

An Exploration of Community Within the Context of a University's Tennis Program

By

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this to my parents, Caterina and Giovanni, who always supported me since day one, but especially since the beginning of my American journey. Nothing could be possible without you.

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ABSTRACT

Within sport management studies, scholars have overlooked the importance of the involvement and engagement of the surrounding community in relation to sport organizations. Using an ethnographic methodology to guide the research, this study analyzed the conceptualization of a tennis community within the context of a university's tennis program. The study also explored the power relation and sources of power between a city and university partnership. In particular, this study was guided by the following questions: 1) What has shaped the participants' subjective understanding of the concept of community around the university's tennis programs? and 2) How have power dynamics (social, political, economic, cultural) in the context of the community and the university's tennis program played a role in shaping the meaning-making of community around the university's tennis program? The methods used to answer the research questions included six months of ethnographic participant observations, 23 semi-structured interviews, and records kept through a research journal. Analysis of the data, generated results that have been developed into two separate manuscripts. The first manuscript showed the factors identified by the community members in the development of place identity with the Tennis Complex. The second manuscript presented the way in which sources of power were created within the community and the ways in which power has been exercised in the research context. Overall findings serve to provide leaders of sport organizations with additional evidence-base literature emphasizing the several benefits of community, the importance of place and identity, the strategies to adapt for community engagement, and the importance of partnerships and forms of collaborations.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“Are you going to the tennis game tonight?” my friend Carolynn asked as we were rushing out of our Tuesday morning class together, both knowing we would not have much time to have a proper conversation at this time of the day.

“I’m not sure yet. I have so much schoolwork piling up that needs to be taken care of. Are you going?”

“Yeah dude! They are giving out free scarfs and food. We’re meeting the rest of the group there. We’re going to support Patrick, and probably going to get drinks after the game.”

‘Wow’ I thought to myself ‘that sounds like so much fun if all my friends are going to watch the game and then going to the bar afterwards’.

“Yeah, I think I might come then!” I said, smiling at her and getting excited for the evening ahead.

“I’ll see you there at 5 pm.” By the time we had exchanged our quick conversation we were already outside the building. We said ‘bye’ and gave each other a hug, as Carolynn and I headed different directions to continue with our hectic graduate student life that morning.

The next few hours of that morning passed by pretty quickly as they did every other morning spent in the middle of a crazy semester filled with classes, work, readings, and pages to write. My phone buzzed a few times in my pocket but I was trying to ignore it. I was sitting by a window of a coffee shop just by the square of our college town, writing an essay response to an assignment for my University Leadership class. After thirty-minutes of intense focus spent on the pages of my Word document, I decided to take a break and glance down at my phone. Three notifications read all similar messages.

10:26 am 'Hi Luisa, hope you are coming to the game tonight. The kids will be so happy to see you. We are so excited for the game!'

10:40 am "See you at the game tonight! It's been on our calendar for weeks now. Our friend Jackie is coming too with her kids. All the kids are buzzing with excitement to see some great tennis."

10:43 am "Are you going to the men's game tonight?!?"

'Shoot' I thought 'I guess I really have to go to the game tonight'. It's not that I did not want to go the game. I love tennis and I've always attended pretty much any home tennis match I could go to. I love rooting for our teams. I am a graduate assistant coach for the women's tennis team. There is nothing more exciting than watching some good old college competition on our home courts and cheering for our student-athletes. However, I am also a first year Ph.D. student and that week was kicking my butt. I was struggling to stay afloat with everything I had to do. As I started replying to the messages, saying that I would indeed see everyone there that evening, I started getting really excited for the game. I could always continue working on this essay the following morning anyway. Then, it hit me. When was the last time that so many people were getting this excited for a tennis match in our town? I had been part of the tennis program at our university for about seven years now, the first four years as a student-athlete, and the latest three as a graduate coach for the women's tennis team. Nonetheless, in the last year or two, the atmosphere at these games, especially the men's matches, was just different. The Complex was now packed with people and they were all loud, whether they were cheering the team or talking to each other. The games were incredible, and

the people were so thrilled to see each other and just have a good time. I am not talking just about the wins that our men's team were achieving lately, but the excitement of being part of this tennis fandom was growing in popularity. If you played tennis, had any connection to the tennis players or coaches, or were a member of the Tennis Complex, it was becoming the 'thing' to attend these games for the hundreds of people that were now gathering in our home courts pretty much every weekend. Through the years, I had been travelling to numerous universities and colleges across the country to compete with our team. I started to think back and realized that not even when we had competed against the top schools in the nation, had I ever seen such crowds gathering together to support a tennis program so avidly.

The more I worked and attended our home games, the more I also noticed that these groups of people (fans, athletes, members of the Tennis Complex, coaches) bonded over things that went far beyond just being fans of the same team. They bonded over talking about other sports, different cultures, food, work, and life experiences. It felt like I was part of a community of people that centered around the tennis program but expanded and tightened over so many more aspects of life as well. It seemed that attending the matches facilitated this process as it expanded through socializing at informal events outside of the tennis context. How had I been involved in tennis all my life and never felt or noticed this kind of phenomenon developing around me before? Perhaps this phenomenon had not actually ever formed around me. Perhaps I had personally never tried to actually develop a relationship with the people around me attending tennis games. Or, perhaps the circumstances were never the right ones for this phenomenon to take place. But now, the more I attended these tennis games, the more I realized how much fun it was. And maybe it was the same for others as well. As the afternoon went by and our own tennis practice was done, I rushed home as fast as I could to quickly take a shower and immediately head back to the courts where our girls had hit a thousand balls just an hour before the men's tennis game was about to begin.

Diving into the concepts of sport and community, I wondered if my lack of intention towards developing relationships with the people surrounding the sport of tennis was part of a larger problem in our sport world. While my experiences have often seen relationships being built over similar shared interests (e.g. sport), I wondered why we do not often see large groups of supporters form around small collegiate teams, such as tennis. As I started developing relationships with other supporters of our tennis program, I realized how these people and I had much more than just tennis in common, and that I could count on them for things that went beyond conversations about tennis. Whether I needed a favor or help with anything that was going on in my life at the moment, I knew that any of these people were one call away for me. This evolving situation made me curious about understanding how the dynamics of community work, and it made me wonder if there were more reasons yet to be identified as to why this phenomenon of growth in terms of fan support and engagement was occurring amongst us. More importantly, it made me question what even is the concept that we all so refer to as ‘community’? In particular, how was community identified in the context of this particular group of people? How did it develop, and how was it sustained?

The Problem

In the United States, the daily life of most individuals involves – at least to some degree – activities and moments that place sport at the center of it. With the increase of leisure time in the USA during the 1970s and 80s, “both spectatorship of, and participation in, sports have undergone dramatic increases.” (Stone, 1981, p. 214). Since then, whether anyone has ever wanted to be part of the sport world, one can hardly escape the exposure to sports through social activities and technological influences. In the recent decades, examples of such activities have included watching sport on TV, talking to friends about sport, watching a game from the stands, following live scores on a cellphone, wearing a jersey representing a sport’s team, playing Fantasy Football, betting on sports, being an athlete, or

simply participating in a sport as a form of leisure activity. Weiss and Norden (2021) stated that “sport is a global phenomenon” (p. 31). In their article, they presented the example of the sport of soccer which, in 2018, has brought 3.6 billion people to watch the Men’s World Cup Matches (FIFA 2018). In other countries, such as the United States, where soccer is relatively marginalized, the national sports such as baseball, American football, and basketball have tended to gain the majority of the population’s attention.

With sport being so present in people’s lives, its impact on social life and social problems have been significant through the decades. In the existent literature, sport has been “increasingly recognized in social policy as a means of steering social change and as a method for responding to diverse social problems” (Ekholm, 2016, p. 1; Giulianotti, 2011). Examples of such social problems in relation to sport and community include the exclusion of marginalized citizens in local sport and recreation (Frisby & Millar, 2002, p. 209); the bridges that exist between divided sport communities (Sugden, 2008); ageism and opportunities for senior individuals to embrace active living (Webb et al., 2017) and unhealthy lifestyle and loneliness from lack of participation in activities related to sport (Pinto et al., 2021).

In addition to addressing such problems, the discourse on community and sport has also brought to light other important social concepts such as new forms of associativity: “the tendency of individuals to create social networks and organizations outside of family” (Riess, 2008, p. 33). In relation to sports, associativity started when cities became the primary sites of organized sports and sports clubs and continued through the spark of the park movement which then led to country clubs, arenas, gymnasiums, ballparks, etc. (Riess, 2008, p. 37). In more recent years, associativity has also evolved through technology and social media to bind people together and construct hybrid identities. This has led to create communities through new modes of interactions, taking away from the formation of

communities face-to-face. (Ross & Rivers, 2020). Glover and Sharpe (2020) pointed out how even “though technology makes social relationships easy to establish and maintain, it shifts the meaning of social isolation where relationships are easily formed but have little or conflicting meaning” (p. viii.). This concept raises up one of the issues in our modern society in which technology can lead to people feel more socially disconnected than ever. This is especially the case in the context of sports and community in the college environment as most of the population is of young age (18-22 years old) and very much lives off technology. Nonetheless, it is also a relevant issue to be explored in all kinds of sports communities where more people can now easily connect to sport’s teams and fans through technology rather than just in person.

Concepts of community around sport bring to surface many social problems worth exploring through research. This study wants to look at a specific problem that affects managing community in sport organizations. Pfeffer (1994) discussed how the consequences of individual actions are inappropriate measurements of the effectiveness of an individual (p. 144, as cited in Kleinrichert, 2008). In Pfeffer’s view, the motivation and intention of the individual is a result of the capability of managers and professionals in a specific setting to solve problems, to have control over resources, to tie individuals to other powerful individuals, and to provide an individual with a formal position in the organization (Kleinrichert, 2008, p. 476). In college athletics, the problem stands on the fact coaches, managers, and administrations often lack such motivation and intention. In the university setting, without the people’s support and engagement in activities, sport programs can fail to be profitable and to fulfill the sense of pride so pushed forth by the university. The latter is what Boyer (1990) referred to as the notion of ‘celebrative community’: “traditions and heritage that cause pride and foster an emotional connection” (Clopton, 2007, p. 96). Jones et al. (2018) wrote that community sport organizations (CSO) “provide valuable contexts for

promoting community development” (p. 279). One of the main problems associated with definitions of community development in relation to organizations is the fact that the term is often “tailored to specific goals, circumstances, and people” (Matarrita-Cascante & Brennan, 2012, as cited in Jones et al., 2018). In sports organizations such as a university’s sport programs, rather than focusing on the outcome that comes from community development, communities should be engaged during the process of forming itself (Midgley & Hall, 1986).

