safely outside of the bars.

Additionally, studies need to be conducted which help to triangulate the data. Ethnography is one qualitative methodology which could be used along with interviews to examine the formation of lesbian identity. Although time consuming, a longitudinal

study might lend insight to lesbian identity formation. Additionally, interviewing lesbians who have never participated within the softball environment would add insight to the proposed model of lesbian identity formation with regards to the context of coming out and forming identity.

### Reflections of the Investigator

Each interview that I conducted brought back personal memories for me. I grew up participating in softball. Unlike some of the participants, I never played baseball. Where I grew up, girls were not allowed to participate in Little League baseball. I played softball in junior high, and was on the varsity interscholastic softball team in high school. I did not play softball in college, and put my glove away for 6 years.

As I transcribed each interview, I could picture the woman speaking in front of me. I realized that her story was part of my own story, which I had never taken the time to analyze. I came back to softball after having a personal realization and a personal coming out as a lesbian. Even now I probe myself just as I probed the women in this study. Why softball? I knew it was a place where I could meet other lesbians, but I can't answer why. Looking back I can say it was a comfortable place to meet others, especially if a woman didn't enjoy going to bars. Softball is also a location where women can create space for themselves with other women and where women can demonstrate grace, agility, and strength.

I stated at the beginning of the dissertation that there was not a cause and effect relationship between softball and lesbianism. The interview data supports that statement. What the softball environment brings to lesbian identity formation is a comfortable

environment which does not inhibit a woman from coming out to other lesbians. Half of the lesbians in this study experienced coming out to others in the softball environment. Looking back on my own life, I came out to my team-mates long before I came out to my family. Bob stated that softball brings two types of support: support as a softball player and support as a lesbian.

The model of lesbian identity formation has been based in the context of softball. Although softball does not appear in the model, the women I interviewed all had softball in common. Contextually, it would be interesting to explore if women who are no longer active in the softball environment ever participated in it, and if their identity formation differs. The question of the interaction between softball and lesbian identity formation is valid. In answer, the softball environment may facilitate a female at any level or any stage of lesbian identity formation. It is one of the few environments where a lesbian can find other lesbians and see the diversity in the lesbian population, in terms of size and personality. Ellie commented on how seeing the softball players helped to shed stereotypes and enable her to meet positive role models. This is an important by-product of the softball environment.

The interviews with the lesbian players and spectators had an effect on me as a researcher. I believe that one reason why the lesbians were so open to me was because I was an insider. Most important, I believe that the lesbians in this study were open because they had a chance to share their personal stories with me. Discussing stories and writing them down has an effect of validating stories and experiences. I hope that I have

told their stories as they would have liked them told, and that this is not the last time their stories are heard.

## APPENDICES

## **APPENDIX A**

### **UCRIHS Approval**

**MICHIGAN STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

123

May 12, 1994

TO: Brenda A. Riemer  
39 Im Circle

RE: IRB#: 94-199  
TITLE: THE INFLUENCE OF THE SOFTBALL ENVIRONMENT ON THE  
FORMATION OF LESBIAN IDENTITY  
REVISION REQUESTED: N/A  
CATEGORY: 1-C  
APPROVAL DATE: 05/09/94

The University Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects' (UCRIHS) review of this project is complete. I am pleased to advise that the rights and welfare of the human subjects appear to be adequately protected and methods to obtain informed consent are appropriate. Therefore, the UCRIHS approved this project including any revision listed above.

**RENEWAL:** UCRIHS approval is valid for one calendar year, beginning with the approval date shown above. Investigators planning to continue a project beyond one year must use the green renewal form (enclosed with the original approval letter or when a project is renewed) to seek updated certification. There is a maximum of four such expedited renewals possible. Investigators wishing to continue a project beyond that time need to submit it again for complete review.

**REVISIONS:** UCRIHS must review any changes in procedures involving human subjects, prior to initiation of the change. If this is done at the time of renewal, please use the green renewal form. To revise an approved protocol at any other time during the year, send your written request to the UCRIHS Chair, requesting revised approval and referencing the project's IRB # and title. Include in your request a description of the change and any revised instruments, consent forms or advertisements that are applicable.