Nowadays, the reality of most sport organizations at the club and school level is that such organizations are “in the hands of technicians, instructors, school coaches and teachers, sport fans and so on” (Hernandez, 2002, preface v). While some of these figures may understand how sport may benefit the individual and the community at large, these leaders tend to be more knowledgeable on the development of technical skills in the sport and may lack of knowledge to develop a community around the sport organization. The importance of community formation lies in long term benefits to both the individuals and the organization. At the organizational level, these may include an increase in sustainability in sport participation (Vail, 2007), and an increase in financial support to the organization (Humphreys & Mondello, 2006). At the individual level, benefits may enhance one’s physical and psychological abilities (Schulenkorf & Schelenker, 2017). Simson and Bird (2023) discussed subjective well-being as something concerned with people’s feelings and emotions, which reflects in the sport context as “pleasure and fulfillment associated with the sport performance” (p. 192). In particular, Ryff (1989) described psychological well-being as “the personal growth and effective daily functioning of an individual” (p. 1077). Getting people involved in sporting events may boost their motivation to participate in the sport themselves and may also complement social interactions with others. On a broader level the importance of community formation can lead to societal benefits such as “community connectedness and pride and social capital” (Schulenkorf & Schelenker, 2017, p. 218). All of

these factors are part of a specific problem in sport organizations that is in need of further research. As Hernandez (2002) put it, “the ineffectiveness of today’s sport organizations is due largely to the lack of a compelling vision and the absence of a driving force based on administrative competence” (p. v).

In addressing these issues, this study wants to explore the context of a university tennis program and its participants at the site of a semi-public Tennis Complex in the city where the university resides. I am referring to the university tennis program as an entity that encompasses both the men and women’s tennis teams. The difference between referring to a ‘team’ and a ‘program’ stands in the fact that a program includes other interests besides wins and losses. I discuss the tennis program as an entity that includes community service, creates interests in participation opportunities, and enhances overall sport development.

The uniqueness of the research site stands on the fact that the decision-making process at the facility is impacted by both the university (through its tennis program) and by the City (through its events and policies). The facility brings together different demographics of people who play the game of tennis at the recreational and competitive level. The study wants to examine the participants meaning making on the concept of community, and the power dynamics at play between the city, the university, the Tennis Complex, and the people who engage in activities at the site. In particular, the study wants to answer the question of how such dynamics have impacted the meaning-making of participants on the concept of community in such context.

What is community?

Curran (1998) explained sport as “social institution that encompasses and promotes a collective social experience” (p. 104). Since the Ancient Greek times (700-480 B.C.), the pattern seems to have been that wherever there is sport, there are people coming

together. While the Greeks made use of sporting games to create a sense of identification within groups of people (e.g. athletes and non-athletes), establish social classes, and worship religious myths and Gods; sport also served as a domain that would naturally bring large audiences together (Golden, 2004). This phenomenon naturally brought up the question: do people who come together in the face of a sporting event really make up a 'community'? The combination of sport and its impact on our social life, as well as the misgivings about community in the literature, is what sparked my interest in studying the development of community around this particular collegiate sport program

Any type of study that wants to explore the concept of community requires a clear understanding of what the broad term 'community' actually means. For most people, the definition of community is a "generalization not based on scientific experiments, but rather based on interpretation that each individual has formed through their own experiences" (Gusfield, 1975, p. 84). These interpretations often include three characteristics: (1) a group of people, (2) a quality of relationship, and (3) a place/location (Creed, 2006, p. 4). This means that when people think about community, what comes to mind is a group of people that come together in a physical place, who share a relationship of positive value characterized by trust, commitment, or any other qualities that bring up positive sentiments.

Through the lens of Creed's definition, an example of community could be interpreted by a group of volunteers whose relationships are bonded by the same interests and ideals, and who meet up at the same park every month to help clean up the environment from litterers. An even simpler example of community would be a group of graduate students who meet at the same coffee shop every Friday to engage in friendship and discuss their experiences in their classes.

Gusfield (1975) wrote that when examining a concept that embodies such

generalizations, scholars of the literature, critics, and philosophers have “given much thought to the differences between scientific and non-scientific language” (p. 84). In his effort to explain how such differences in definitions of communities have arisen and which one we should give more attention to, he referred to the differences between poetic and semantic meanings of community. The poetic meaning of community is defined through individual perspectives, emotions, and subjective feelings, while the semantic meaning is rooted in scientific explanations that scholars have used in order to isolate the term and avoid distorting too much what community really is (Gusfield, 1975, p. 85). While the poetic meaning takes up a substantial portion in the process of understanding community, Gusfield (1975) was of the belief that it is also beneficial to take into consideration the semantic meaning of it. When these definitions are brought together, one can realize that community is actually a dynamic, complex notion that needs to be explored through different angles and perspectives, as it can take form in several shapes, places, and situations.

Often associated with the definitions of community through the poetic meaning is the assumption that community is a term that carries a positive meaning. This usually comes from the first impression that most people tend to have when they think about it. Lyon (2011) described this impression as “feelings and images of small-town nostalgia in which people help out each other” (pp. 3-4). But the term community does not necessarily carry a positive feeling, nor does it always develop in a small town. In fact, Creed (2006) pointed out that to think of community in such way is what leads people to “have prejudice on inclusion or exclusion of cultures” (p. 10). Firstly, if we established that the phenomenon of community is evolving and dynamic, we have to understand that it can form and take place anywhere. For instance, in our current lives, community can be formed in corporations, neighborhoods of big cities, and even in informal groups (Lyon, 2011, p. 4). Secondly, though communities with positive outcomes can be formed in any of these settings, so can

communities with negative consequences. Some examples of these can be street gangs, mafia families, hooligan sport groups, drug rings, etc. In other words, the same qualities that make up community to be seen as something positive may result in discontent or dissatisfaction of the public which may lead to community formations to be perceived through negative outcomes as well. (Creed, 2006, p. 12). Although the groups described above may be perceived as to have strong sense of community, they can also lead to “exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms” (Portes, 1998, as cited in Agnitsch et al., 2006, p. 40).

Different outcomes and shapes of community are especially present around sports. My own personal experiences and observations through sport as a fan, player, and then coach at the collegiate level is what sparked my interest in studying community formation around sports in the first place. The term ‘community’ can fit to numerous situations in sport. For instance, when sport’s fans come together in a geographic location to consistently support their favorite team, when supporters of a sport organization contribute and fight for their team to improve the program, or when groups of people identify with a sport’s team and build positive interactions and relationships within each other. Anderson (1983) also discussed the term ‘imagined community’ through which people share common interests without meeting any other fans of such community. Lastly, community also fits situations in which groups of people share the same identity to lead to negative outcomes such as hooligan formations that spark fan violence.

Social Interaction Theory & Sense of Community

How and when a community forms and develops, as well as the quality and outcomes of this process, is what scholars should investigate to continue understanding the many aspects tied to this phenomenon. Aigner et al. (2002) claimed that “face-to-face social interactions and social relationships have constituted the core elements of community” (p.

101). A theory of social interaction was developed by Kaufman (1959) and Wilkinson (1991) to define issues surrounding community formation. In their model of community, the theory of social interaction is what they believe tie together the main four characteristics of community: 1) shared territory, 2) contributes to the wholeness of local life, 3) gives structure and direction to collective actions, and 4) is the source of mutual identity. What constitutes community is then grounded in symbolic meanings and communicative practice of individuals (Adelman & Frey, 1997). Looking at community through the social interaction theory makes the concept of community something that is socially constructed. Wilkinson (1991) pointed out that through this theory, “social interactions develop mutually shared meaning, which ultimately constructs community” (as cited in Procter, 2004, p. 55). Through this process, community is further constituted by shared identity, values, and code of behavior. (Procter, 2004). Through social interaction, the people themselves construct a meaning of community.

Often attached to concepts of social interaction and community formation is the expression of having a ‘sense of community’. Originally, the term sense of community was labeled as associated with membership (something that placed a boundary between “us” and “them”) (McMillan, 1996, p. 315). Scholars have tried to make sense of the feeling associated with community since the 1970s through studies that aimed to reveal that the experience of sense of community does in fact exist and it operates as a force in human life (Sarason, 1974; Riger & Lavrakas, 1981; Glynn, 1981; Doolittle & MacDonald, 1978, McMillann & Chavis, 1986). Originally, the term sense of community was labeled as associated with membership (something that placed a boundary between “us” and “them”) (McMillan, 1996, p. 315). However, a more modern view of sense of community replaced ‘membership’ with simply “having a connection to others in a setting when one can be themselves and see themselves in eyes of others” (McMillan, 1996, p. 315-316). With social

interaction and sense of community being intertwined, theories regarding these concepts will be used in this study to explore the phenomenon of community formation around the university's tennis program. These theoretical tools will be especially useful in the context of the research through the process of understanding people's experiences through their own social interactions with others at the site of the Tennis Complex through the years.

A Critical Theory Approach to Community

Through the first decades of the 20th century, definitions of community emphasized factors and features of creating and maintaining structure of local life and local institutions (Bridger et al., 2011, p.86). Following World War II and the economic, social, cultural and technological changes brought by the 1950s and 60s, life at the local level was transformed. As a consequence, so did the concept of community. Scholars turned their attention to understanding how these external forces [e.g. cultural, political, economic, social or technological trends (El-Khawas and Walker, 2001, p. 4)] impacted community, with the goal of proposing a concept of community that reflected these changes. Richards stated that the “study of a small community undergoing development suggests that external resources do not necessarily deplete local decision making if the community has shared values, conflict resolution mechanisms, local issues, and healthy indigenous social networks” (p. 75).

In the past, studies that addressed issues of social science have used the theoretical perspectives of positivism, post-positivism and interpretivism. With interpretivism, social science underwent a process of understanding individual behavior. Critical inquiry then came into play to *challenge* the interpretivist approach, as well as all other forms of approaches used in the past. Crotty (1998) defined critical theory as such: 1) “not a research that seeks merely to understand, but a research that challenges, 2) not a research that reads the situation in terms of interaction and community, but a research that reads it in terms of conflict and oppression, and 3) not just a research that accepts the status

quo, but a research that seeks to bring about change” (p. 127). The objective of the critical approach was then to challenge previous approaches to research and to eventually bring a change in society through the research applied.

Developed in the 19th century and based on the work of philosopher Karl Marx, the notion of critical theory stood on the fact that we should not set out from what has been said, imagined, or conceived by individuals in the past. Rather, to achieve an actual change in societies and to break through hegemonic ideologies (“the ways in which society as a whole adopts the ideas and interests of the dominant economic class”), we should look “at real, active men[*sic*] in the present moment and at their real-life processes” (Crotty, 1998, p. 132; Stoddart, 2007, p. 195). Through one of his most famous quotes, “life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life”, Marx (1977) wanted to imply that the way in which we gain knowledge is through our own individual experiences. Naturally, our individual experiences are the shaped by structures outside of our control such as class, gender, religion, politics, among others.

From here, it emerges the notion of power and its importance in the formation of critical theory. Since the 19th century, community has often been associated with “state governance as its political and economic power” (Creed, 2006, p. 8). When the formation of communities is strongly influenced by such external power, it is more likely to lead to community formations in relation to categories of political significance (e.g. religious, ethnic or racial communities) (Creed, 2006, p. 9). This may be due to the fact that when people experience certain situations in their daily lives, they are simultaneously influenced by these external powers around them, which turn to impact their perspectives on these situations and the way they produce meaning and create knowledge of certain concepts. In addition to political and economic power influencing the concept of community, the work of Paulo Friere (1972) also showed how power can shape the knowledge of people and how

implications for change in the study of community relies on the notion of situated created freedom. This is the idea that we cannot always recreate the ways that constitute our world whenever we want, but we can, in a particular situation, act with some degree of power.

When it comes to community formation, the use of critical theory would start by asking each community members' personal background and experiences and how those have influenced their view of community around the tennis program. Then, it would turn to ask participants about the power dynamics at play around the tennis programs, the city, and the university to understand how those have shaped their perspective of the concept of community as well. Harris and Adams (2016) discussed that social issues (such as community) in relation to sport development "compete in political, social, economic and cultural ways" (p. 98). From the political point of view, "policy contexts may condition and construct what might be regarded as politically useable resources (Collins, 2008; Darnell, 2012 as cited in Harris and Adams, 2016, p. 98). In the research context, the site of the Tennis Complex which served as a usable resource for the people involved with the game of tennis was a great example to explore such political dynamics. Socially, the meaning of sport and the address of collective social problems have an impact on both the individual and society as a whole (Harris and Adams, 2016). Economically, these dynamics refer to the available resources necessary to make an impact on the community, as well as people's wealth status and their impact on such resources to come to live. In the context of this specific university tennis organization, supporter's financial contributions have played a necessary role for the improvement of the tennis programs in terms of resources and perks to the tennis teams. On the cultural level, different norms and values related to the meaning of sport in a specific culture may impact issues of socialization and community development (Coakley, 2011, Harris and Adams, 2016). Schinke et al. (2014) also discussed how culture infuses into each sport context in terms of how athletes and coaches express certain cultural

characteristics to play out in a way that contribute to performance excellence and psychological health and benefits not only to athletes and coaches but also the fans of the sport (p 319).

Through this process, we can see how the notion of power has an effect not only on how subjects create meaning-making through their interactions, but also on how ideologies form as forces that shape our culture. Fairclough (1995) defined ideologies as something “tied to action, and [...] and judged in terms of their social effects rather than their truth values” (p. 76). Linked to the Marxist tradition, Schèaffner and Kelly-Holmes (1996) discussed ideologies as being connected with class power and domination (p. 1). With critical theory in mind, the action for change stands in the fact that if meaning-making is created through subject’s interaction, then by changing the way in which we interact to one another we can consequently change the meaning-making process as well. One example that naturally comes to mind is the hegemonic ideology that gender is binary. For the last two-thousand years this ideology has been perpetuated through the interactions with others in our society. However, we can see how in the last couple of decades more interactions with non-binary gender individuals are slowly changing this ideology that has been so present in societies through history. When we look at the meaning-making process this way, it derives that meaning is never stable. As a consequence, just like ideologies can influence subjects and meaning making, the same can happen in reverse. When this process happens consistently every day, it becomes possible to make a *change* in the hegemonic ideologies that shape our culture.

The Research Setting

As established, critical theory is particularly unique due to the fact that it can explore changes in community development through the notion of power dynamics (political, economic, cultural). Just as unique is the research setting of this study, which revolves around

the term ‘community’ and its formation is shaped and influenced by different kinds of power exerted onto the tennis program. Generally, members of a local group come together with shared interests to seek becoming part of something bigger than themselves through interactions within each other. When a community forms within a larger context (such as a university or a city), its development can be influenced by powerful actors within the larger society.

Finding myself being closely involved with the university’s tennis program for years, I started to notice our environment changing and experiencing a phenomenon of supporters’ attraction and engagement that does not usually occur in the setting of collegiate tennis programs that do not belong to Power 5 conferences (the five most prominent athletic conferences in college football in the United States). In particular, the university men’s tennis team had not just gained a lot of attention through their recent big wins, conference titles, and NCAA appearances, but it had started to attract more fans than ever before at our home tennis facility: the Tennis Complex. Supporters of the team not only brought rowdy cheers and excitement to the home matches, but they also attended these events with a positive mindset towards bonding and developing relationship with others (other supporters, student-athletes, coaches, kids, etc.). I also started to notice how these relationships between supporters of the team continued to develop outside of the Tennis Complex. Through the many activities and projects designed by the head coach around the tennis program, as well as the many formal and informal events organized through the years, significant and meaningful interactions were formed between supporters and ‘outsiders’ of the tennis program. Some of these activities included tennis home games, free tennis clinics, fundraising events, as well as formal and informal lunches and dinners. Moreover, in the recent decade the program experienced an incredible number of donations in dollars to improve the tennis facilities and program under all kind of aspects. This is generally part of a larger issue that affects mid-

major athletic programs who do not receive the same funding as Power 5 athletic programs, and therefore have to develop fundraising campaigns.

It is crucial to point out that amongst those individuals who seek community formation, there are individuals who have different degrees of power on decisions made and actions taken that affect the program and community development as a whole. Power may generate from the social status of members, occupations, money, personal connections to other individuals, but also from the city and the university. The goal of this study is to find out if a community has been formed within the people involved in a Division I tennis program and to explore how power and influence have shaped their meanings of community. The study wants to explore the participants' feelings and experiences at the site of the university's Tennis Complex and all the power dynamics that might be at play in this phenomenon. There are between 50 to 200 people who are involved with the tennis program and who are tied together by activities that revolve around the tennis program. Some of them are connected to the program by just being private donors behind the scenes, while others are more active and present by participating to team events. These supporters, along with the student-athletes, coaches and administrators of the tennis program, were able to create a group that has developed – and is continuing to develop – as a *process* in time through interactions within its members and power dynamics. The initiatives to make these individuals come together had the goal to provide support for tennis teams, help improve the overall program, and improve the local social life around the sport of tennis in the city. Many members of the current tennis group have been residents of the town and have participated in tennis activities their whole life. Important to note is that one does not need a formal membership in order to be part of such group, but rather these are individuals who consistently partake in interactions within each other and the tennis team. The tennis community around the program started to grow bigger when the current men's head coach

took over the job for the tennis program in 2009 and cultivated a culture of community formation around his program.

The physical facility used by these individuals (members of the tennis complex, student-athletes, former athletes, admins, donors and coaches) plays a critical role in the process of interactions. The structure is a tennis indoor facility consisting of 8 indoor courts and a mezzanine, as well as 24 outdoor courts, just 10 minutes' drive from the university's campus location. It is also worth to point out that another facility is currently being built, which will consist of 8 outdoor courts on the campus location. While some the individuals described above possess an actual membership at the indoor Tennis Complex, it does not make them stand out in any way over other individuals, nor that is a requirement to be part of such tennis community. Individuals make up a community through their significant interactions.

Methodology

There are a few types of methods that could be used in order to analyze the interactional behavior and power relations of the individuals that are associated with the tennis program. This group could be studied through questions provided in a survey, and then analyzed through either a univariate or bivariate analysis, with the goal to identify themes and patterns of community development through the critical approach. Another approach could try to make sense of patterns observed in this group of people through external factors such as members' income, accessibility to the sport, geographic location and resources that permit these interactions to happen. Another option could be examining the phenomena through the ethnographic method, which tries to make sense of the complexity of a social context from the inside, as a member of the group in question. In particular, a qualitative approach would facilitate delving deep into the issue of community and community develop as it would gather participants' experiences, perceptions and behavior which would help answer the

hows and whys of the issues (Tenny et al., 2022). Moreover, because the tennis group includes people of different ages, background, cultures, statuses, and occupations who share the same interests and goals, the qualitative approach could allow one to answer these questions through an interview process with open-ended questions. Interviewing would be a valuable type of method to use in addition to participant observations, as it could reveal crucial details that could not be brought up to light otherwise.

Following a similar methodological approach used by Dunlap (2009), this study used an ethnographic approach and will collect data for a period of six months, from October 2023 to March 2024. During this period of time, I spent time with the group of people associated with the tennis program by attending events, tennis games, clinics, and informal meetings (such as lunches or dinners). Field notes were constructed from the time spent in the field, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain the perspectives of the head coaches of the tennis programs (men's and women's), former coaches, donors, student-athletes, and supporters. Through this process, each individual was able to express the different perspectives and feelings which they personally believe would best explain the term of 'community', and how power may have played a role in such community development through the years.

By analyzing the subjective experiences of these individuals, my work started by understanding whether or not the people who associate themselves to the university's tennis program believed that a community actually existed, and how they conceptualized being part of such community. Essentially, examining their meaning-making process on community. In addition, I was able to explore the notion of power and its effect on the initial formation of the community, as well as its development and maintenance. Finally, I examined how power dynamics have affected, and continue to affect, the community members as well as the success or failures of the program through the years. The power

dynamics explored will specifically focus on intra-organizational relations, resources and fans' financial support to the university's tennis program, and cultural norms and values of the sport of tennis in the geographical area of the study as well as the culture and values of the university tennis program.

Research Purpose & Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the participants' meaning making on the concept of community in relation to a university's tennis program. In particular, the purpose is to explore how power dynamics (social, political, economic, and cultural) have had an impact on their subjective understanding of the concept of community that has shaped around the university tennis program as a whole. The research questions for this study are as follow:

1. What has shaped the participants' subjective understanding of the concept of community around the university's tennis programs?
2. How have power dynamics (social, political, economic, cultural) in the context of the research played a role in shaping the meaning-making of community around the university's tennis program?