**PROBLEMS/  
CHANGES:** Should either of the following arise during the course of the work, investigators must notify UCRIHS promptly: (1) problems (unexpected side effects, complaints, etc.) involving human subjects or (2) changes in the research environment or new information indicating greater risk to the human subjects than existed when the protocol was previously reviewed and approved.

If we can be of any future help, please do not hesitate to contact us at (517)355-2180 or FAX (517)336-1171.

Sincerely,

David E. Wright, Ph.D.  
UCRIHS Chair

DEW:pjm

cc: Deborah L. Feltz



OFFICE OF  
**RESEARCH  
AND  
GRADUATE  
STUDIES**

University Committee on  
Research Involving  
Human Subjects  
(UCRIHS)

Michigan State University  
225 Administration Building  
East Lansing, Michigan  
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517/355-2180  
FAX 517/336-1171

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Written Advertisements**

**Written Advertisements**

**(Appeared in a lesbian newsletter)**

**Wanted: I would like to interview women (25 years or older) who play/attend slow pitch softball games. The purpose of my research is to examine the possible influence of the softball environment on identity. Participants will receive a summary of the results. All interviews will take place at a mutually acceptable location to ensure privacy and confidentiality. Please contact Brenda (Bernie) Riemer at \_\_\_\_\_ for further information.**

**(Appeared in a free monthly newspaper in the city of Umpira)**

**I am interviewing women (25 yrs and older) who play slow pitch softball. The purpose is to examine the connection between the softball environment & identity. Interviews will take place at a mutually acceptable location. Please contact Brenda Riemer at \_\_\_\_\_ before June 8 or after June 18 for further information.**

## **APPENDIX C**

### **Consent Form**

**Consent Form**

The purpose of this study is to understand the formation of identity and the possible connection of identity with the softball environment. The interview will take approximately 1 - 1.5 hours of your time.

You may decide, at any time, to discontinue with the interview. Also, at any time you may decide that you do not wish the interview to be taped and I will turn off the tape player.

Before the interview begins, you will decide on a name which will be used in the interview. Your real name will not be used on the tape, and your name will not be written down next to the assumed name at any time. Upon completion of the study, I will be mailing a summary of results to you. After that mailing, the list with your name and address on it will be destroyed. I will be the only one transcribing the tape of our interview, which will ensure your anonymity to others.

If you have any questions after the interview is over, please feel free to contact me.

Thank you for agreeing to participate.

**I agree to participate in this interview. I am aware that at any time I can request that the tape player be turned off. I am also aware that I can terminate the interview at any time.**

---

Name

---

Date

## **APPENDIX D**

### **Questionnaires**

## **Questionnaires**

### **Questions for lesbian participants**

**Is the softball environment known as a place where lesbians can meet?**

**When did you begin to play softball?**

**Probe: why softball? Why not other sports?**

**Do you remember why you decided to begin playing softball?**

**What is it about the game that makes you want to keep playing?**

**What do you enjoy about softball?**

**Please give a description of a softball player.**

**Do you fit that description?**

**Do the women you play with fit that description?**

**Do women use the softball environment to meet other women?**

**Have you ever used the softball environment as a place to meet other lesbians?**

**When you play softball, are you on lesbian team?**

**Does it matter to you if your team-mates are lesbians or not? Why?**

**If yes, do you act differently on that team than you would a non-lesbian team?**

**If yes, Could you give some examples?**

**How does a lesbian define her identity?**

**How would you define the terms homosexual, gay and lesbian? Do you consider yourself to be a lesbian?**

**When did you have an idea or feeling that you could be (use participant's term of choice) homosexual/gay/lesbian?**

Could you tell me how you came from realization to a personal coming out?

When did you come out to others? And what was the environment?

How do you identify yourself?

Do you consider being a lesbian part of your identity?

Have you ever been active in a lesbian community?

Why/why not?

Are you still active/Would you want to be active in a lesbian community?

Why/why not?

Have you ever conformed to what you thought a lesbian should look like?