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Coming off some important questions that have been raised in chapter one, this chapter will explore the literature review of some of the theories that have been present in the scholarship regarding some larger trends of community, leisure and sport within the social sciences. This chapter will review the numerous definitions of community that are present in the literature and the evolution of the concept of community through historical changes in time. As this research wants to take a critical approach, the chapter will also review the literature on critical theory with the goal to help the reader identify the link between the critical approach and the research context. In doing so, the chapter will also dive into the concept of power in relation to community. As established, this research wants to understand the dynamic phenomenon that has been evolving around a university's tennis program in relation to community formation. Therefore, it is imperative that the review will include a section on leisure and sport literature on community as well. The objectives for this study are finding out how individuals have come to be involved with the program and how they perceive community within this context. In particular, concepts of power relations and dynamics will be explored to dive deep into why and how this phenomenon has been taking place. The use of critical theory will be especially important to tackle this part of the study.

Definitions of community

Any study that wants to research community requires a review of what the term holds and what it actually means. This section will provide the reader with a clear background on the concept of community in order to understand how the study and research context will explore community in the following chapters. There have been numerous ways in which the concept of community has been explored through the years. When Hillery (1955) compared definitions of community in the literature, he found that there were as many

as ninety-four meanings associated with the term. Creed (2006) specified that the difficulty in having a clear definition of community comes from the fact that when using the term “community” in one way, people unintentionally include other qualities that are generally associated with the word (e.g. “some degree of harmony, homogeneity, autonomy, immediacy, locality, morality, solidarity, identity, the idea of shared knowledge, interests, and meanings” p. 5). This is notable because people often describe the term based on their previous personal experiences in which they felt they were part of a community. These experiences may have all been different or may have included different qualities for different people and situations.

Despite the weight that the term holds, many authors in the literature have been trying to provide clear definitions of community. Bender (1978) stated that in the late 20th century, definitions of community focused on three characteristics: 1) a group of people, 2) a shared common interest, and 3) a particular locality (p. 5). Still, when it comes to the territory that characterizes a community, the literature does not provide a clear size for it. Bender (1978) wrote that the location of a community “can range from a neighborhood to a town, to a medium-sized city” (p. 6). But there is more to these three characteristics. The term community is also often associated with the *quality* of the human relationships, as well as having an emotional meaning attached to it. As this study will try to understand if a community has been formed around the university’s tennis programs, these definitions are important to know and to keep in mind as developing methodological approaches. These definitions are also needed to know in order to unpack and understand the data collected. For instance, such definitions may or may not be found in the responses to participant’s interviews and other methodological approaches used for the research.

Taking a complete opposite stance on the definition of community, Creed (2006) suggested that “community does not *need* defining” (p. 4). In explaining how this is the case,

Creed (2006) and Bender (1978) both provided examples of this process as they made a distinction between the perspective of traditional community in 19th century, and modern community as they saw it evolving in the 20th century. “While traditional communities were tied to the commercialization and bureaucratization of social relations; the urbanization, modernity, and capitalism of the 20th century shifted the American society’s view on community, as it was now threatened, created and transformed through economic and political forces” (Creed, 2006, pp. 4-6; Bender, 1978, p. 3). The notion of a threatened community was a great topic of research during this time, as people in society felt that the community of the past might have never been the same or was now lost to some extent. Instead, the literature on the notion of community being threatened and transformed once again confirmed that community is something dynamic. It also confirmed that community is defined and influenced by the people involved in the process and by any external power that may impact those people’s perceptions on community.

Generally, when one is asked about the term ‘community’ and what that means to them, the discourse on the topic is often characterized by subjective interpretations that the person has formed through their own personal experiences. Such interpretations are generally a positive and nostalgic feeling that represents a group of people in a specific place or location who share a positive relationship and generally help each other out (Gusfield, 1975; Joseph, 2006). For example, a person who is a football fan and who goes to the stadium to watch football regularly during season could refer to community as being together with other sport fans at the stadium and cheering for the same team. On the other hand, another person who has been supporting a smaller sport’s team for several years could say that community for them means creating an inclusive environment for people to enhance social interaction during competition but also outside of the sport setting. For others, community could simply mean getting a group of people together to play golf every Friday. Naturally, most of these

subjective interpretations tend to be connected to positive feelings and positive relationships within the people in the context.

While these first impressions of community are certainly not ones to disregard, scholars should not just settle for such interpretations when discussing the concept of community, its definition and what it entails. These kinds of first interpretations are what Gusfield (1975) called the poetic meaning of community, which "... involves a perspective which constitutes what is significant from one or another perspective; and takes an attitude toward an object or event" (Gusfield, 1975, p. 85). The poetic approach entails providing meaning to a concept through individual perspectives, emotions, and subjective feelings. Nonetheless, it would not feel right to just take in consideration the subjective feelings of individuals who are all different from each other and experience different things on the matter. In fact, Gusfield (1975) also argued that when trying to define a concept, simply looking at such concept (in our case, community) from the poetic perspective would not be enough to gain the full understanding of what community really is. For instance, simply considering the poetic meaning of community and society would add conflicts and drama to the discourse (Gusfield, 1975, p. 86). Because community and society are linked to certain personal experiences, if we were to just take a poetic approach to community we would stumble on feelings of contrast between different people. In addition to this, when people tend to view a concept through personal experiences they tend to share their own personal opinions resulting in possible drama to add to the definition of the concept.

Generally, it is assumed that because the term "community" is associated with human relationships that mean that it is also representative of reality. Therefore, the concept wouldn't need to have a semantic meaning and should rely entirely on the poetic one (Gusfield, 1975, p. 85). This is when Gusfield introduced the importance of the semantic meaning, which is rooted in scientific explanations that scholars have used in order to isolate

the term and avoid distorting it too much through subjective explanations (Gusfield, 1975, p. 85). In regard to the concept of community, when both the poetic and semantic analysis of such a concept comes together, we realize that community is actually a dynamic complex notion that needs to be explored through different angles and perspectives. Community can take form in several shapes, places, and situations. Depending on the context, community can form in neighborhoods of the suburbs of a city, it can come to life in the office of a workplace, or it can even form within people who don't necessarily know each other on a personal level such as at a soccer or football game. Due to its versatility, it seems necessary to dive deeper into the history and the changes that have been associated with the concept of community to different situations throughout the centuries. Gusfield (1975) wrote that "the discussion on 'community and society' which occupied the attention of the nineteenth and early twentieth century writers have continued to dominate much of the analysis and evaluation of contemporary intellectuals as well" (p. 87). This is because the context of the discussion has changed through the centuries, and it continues to change as we speak. Nonetheless, we as scholars, continue to spend time researching and discussing the concept of community because as long as there will be people in society, community will always be present in whatever shape or form it may present to us.

The evolution of the concept of community

The notion of community has been at the center of discussion in regard to political and social life since classical Greece when Plato and Aristotle found interest in the discourse (Bender, 1978, p. 3). However, the concept has changed and molded into different forms and representations as we can see in more recent scholarship. In the nineteenth century, the study of human relationships was the topic of discussion of social thinkers in Europe and in the United States. With changes in social life that came with urbanization and capitalism, new patterns of human relationship through urban life were now seen as a threat to the

concept of community. Many authors in the literature have pointed out the weakening of community bonds as individualism and consumption started to become at the center of Western society (Shaffer & Anundsen, 1993; Bellah et al., 1996; Putman, 2000). As an example, Bender (1978) wrote that “modern Americans fear that urbanization and modernization have actually destroyed the community that earlier shaped the lives of men and women” (p. 3), which was thought to be particularly true for small American towns. Lyon (2011) described this picture of community as “feelings and images of small-town nostalgia in which people help out each other” (pp. 3-4), which often come with the presumption that community is always associated with positive feelings. A similar feeling is described by Sharpe et al. (2016) and Bauman (2001) as they both pointed out that when people think about the community of the past, “warm and cozy thoughts come to mind [...] where you are continually surrounded by family or friends who are willing to help each other out” (Sharpe et al., 2016, p.3). These feelings might be explained by the fact that ‘community’ is often associated with something that makes us feel good and something that comes from the people who are closer to us, such as family members or close friends. However, Creed (2006) pointed out that the same qualities that make community seen as positive, may result in discontent or dissatisfaction of community formations when those qualities are not realized (p. 12).

Through the first decades of the 20th century, definitions of community emphasized factors and features of creating and maintaining structure of local life and local institutions (Bridger et al., 2011, p.86). Following World War II and the economic, social, cultural and technological changes brought by the 1950s and 60s, life at the local level was transformed and as a consequence so was the concept of community. (Bridger et al., 2011, p. 87). Scholars turned their attention to understanding how these external forces were impacting the community, with the goal to propose a concept of community that reflected

these changes. For instance, suburban areas started to see the construction of housing which changed the well-defined settlements in those areas before the war. Other examples included the construction of the interstate highway system, the rise of television, computers and other forms of telecommunications (Bridger et al., 2011, p. 87). Studies on community during this time period were now trying to understand how the complexity of life characterized by these changes was impacting the concept of community. Looking at community from different angles rather than simply the territorial aspect turned the conversation in dynamic terms. Bridger et al. (2011) showed how now the discourse on community represented a “complex social, economic, and psychological entity reflective of a place, its people, and their myriad relationships” (p. 88). Essentially, community was now influenced by many more external factors rather than simply the interpersonal relationships and values between people connected by a geographical territory.

Historical Changes Impacting Community

Given the changes in which the concept of community has been evolving into, the subject is in need of much academic attention. The literature so far examined provided enough evidence that there is an unclear definition of community that is due to its dynamic complexity and its continuous change over time. However, Bender (1978) argued that “very little attention is devoted to a consideration of the details of the actual processes of change in the structure and meaning of community over time” (p. 4). Changes in society through the years brought out new definitions of community of the future. Shaffer and Anundsen (1993) wrote that we should now look for “members that are interdependent, committed to one another, participate in common practices, and identify themselves as a part of something bigger than the sum of their individual parts (as cited in Sharpe et al., 2016, p. 3). This significant change shows how community is a heterogeneous and dynamic concept (Gusfield, 1975, Sharpe et al., 2016). If we ignore the dimension of history and how it has influenced

social relations, we then simplify the discourse on social change and the role that power plays in such changes through the centuries (Bender 1978, p. 5).

Coming to the end of the twentieth century, the growing concept of community in society had stimulated scholars to react more and more to the phenomenon. Rose (1999) saw the changes in community during this time as a new way of governance (as cited in Creed, 2006, p. 5). For instance, the term 'community policing' was often used in the late 1990s to indicate one of the many changes in progress at the time throughout the United States (Rosenbaum, 1994, p. 4). While community policy developed in response to policies in the United States being less efficient and effective, the change that this brought into the concept of community laid in the fact that involving members of the community now had a role in the policy decision making (Rosenbaum, 1994, pp. 5-6). With this, Rose (1999) provided one more definition through the transformation of community in our modern society which is now tied to its use at the state/societal level. This concept is often referred as vertical ties to community. Miller & Preston (1973) and Tonnies (1963 [1887]) explained horizontal relationships (*Gemeinschaft*) as relationships of community units to one another within one locality characterized by regular contact, solidarity and trust; and vertical relationships (*Gesellschaft*) as relationships of community units to the larger society characterized by thin forms of trust and looser relationships but more prone to inclusion an integration on a large scale.

Drawing from Rose, Joseph (2006) wrote that when groups do not follow specific requirements that follow state and societal rules and values, then they are generally considered "gangs" or "underground networks" and are not defined as "community" (p. 28). Nonetheless, while community can form through state/government regulations and definitions of community may arise from the emotional ties to the nation-state, Creed (2006) claimed that these are still not the implications for a definition on community (p. 8). While

we, as a society, tend to only refer to groups of people as ‘community’ when these groups are following laws that are placed in society for us to follow, it does not imply that we can then form definitions on community entirely based on these implications. These are important concepts to bring to surface as they show what we as a society consider to be a ‘community’ versus something that is not. Whilst such observations are not ones to disregard, definitions of community need to go further than simply personal perspectives and opinions people have in modern society.

Community: An Unequivocal Good

Conversations on community in past literature have always associated the term ‘community’ to something that Joseph (2006) described as unequivocal good:

“an indicator of a high quality of life, a life of human understanding, caring, selflessness, and belonging ... that emerge in times of crisis or strategy to bound people together by common grief” (preface, vii).

This description is what the author calls the Romantic narrative of community: a community that refers to a long-lost past of small-town nostalgia. The discourse on nostalgic community can also be seen in Tocqueville’s (1945) text *Democracy in America* in which he observed that community creates as a result of the United States “township system” whose focal point is local interests, passions, and rights (Joseph, 2006, p. 3). As Joseph (2006) explained, these township systems that existed within political and historical moments in time, led to people being able to “see inside themselves and to act on behalf of themselves and their immediate circle” (p. 4). While older scholarship looked at community from its internal dynamics, Joseph (2006) used her book to shift the discourse on community in relation to social processes in which communities take place. The book contains the main argument that capitalism “generate[s] the discourse of community to legitimate social hierarchies” (Joseph, 2006, preface, viii). With capitalism, society changed in the sense that people went from having little power over their own lives to now working and earning dollars and deciding what to do with such money.

However, through capitalism, most common people would operate in such an economy under the control of private owners and corporations that would use them for their own profit. Such private owners would control the issuance of money and wealth distribution. Government regulations also influenced the issuance of money to private owners. This chain process of production and power structured the social hierarchies that still exist in our modern society. We can see how traits of capitalism are still present in our modern world as materialism is still at the top of hierarchy where people the desire to accumulate wealth and materials things is what now governs people's minds.

The difference between community of the 19th century, were social formations entailed people knowing their place in society, and community of the 20th century, stands in its relation to capitalism (Joseph, 2006, p. 8). The author argued that there is a temporal disconnection between the nostalgic discourse on community which places community in an idealized past, and the discourse on community in modern society (Joseph, 2006, p. 8). The disconnection lies on the fact that the view on community in our modern world sees "material processes transforming social relations" (Joseph, 2006, p. 8). Technology brought the biggest source of social changes in terms of physical material items that now people used in their daily lives, transforming their relations with one another. Now, community was seen as free and independent while at the same time it complemented capitalism in the present time (Joseph, 2006, p. 10). Putman (1993) argued that through capitalism, inequalities of power or wealth in organizations, as well as family, school, and workplace all played a part in defining "community" (Joseph, 2006, p. 12). Paraphrasing Putman, Joseph (2006) put it this way: "The social value of local community formation is not in the challenge that such communities might offer to dominant regimens but rather in that they are sites of incorporation into hegemonic regimes" (p. 12). When communities form as something that is ingrained into hegemonic ideologies, such ideologies will have an impact on the definition of such communities and how

they are perceived within a particular society in a specific time in history. Joseph's statement would reflect Marx's notion of critical approach to bring a change in ideologies that are set in stone in hegemonic regimes.

In the discussion of the Marxist heritage, Crotty (1998) wrote that "the effective action for change stems from awareness of the conflict between productive forces and the social relations of production, and such awareness can only occur at the ideological level" (p. 135). In these statements lie the importance for social science researchers to continue digging into dynamics of conflicts and power relations within specific communities. With the changes that society underwent through capitalism and in the years to follow, the shift in the value of community was now based on the fact that groups coming together and forming a community were now tied to how these groups fit into hegemonic systems within certain cultures. Therefore, research on any group of people that may make up a community should understand the culture and hegemonic systems that those people fit in, as well as taking into consideration all the dynamics that may play a role into people coming together. This is precisely why this study chooses the critical theory approach to explore the groups of people associated with the university's tennis program.

Bauman (2001) is another author who took the critical approach to the concept of community as it transformed through significant historical changes in society. With his approach, the author wanted to answer the question of why community is so sought after in the contemporary present (Tester, 2002, p. 442). Bauman saw the transformation of community during the time of capitalism as something that contained the "lost qualities of society that live on as goals for the future" (as cited in Creed, 2006, p. 5). Through these times of transformation for community he also saw a potential for the change in the concept by "standing up against the status quo" (Bauman, 2001, p. 125). For him, the view on community relied very much on the subjective feeling and interpretation of it. In fact, he claimed that "words have meanings:

some words, however, also have a ‘feel’; the word ‘community’ is one of them” (Bauman, 2001, p. 1). This statement takes us back to the poetic meaning of community by Gusfield (1975) and acts as a reminder for this study to further explore the subjective feelings of the participants as related to the word ‘community’. Finally, in his review of the book, Tester (2002) paraphrased Bauman’s approach as such:

“community is given such prominence in contemporary society and it is desired so avidly because it offers an erstwhile home in which the disembedded men and women of contemporary social life might feel safe and secure in a world that is otherwise confusing and threatening” (p. 442).

His approach offers us a new perspective on the shift of the concept of community. Though some argued that community was something that got lost with societal changes through the 20th century, Bauman viewed the concept of community as something that offered opportunity to those who did not feel safe or who did not feel as if they belonged in this ‘new’ contemporary world.

The Relation of Power with Community

Joseph (2006) used Marx’s theory of value to lay out his argument on the supplementary relation of community with capital. Marx’s (1977) theory of value claimed that the value of commodity (goods or services produced by human labor) can be measured by the average number of hours of labor that it took to produce such commodity. The author articulated this theory by explaining that “labor is represented by value, which is in turn represented by money, which is then transformed in capital” (Joseph, 2006, p. 13). However, according to Marx (1977), nothing has value unless it has some form of utility, and utility is socially and historically determined. This production process then is also dependent on “historically particular relations” (Joseph, 2006, p. 14). This is when the importance of *power* is introduced in the discourse of critical theory to explore the impact that such dynamics have on the shaping of community.

In his book *Capital*, Marx (1977) argued that for the production process to take

place there must be social distribution. Whether that is assigned at birth or not, social distribution places members of society into different kinds of production, and thus defining “commodity as labor power” (Joseph, 2006, p. 14). While the Romantic approach to community was anti-capitalist and saw capital (value) as something simply abstract, critical theory challenges this view by distinguishing between abstract value and the concrete use-value that capitalism brings into society. Power is not only critical in this process through the Marxist argument, but the notion of power plays a crucial role in the argument that meaning making is socially constructed and historically determined. An example of the latter is the power influence over community formations in Paulo Freire’s (1972) critical approach to pedagogy in Brazilian communities.

Another argument raised by Joseph (2006) in his book is that “the deployment of community works in service of maintaining or elaborating domination and exploitation” (p. 21). He explained this argument by exploring discourses on cultural pluralism (the concept that sustains that minority groups within a society can maintain their own cultural identities), multiculturalism (the societal condition that encapsulated numerous ethnic and cultural groups) and diversity that emerged in the United States in the early 20th century. These, he claimed, are all strategies used for the “production of subjects for capitalism” (p. 22). Joseph (2006) discussed how in the United States, “membership to original ethnic community is seen and placed as step toward the goal of being part of the American national community as well as being represented later on as the explanation of one’s place within the American community” (p. 23). Similarly, Toqueville (1945) claimed that “participation in civil society is what will generate national community, and that ethnic communal membership is posited here in relation to participation in the American community as an excess” (as cited in Joseph, 2006, p. 24). This abstract process of individuals becoming part of the American community and being able to make their own free choices does not mean that individuals will lose their own community

of origin. Instead, Joseph (2006) explained that through his process, individuals simply trade “one set of communal particularities and constraints for another” (p. 24). In this instance, viewing the nation of the United States as community means that community is defined by boundaries. Though these concepts of community refer to the community on a broader scale, such concepts can still relate to smaller sport organization communities. In particular, the concept of membership is often important for people who are involved in sport organizations, regardless of whether the membership is something that is gained through an economic transaction or whether that is something more abstract such as wearing the jersey of a team or supporting the organization through participation. Nonetheless, the literature on the concept of membership in communities is important to address as it is connected to a larger sentiment that the American people are tied to. That is, being part of smaller communities make people feel closer to being part of the American community as a whole, giving them a more sense of pride in nationality as well.

Joseph (2006) pointed out that when people identify as “we” who are part of the American community they are still inevitably living in “communities” such as small towns (p. 27). On the other hand, when people identify as “we” as townspeople, they are still represented by the larger community such as “we” congress people (p. 27). In the discourse of cultural pluralism and capitalism, for people to be able to participate in a community in the United States it is necessary for groups to have “certain standardized features” (e.g., businesses and organizations that are regulated by the government or that follow state laws) (Joseph, 2006, p. 28). In other words, community is linked to modern governance (Creed, 2006, p. 8). When groups do not follow specific requirements, then they are generally considered “gangs” or “underground network” and are not defined as “community” (Joseph, 2006, p. 28). While community can form through state/government regulations and definitions of community may

arise from the emotional ties the nation-state, Creed (1958) claimed that these are not the implications for a definition on community (p. 8).