Is there a connection between the softball environment and a lesbian identity?

Did the softball environment influence your coming out?

Probe: Or did you start playing after you came out? When in the process?

Do you think that the softball environment can be a place for a woman to come out as a lesbian?

Could your behavior be considered more "out" while on the softball diamond than at other times?

Did you ever think that because you liked to play softball you were a lesbian?

Do you think other people might have felt that way?

Are there other sports that you would identify as lesbian?

Are there other activities that you would identify as lesbian?

How do these compare, in your opinion, to softball?

Have you ever read "Diamonds are a Dykes Best Friend?"

**2. Questions for lesbian spectators**

**Is the softball environment known as a place where lesbians can meet?**

**Have you ever played softball?**

**If yes, when? Why did you stop playing?**

**What is it about the game that makes you want to come and watch?**

**What do you enjoy about softball?**

**Please give a description of a softball player.**

**Do you fit that description?**

**Do the women you watch fit that description?**

**Do women use the softball environment to meet other women?**

**Have you ever used the softball environment as a place to meet other lesbians?**

**When you come to a game, do you watch a lesbian team?**

**If yes, do you act differently while watching that team than you would a non-lesbian team?**

**If yes, Could you give some examples?**

**How does a lesbian define her identity?**

**How would you define a lesbian?**

**Do you consider yourself to be a lesbian?**

**When did you have an idea or feeling that you could be (use participant's term of choice) homosexual/gay/lesbian?**

**Could you tell me how you came from realization to a personal coming out?**

**When did you come out to others? And what was the environment?**

**How do you identify yourself?**

**Do you consider being a lesbian part of your identity?**

**Have you ever been active in a lesbian community?**

**Why/why not?**

**Are you still active/Would you want to be active in a lesbian community?**

**Why/why not?**

**Have you ever conformed to what you thought a lesbian should look like?**

**Is there a connection between the softball environment and a lesbian identity?**

**Did the softball environment influence your coming out?**

**Do you think that the softball environment can be a place for a woman to come out as a lesbian?**

**Could your behavior be considered more "out" at softball games?**

**If yes, please give an example**

**Have you ever read "Diamonds are a Dykes Best Friend?"**

**3. Questions for non-lesbian players**

**Is the softball environment known as a place where lesbians can meet?**

**When did you begin to play softball?**

**(If the participant began playing post high school) Why did you decide to begin playing softball?**

**What is it about the game that makes you want to keep playing?**

**What do you enjoy about softball?**

**Please give a description of a softball player.**

**Do you fit that description?**

**Do the women you on your team fit that description?**

**Do any women in the league fit that description?**

**Do you think women play softball to meet other women?**

**What is your opinion about the assertion that some people make that lesbians play softball?**

**Are you aware of lesbians on your team?**

**On other teams in your league?**

**Have you ever been cautioned about playing softball because of lesbians?**

**If yes, Could you give some examples?**

**Do you bring anyone with you to watch you play?**

**Do they ever make comments to you about other women in the league?**

**Have you ever noticed spectators who might be lesbians? How does that make you feel?**

**What is a lesbian?**

**How would you define a homosexual/gay/lesbian?**

**How do you identify yourself?**

**Non-Lesbian Spectators**

**Have you ever played softball?**

**If yes, when? Why did you stop playing?**

**What is it about the game that makes you want to come and watch?**

**What do you enjoy about softball?**

**Please give a description of a softball player.**

**Do you fit that description?**

**Do the women you watch fit that description?**

**Do women use the softball environment to meet other women?**

**When you come to a game, do you watch a nonlesbian or lesbian team?**

**What is your opinion about the assertion that some people make that lesbians play softball?**

**Are you aware of lesbians on your team?**

**On other teams in your league?**

**Have you ever been cautioned about softball players because of lesbians?**

**If yes, Could you give some examples?**

**Do you bring anyone with you to watch the games?**

**Do they ever make comments to you about other women in the league?**

**Have you ever noticed spectators who might be lesbians? How does that make you feel?**

**How would you define a homosexual/gay/lesbian?**

**How do you identify yourself?**

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