In the context of this study, power and social distribution are explained by scholars such as Pfeffer (1994) and Babiak (2007). When it comes to power dynamics in sport organizations and community, the literature offers theoretical frameworks that address both power dynamics within the organization itself (in relation to the people who work there and the dynamics of the sport team) and power dynamics in relation to outside structures that exists in society. For instance, level of performance of a sports team is a “source of power that can help build one’s formal authority and reputation” (Pfeffer, 1994, p. 142) as one individual finds their place in a community. As a consequence, an individual establishing his/her formal role and position in a sport’s organization is also a source of power as it shows the individuals’ “ability to perform his or her job effectively” (Kleinrichert, 2008, p. 476). In his work, Pfeffer (1994) placed much focus with relationships within organizations. According to him, the people who work in an organization cannot work in isolation but must be able to with other individuals within the organization (Kleinrichert, 2008, p. 476). In order to do so, individuals should be “effective, goal-oriented and capable of developing a variety of relationships with others” (Kleinrichert, 2008, p. 476). Pfeffer (1994) described ‘being effective’ as knowing how to “develop sources of power” (p. 71). In the context of a sport organization these would be its resources (anything that is perceived to be valuable) (Pfeffer, 1994, p. 87). When individuals who work in sport organizations, such as head coaches, assistant coaches, managers, and administrators have control over resources as a result of interrelationships within the organization, they have power and dictate how other individuals gain access to these resources (Kleinrichert, 2008, p. 476). Kleinrichert (2008) stated that “these relationships are resources in themselves” (p. 476). In order for individuals who are part of an organization to create relationships and establish ties to other people and to other organizations, Culbert (1996)

claimed that one must have a “view of the world that the other person actually lives in” (p. 14). Furthermore, Kleinrichert (2008) stated that “how an individual perceives their reputation within an organization may shape both their motivate to establish ties to the community and their view of how they may establish inter-organizational sources of power” (p. 477).

In the context of this research, the power dynamics at play of the university’s tennis program’s head coaches, managers and administrators can be understood through Pfeffer’s (1994) characteristics of reputation development: “the ability to focus one’s energy and avoid wasted effort, sensitivity that allows to understand others, flexibility in order to achieve one’s goals, willingness to engage in conflict and confrontation, and the ability to be a good subordinate or team player” (p. 166). When important figures in the organization manifest these characteristics, they can gain ‘social approval’ and can acquire power (Pfeffer, 1994, p. 166).

Babiak (2007) is another scholar who discussed inter-organizational relationships and partnerships of groups formation that spark from collaboration between nonprofit, public, and private organizations in a sport context. New structures in society emerging through environmental factors such as “globalization, changing technologies, economic challenges, and evolving social expectations” (Babiak, 2007, p. 338) have forced sport organizations to find new innovative strategies to create and maintain personal relationships. Babiak (2007) mentioned how effectiveness of sport organizations is now generated within networks of interactions among organizations, such as embracing public-private partnerships (p. 338). While recruiting is certainly important with the increasing expectations of excellence in performance, Mills (1998) stated that “the future of sport depends on strong leadership, partnerships and accountability” (p. 1). In relation to the study, exploring the power dynamics through public-private partnerships between the city and the university, as well as partnerships with local restaurants and sponsors of the university tennis

programs is just as important as examining the relationships between people and groups that support the tennis programs. It is also worth to note that many people who are supporters of the tennis programs are either sponsors of organized events or have played a role in facilitating these partnerships, either through their statuses, titles, or financial contributions. The university sports program that this study wants to examine at the social level includes people of different ranks and titles in terms of leadership and economic power. With dynamics of power between groups within a sport organization, the study wants to explore the participants' subjective interpretation of the concept of community and what that entails for them.

The Critical Review

Creed's (2006) critical stance on the concept of community can be seen in one of the early statements made in his book: "*community is not a thing, or simply a concept, but rather a moment in modern rule, a moment saturated with affective power*" (p. 9-10). The reason why Creed used the term 'affective power' refers to the fact that, most times, when people use the term "community" in one way they unintentionally include other qualities that are generally associated with the word (e.g. "some degree of harmony, homogeneity, autonomy, immediacy, locality, morality, solidarity, identity, the idea of shared knowledge, interests, and meanings") (Creed, 2006, p. 5). The biggest challenge for authors like Creed, who have been calling for a reform on community, lay in the components that have been associated with the term community such as "a group of people, a quality of relationship (usually with a positive normative value), and a place/location" (Creed, 2006, p. 4). The concept of community is complex, and according to Creed (2006), it develops in relation to external forces (economic, environmental, geographical, political, organizational, etc.) to which individuals will have their own different emotional reactions to (p. 7). This is precisely why this study wants to take a critical route to examine the groups that revolve around the

university tennis program. While most people relate the term 'community' to geographical characteristics, and the relationships that blossom through a group of people, community needs to also take in consideration things such as organizational, economic, and political forces at play that also have an impact in shaping it.

This is how Joseph's (2006) analysis circles back into the discourse to help us understand how the Romantic concept of community is being challenged and how it is now viewed to be a dynamic complex one. Joseph (2006) explained this through the relationship of community and capitalism, suggesting that "community attains some of its emotional resonance and significance for rule through its role in a system of resource extraction and mobilization" (as cited in Creed, 2006, p. 8). While in the past, traditional definitions of community were based on "the commercialization and bureaucratization of social relations", now the understanding of community is associated with "state governance as its political and economic power is displaced" (Creed, 2006, p. 8). When the formation of communities is strongly influenced by political power, it more likely leads to community formations in relation to categories of political significance (e.g. religious, ethnic or racial communities) (Creed, 2006, p. 9). Both Creed (2006) and Joseph (2006) recognized that when communities do not fit within these images, they are no longer defined as "community". This argument can very well fit into the context of this study. The main reason resides in the fact that many of the people who are associated with the university's tennis program may refer to their relationships with other people in the program as being part of the 'tennis community' or the 'City's tennis community' or the 'university tennis community'.

Creed (2006) provided some examples as to how he challenged the Romantic view on community through the application of three strategies that critiqued traditional approaches to community. The first strategy insisted on "examining the making (and unmaking) of communities (Creed, 2006, p. 11). In the past, the major assumption has been

that community formation is natural or organic. Creed (2006) suggested that researchers should look at the history of community formations and identify when such collectivities started to develop a form of identity (whether internal or external) lead to being referred to as “community” (p. 11). In particular, focus should be placed on identifying the qualities and relations of such communities and the forces that generated them (Creed, 2006, p. 11). The second strategy challenged the “presumption of community as positive, while acknowledging diverse and often unintended consequences generated by invocations of community” (Creed, 2006, p. 11-12). This is precisely the picture that Lyon (2011) described as “feelings and images of small-town nostalgia in which people help out each other” (pp. 3-4). The same qualities that make community seen as “positive”, may result in discontent or dissatisfaction of community formations when those qualities are not realized (Creed, 1958, p. 12). From such thoughts, it follows that the same attitudes that generate community formations can also generate community exclusion. Lastly, Creed (2006) proposed a third strategy “against the objectification of communities, communities are constituted by and constituted of different regimes of knowledge” (p. 13). Following the concept that communities are not things, Creed (2006) challenged us to view “how community fits within the authorized forms of knowledge that shape how we understand and experience the world” (p. 13).

The Critical Approach in Relation to the Research Context

Creed’s critical stance on the concept of community is essential to understanding the research context of community formations at the Tennis Complex. The different group formations within the facility and their different kind of involvement with the tennis program challenge the assumption that community is simply seen as a positive thing. Using a critical approach to such context should also help bring to life conflicts and disagreements that may have occurred through the years within certain groups regarding

important decision that may have impacted the overall community. The following journal entry shows why the use of critical theory from the literature fits with the research context.

“By the way, thank you so much for giving me permission to conduct research here at the Tennis Complex, Josh.” I had just walked into his office at the Tennis Complex, and I was returning the racquet he had lent me for my tennis lesson that day. Josh is the director of the tennis complex, and I had asked him to sign a permission letter for me to start my participant observations and interviews at the Complex. He took over the position of director only last year, and he was now entering his second here running the facility.

“Yeah! Anytime. So, what are you going to do here exactly?”

“I will mainly observe participants as we host events here that will bring people together, such as the Pro-Am, our hidden dual tournaments, and our home games. Basically, I will just observe and then write field notes and journal entries. It’s going to be an ethnographic study. I don’t know if you know what that means but it’s not going to be the ‘classic’ quantitative research data collection. As the researcher, I am also part of the research by being present in the context observed.” I tried my best to briefly explain to him what I was going to do at the Tennis Complex in the following months.

“I understand. And what are you trying to find out? Like, what is your goal with this research?”

“The goal is to find out if a community actually exists here and what that means for the people who are supporters of the tennis program, the people who are members of the Tennis Complex and those who have been around this environment either for just a small period of time or all their lives. In addition, I am going to explore the power dynamics that are involved in everything that has impacted the people to create groups and crowds here at the Tennis Complex. If you think about it, even the power dynamics involved in the

process of making this Tennis Complex come to life as a facility that gave the possibility for groups of people to get together and support the tennis program.”

“Yeah. That’s really interesting. And I will tell you this. There are a lot of people in this context who don’t agree on many things. There are people in certain groups who want the Tennis Complex to be more inclusive for certain people rather than for others. I think this is one of the main conflicts that came with making this place a partnership between the university and City, you know. I am trying my best to make this facility as inclusive as possible for all the people who want to participate in leisure activities, but there are people who push against my decision, or that want things to be done in a different way. And these people have some kind of power into the decision-making process here at the complex as well, you know.”

“Yeah, exactly! That is something that I am going to investigate. Especially with the semi-structured interviews.”

Josh got up from his office chair to walk to the scanner and get the permission letter that he has just signed for me a minute ago.

“Well, there you go Luisa. And thanks for sharing about your research!”. I leaned forward to grab the permission letter, thanked him again and then left the office.

Review of Leisure and Sport in Community

Both leisure and sport take up significant and meaningful space of our social life, making it important to ask questions of community within these realms. Leisure has been seen by scholars in the literature as a “vehicle for the realization of community” (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Cook, 2003; Glover & Stewart, 2006; Sharpe et al., 2016, as cited in Glover & Sharpe, 2020). Leisure is a form of activity that permits us to step into an open space and “free ourselves of the transactional forms of existing and relating” (Glover & Sharpe, 2020). During times of leisure, we are able to engage with others through ways that we don’t

normally experience in other more structured parts of our lives. Within this open space lie possibilities of community. Similar to characteristics of traditional definitions of community reviewed earlier in the chapter, Glover & Sharpe (2020) claimed that “leisure brings together people with shared interests to socialize and build meaningful and durable relationships” (Introduction, iii.).

Leisure communities, just like any other type of communities, present us with the opportunity to feel members of a group who shares our same values, identities, or interests (Glover & Sharpe, 2020, p. 4 of Introduction). In other words, leisure communities, when formed, provide us with a sense of belonging (Bauman, 2021). However, in the dynamics of establishing a sense of belonging within a group are also connected the boundaries that groups, and therefore community, define. For instance, defining who is part of the community and who is out of the group. The identity of the members of the community is defined through the culture of the members themselves who constructed ‘community’ in the first place. Essentially, identity and community are “an outcome of their interactions” (Busher et al., 2007, p. 407). Through this process, some people may be more influential (depending on the degree of power they exert) in the construction of such community. Similarly, Haslam et al. (2011) wrote that “social identity refers to individual’s sense of *internalized group membership*” (p. 46). It describes how someone’s *sense of self* is tied to the awareness of belonging to a particular social group, and how group membership is meaningful (Haslam et al., 2011, p. 46). The process of one’s self no longer being seen in person terms (as “I”) is described by Turner (1982) as *depersonalization*. When joining a group, we generally expect the people who are already part of the group to know about the values and priorities of the group. When we experience depersonalization, moving from one group to another, each group becomes the measure of all things (Haslam et al., 2011, p. 53). Thus, it is established that community cannot exist with a number of people belonging to a

group. Nonetheless, being aware of a sense of self such as “I”, “us” and “them” when belonging to groups lead us to the argument that communities may not just produce affiliation but also distance (Grundmann and Osterloh, 2020). Once again, though community is often associated with the formation of positive feelings, we cannot disregard “social distinctions and power imbalances” (Glover and Sharpe, 2020, introduction, vi). With feelings of comfort linked to being part of a community, so are included feelings of discomfort and tension. Neal et al. (2019) suggested to think of community not as a form of attachment or belonging to a group but as a space “produced in the profound sociality of ‘being with’” (p. 69) – yet another approach to the concept of community that does not view ‘community’ as a just ‘thing’ or something static. Conceptualizing community as a process or a practice can fit very well with the conceptualization of leisure brought up by Cook (2003): “recreation and leisure can be understood as a kind of ‘re-creation’ of social life” (p. 1146).

If we think of the groups of people that this study examines in relation to community formation, the activities observed through ethnography are considered to be leisure activities for the members of such groups. For instance, playing tennis at the recreational level, attending tennis matches, hosting a dinner and cooking for the university’s tennis team, hanging out with the members of the tennis teams and other members of the Tennis Complex, etc. When these leisure practices are constantly repeated, “it reinforces a particular understanding of community through shared experiences and shared symbols” (Glover & Sharpe, 2020, p. 6 of introduction).

These experiences and shared symbols found in the modern processes have not only changed the public perception of community through leisure, but through sport as well. Rich et al. (2021) and Rich et al. (2022) referred to the notion of community – whether real or imagined – in the context of sport and sport management as something ubiquitous. Though the sport-community relationship is present everywhere in our modern society, it is most important

to understand that this relationship is “shaped by varying policies and politics”, making sport being understood through different cultural contexts (Rich et al., 2022, p. 1). This means that the same sport being performed in one country that has different policies in place as opposed to another country will impact its relationship to the community surrounding such sport. Furthermore, Bauman (2001) claimed that in modern society, people are stuck between “security and freedom: the more our lives have become separated from community, the more we long to experience it”. (as cited in Rich et al., 2021, p. 2). Sport serves as a vehicle to experience community through different lenses. For instance, the literature proposes studies that look at community and sport through different contexts: community as an outcome (Arai & Pedlar, 2003; Cunningham & Benefort; 2005), community as a site for struggle or resistance and social division (Spaaij, 2011; Bairner, 2003), and community as a form of regulation or social control (Rich et al., 2021, p. 1).

Ingham and McDonald (2003) claimed that “members of representational sport ‘communities’ do not necessarily inhabit a shared geophysical space”, but they can simply form symbolic ‘communities’ (p. 17). By representational, Ingham and McDonald (2003) refer to “organized competitive sports as a way in which the group conceives of itself in its relations with objects that affect it” (p. 17). This is also what Durkheim (1965) referred as ‘representations collectives’ in which such objects can be an athlete or a sports team which define as a ‘community’ all those people who in a way or another relate to the object (i.e. ‘I am a fan of this athlete’ or saying things such as ‘our athlete’ or ‘our team’) (Ingham and McDonald, 2003, p. 17) Thus, according to the authors, representational sport allows for creation of particular forms of “community”, but it is a matter of debate as to how solidarity the community really is (Ingham & McDonald, 2003, p. 18). At the geophysical level instead, Putman (2000) claimed that levels of community participation are linked to sport participation through high levels of generalized trust. Thus, the role of sport has been

highlighted in the literature in relation to community as a form of participation due to its potential for community strengthening through levels of trust, network connections and reciprocity (Long & Sanderson, 2001; as cited in Brown et al., 2014). Putman's headline of one of his most famous work *Bowling Alone* represented its argument on sport in relation to community and social capital through social interactions. The activity of bowling can be representative of sport as it can be seen as a team or an individual activity (Brown et al., 2014, p. 437).

The Concept of Power in Critical Theory and How It Shapes Community

Deetz (2005) pointed out how studies that use critical theory generally have a focus range that goes from macro (relations to the larger society) to micro (practices internal to specific organizations and situated in contexts). Within this range lie an exploration of relations among "power, language, social/cultural practices, and the treatment and/or suppression as they relate to the production of individual identities, social knowledge, and social and organizational decision making" (Deetz, 2005, p. 85). These asymmetrical power relations that critical theorists have explored in the literature come from class, gender, and/or position (Deetz, 2005, p. 86), but also from many other identity categories including nationality, religion, sexuality, etc. Also drawing from the work of Karl Marx and the exploitative relation in the workplace, Deetz (2005) identified four themes about organizations (p. 95). The theme of *reification* seemed worthwhile exploring. The concept explained how "a social formation is abstracted from the ongoing conflictual site of its origin and it is treated as a concrete entity" (Deetz, 2005, p. 96). Important to the concept of power in community formation, reification gives the "illusion that organizations and their processes are 'natural' and protects them from examination as produced under specific, potentially temporary, historical conditions and out of specific power relations" (Deetz, 2005, p. 96). Similar to the argument the critical arguments by Creed (2006) and Joseph (2006), one cannot assume that the process

of forming a community occurs naturally, especially at the organizational level (e.g. a sport's team). Further all the conditions that may be part of such organization need to be examined and explored to identify and define what 'community' is and how it perceived by the many people involved.

Organizational community and intentionality

In contemporary sport organizational practices, figures such as managers and coaches have freedom of decision making. Deetz (2005) articulated that "in ideology critique, managerial advantages can be seen as produced historically and reproduced actively through ideological discursive practices in society and in organizations themselves" (p. 96). A study conducted by Busher et al. (2007) argued that "studies of middle leaders (people who hold middle-ranking posts in the hierarchy of a school) have focused too much on their functions and characteristics, taking insufficient account of the influence of social and political contexts on leaders' choices of actions" (p. 405). The authors also pointed out that in the literature "there seem to be very few studies that are ethnographic and consider particular leaders in their own social, political and economic contexts" (p. 406). As they claimed, it is imperative to examine the complex dynamics of leaders that entail leadership and influence a collective group of people with asymmetrical power relationships (Busher et al., 2007, p. 407).

A theoretical tool that has been used in the literature to make sense of these dynamics is the framework developed by Wenger (1998) called Communities of Practice. Wegner (1998) stated that we "may recognize knowledge as a key source of competitive advantage in the business world, but we still have little understanding of how to create and leverage it in practice" (p. 1). The concept 'communities of practice' recognized that people who work in organizations are the most important resource in such setting, and that they "learn their participation in more specific communities made up of people with whom they interact on a regular basis" (Wegner, 1998, p. 2). Such communities are not only established in the

work setting, but they are everywhere. They can take place at home or in our hobbies. Busher et al. (2007) wrote that this framework “can be also used for thinking about how members of a department or school engage with and construct a community, or the multiple communities that make up a school” (p. 407). Wegner (1998) stated that “some communities have a name and some don’t” (p. 2). The members of such communities are informally bound by what they do together, from engaging in informal discussion to solving difficult problems and finding solutions, as well as by what they learn through their mutual engagement in such activities (Wegner, 1998, p. 2). In the construct of a community, Giddens (1991) wrote about the pursuit of self-identity and how that is an important part of “the interactive process by which people engage with others to construct social systems and structures” (as cited in Busher et al., 2007, p. 407). A community of practice is then defined by Wegner (1998) through three specific dimensions:

“The joint enterprise as understood by its members, the relationships of mutual engagement that binds members together into a society, and the shared repertoire of communal resources that members have developed over time” (p. 2).

Conclusion

This chapter provided a reviewed of the many different aspects and angles of the concept of community. The discussions of definitions of community in the literature, the evolution of the concept of community through history and how historical changes in society have impacted the concept of community, the relation of power with community, the review of critical theory and discussion of critical approach in relation to the research context hope to serve the reader of this paper to gain a better understanding of the overall concept of community. In particular, how the concept relates to leisure and sport through some of the theoretical tools discussed. This chapter served to build a literature review of all the concepts that helped to choose the methods and methodology best fit to use for this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

My own personal journey at the Tennis Complex started in 2016. Back then I was a freshman at the university and a student-athlete for the women's tennis team. While I do not recall detailed memories of my early years at the Tennis Complex as a tennis player, I started to pay more attention to my surroundings as I settled down in the city and in the tennis context. By my senior year, most of the tennis people in the city knew who I was as they had seen me perform for the past three years at the Tennis Complex. By then, I also started to memorize familiar names and faces that I would often encounter by at the Complex. Around this time, I had also started to get invited to some of these people's homes to have dinner and hang out with them. These were spectators, supporters, and coaches. During such informal dinners, our discussions would often end being about the tennis program: how the team was doing, how the coaches were handling the team, future goals for the program, disagreements and issues within the tennis teams and at the Tennis Complex, and discussions of organized events for community building. People seemed to be even more eager to engage in these kinds of conversations with me when I became the graduate assistant coach for the university women's tennis team in 2019. During my first year as coach, I did not feel as if I was involved in the full aspects of the job. I had just started graduate school and most of my time was taken up by my classes. However, once I became more accustomed to coaching, I learned how to balance the two and became more used to looking at our tennis program from a coach's perspective rather than a player. Through 2019 and 2020, it seemed like there were a lot of things that were moving forward for our program. One of these was finalizing enough funds to finally bring to life a new tennis facility on our university campus. This was a project that had been thought of and worked on for several years now. The goal was to reach a total of about \$7 million dollars solely through private donations to our tennis program. During this time, I was often included in meetings between our two head coaches

and the director of development at the university to discuss strategies and share updates about the fundraising process.

By the time I started my third year of coaching at the university, I felt like I had much more experience and was more involved with everything that was going on around the program (e.g. the struggles that our program was facing, the goals that both the head coaches and the athletic department had for the program, and the dynamics between some people in the 'community' and our tennis tennis). This was also the year when I started the Ph.D. program at the university. During this year, the people and their influence on our tennis program really caught my attention. Some of our supporters had not only had a huge impact on our tennis programs through private gifts, but I had learned that they had also started to form groups to get involved in decision-making over the Tennis Complex that would have an impact on our facilities and community formation.

A specific moment that caught my attention was during the men's tennis season home opener match in 2021. The team broke the record for the most number of people attending a home match. It was about 300 people in attendance. Though this number may not seem like a lot, it was an incredible number of people for a college tennis match. The atmosphere was phenomenal. The Complex was never quiet throughout the whole match. People were interacting with each other, drinking, eating, and having a great time socializing. I knew that this achievement and this atmosphere was not something that just came together naturally but was the result of a lot of effort put forth by the head coaches and the supporters themselves. This was the time when I realized that I wanted to explore the dynamics between these people and our tennis programs at the Tennis Complex. Being constantly present in this setting served me the opportunity to use ethnography as a methodology for my dissertation study.

The review of Creed's (2006) and Bender's (1978) discussions on the shift of

the American society's view on the concept of community in Chapter Two can offer a starting point for the unfolding of this next chapter. As both economic and political power transformed the notion of community by impacting people's perspectives at the societal level, these same dynamics can also play out in smaller and specific contexts within the larger society. Communities that form within organizational settings (e.g. within a university or a corporation) can be influenced by social and political powers that revolve around such settings. The formation of a community within an organizational setting such as a university has special characteristics in its form. Within a university, we can find that community can also form in more specific contexts such as around a sport's program. Furthermore, examining a university's sport program within the larger context of the university and its city may reveal unique characteristics on the concept of community formation.

In the context of this study, the uniqueness of the situation relies on the fact that the researcher has been a participant and active member of such community for several years. The university tennis teams (both men's and women's) that will be examined in this study are part of a NCAA Division I tennis program. Since the tennis program is tied to the institutional setting of a public university, all of the people who work for the program, such as coaches and administrators, are employed at the institution. On the other hand, the people who support the programs as fans or private donors are not necessarily tied to the university. This dynamic refers back to the discussion in Chapter Two of the difference between horizontal and vertical relationships in the process of community formation. In the case of this study, these are worth paying attention to as they might intertwine due to the interactions between people at the organizational level within the university setting versus the interaction between people on a larger scale at the Tennis Complex and in the city. Particularly important to note for the unfolding of this chapter is understanding that the dynamics of community formations may be influenced by both the internal and external forces that play a

role in the phenomenon at the organizational level (university's tennis team) through coaches, managers and administrators, and at the government institution (Tennis Complex) through directors and tennis pros. Particularly because of these reasons, I felt that ethnography was the research methodology best fit to explore the groups of people involved in such settings. Another reason resides in the fact that this type of methodology can represent authentic experiences with an abundance of details that take place in a dynamic context, such as an evolving collegiate sport's program.

Observational Sampling Strategy

This study did not have one single research site in which participant observations will take place. The research site included any organizational space where any person associated with the university's tennis program spent their time interacting with others and engaged in some form of relationships with one another. For instance, participant observations used local restaurants and houses of community members as research sites for participants observations, when informal dinners or happy hours were taking place at such locations. Another research site used included a new tennis facility that opened at the university's campus in January 2024. The table below presents the details of the spaces in which observations were conducted, including hours spent and dates.

Table 1.*Research Sites*

Research Site	Tennis Complex	New Campus Tennis Facility	House of community member	Local restaurant
Hours	33.5 hours	5 hours	6 hours	1.5 hours
Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 17th, 2023 • October 18th, 2023 • November 13th, 2023 • November 24th, 2024 • January 9th, 2024 • January 10th, 2024 • January 13th, 2024 • February 3rd, 2024 • February 9th, 2024 • March 6th, 2024 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 7th, 2023 • February 1st, 2024 • March 10th, 2024 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 12th, 2023 • October 25th, 2023 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 22nd, 2023

Participant observations focused on supporters, fans, donors, athletes, coaches and administrators' interactions with each other. For the purpose of this paper, supporters refer to those people who support the university's tennis team by attending tennis games but also by attending events related to the tennis programs (e.g. NCAA bracket pick, alumni dinners, Hall of Fame inductions, new tennis facility opening, fundraising tournaments, etc.). Supporters also include those individuals who offer encouragement and attention to student-athletes and coaches outside of the tennis-context (e.g. offering help to the needs of the student-athletes or coaches by bringing snacks or providing extra food and beverages during home games). Fans include those individuals who show an interest or admiration for the student-athletes competition during their tennis games, but who are not as involved as the supporters. Donors refer to those people who financially contributed to the university's tennis program. Athletes and coaches refer to the current tennis student-athletes and coaches of the

program. Administrators include both the athletic administrators of the university and the administrators of the Tennis Complex.

However, the Tennis Complex was the main site in which I spent most of my time observing these groups of people. The total hours of participants observation spent at the Tennis Complex were 32.5 hours. The following table includes the events observed at the site, the observations, the hours spent at each event.

Table 2.

Participant Observations at the Tennis Complex

Research Site: Tennis Complex				
Event	Observations/Descriptions	Date	Hours	Length of Fieldnotes
Doubles tournament between women's tennis team and a group of male recreational players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits, equipment) • Description of format and rules of the tournament (scoring, pairings, rounds) • Description of behaviors of participants around each other • Description of interactions and conversations heard 	10/17/2023	3	2910 words
Men's and Women's team practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptions of interactions with others when teams arrived at the Tennis Complex • Behaviors of teams at the Tennis Complex • Interactions between team members and outsiders during practice times • Interactions between team members and employees of the Tennis Complex 	01/09/2024 01/10/2024 02/03/2024	9	6846 words
Free tennis clinic organized by the university's tennis team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits, equipment) • Description of format and rules of the tennis clinic (court pairings, adult vs. kids drills) • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions between team members and participants of the clinic • Description of interactions and conversations heard 	01/13/2024	2	2075 words

Pro-Am tournament: dinner and drinks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of the set up and format of the dinner • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits) • Description of food and beverages consumed. • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions and conversations heard • Description of speeches made 	10/17/2023	2	3393 words
Pro-Am tournament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits, equipment) • Description of format and rules of the tournament (scoring, pairings, rounds) • Description of behaviors of participants around each other • Description of interactions and conversations heard 	10/18/2023	5	6689 words
Pro-Am: lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the set up and format of the lunch • Description of participants (demographics, outfits) • Description of food and beverages consumed. • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions and conversations heard • Description of speeches made and prize winners 	10/18/2023	2	4161 words
Local Ladies Mixer (Clinic and Refreshments organized by the women's tennis teams for female recreational players only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of the clinic format • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits) • Description of food and beverages consumed • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions and conversations between university's women's team and recreational female players • Description of 'Team Moms' • Description of speeches made by coaches 	11/13/2023	2.5	9259 words

Women's Head Tennis Coach Baby shower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of the set up of the baby shower • Description of the set up of the dinner and helpers • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits) • Description of food and beverages consumed • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions and conversations heard • Description of games played • Description of gifts • Description of speeches made 	02/09/2024	2.5	4516 words
Friends giving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all the sense • Description of participants (demographics, outfits, number) • Description of food and beverages • Description of conversations made • Descriptions of interactions between participants 	11/24/2023	2	2714 words
University men's team home opener game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all sense • Description of people in attendance (number, outfits, demographics) • Description of partnerships (food truck, breweries, inflatables, campus bookstore) • Description of tennis game and participants • Description of attendees' behaviors at the game • Interactions between attendees • Interactions between attendees and men's tennis team • Description of conversations heard • Behaviors of men's student-athletes and coaches during the games and their engagement with the crowd 	01/13/2024	3.5	8436 words

The first reason for choosing the Tennis Complex as one of the main observational sites is tied to the fact that I had worked at the Complex for the past five years and therefore I had been familiar with the environment and with the people who have come and gone or stayed

throughout the years. Prior to being a Coach, I was also a student-athlete for four years and have spent most of my time during those years at the Tennis Complex as well, summing up my time spent in this environment for a total of nine years. The second reason for choosing the Complex is more scholarly tied to use of critical theory in order to understand community formations. Forces of power such as the city and university politics, and people's status and wealth, played a role in the process of the Tennis Complex coming to life as facility that brings crowds together. While the supporters of the tennis program and the members of the Tennis Complex may have not necessarily been aware of the development of these dynamics as they occurred through the years, each person played essential roles to bring together different groups of people to engage in social interactions at the Complex.

It is worth noting that groups of people supporting the university's tennis program existed prior to the site of the complex being built. In particular, these were people that have grown up around the town and have been tied to the program through family members, coaches, or friends who worked for the tennis program. Prior to the site of the Tennis Complex being built, the university's tennis program did not have an indoor facility in the city. Matches and events were held at the outdoor tennis facility at the university. This outdoor facility, named after a former tennis coach at the university, held eight varsity courts for the men's and women's teams and six more public courts. However, the tennis teams had to commute to an indoor facility outside of town when the weather did not permit them to practice and compete outside. This was a major limitation for fans and supporters to come out to the matches as well as having an indoor space where the team could hold other events for their supporters.

The creation of the Tennis Complex, which opened in 2015, had been in the making for several years prior. It required the collaboration of the city and the university officials, and a major effort put forth by the head coaches and the people who supported the

project financially. Having been present at the Complex as an athlete, a coach, and a supporter since its opening, my personal experiences already held much information about the impact that this facility had on the development of the relationships between the people who take part in activities there. In particular, the dynamics of the relationships between the people involved in the university's tennis program and the people who simply participated in recreational activities at the Complex. Since its opening, the Tennis Complex facilitated dynamics of social interaction between all kinds of groups in the city community. Nonetheless, without the financial support and the decision making of some of these people, the formation of such relationships between groups could have not been possible in the same way that it has unfolded in the last few years.

The second research site included a brand-new outdoor tennis facility that opened on campus in January 2024. My observations here included any event associated with the opening of the facility and the first tennis matches ever played here, was observed. The excitement of the people behind the construction of this facility in the last year has brought many supporters and donors together to engage in activities at this specific site. Outdoor university tennis matches for the Spring season of 2024 took place for the first time at this new facility, making it worth observing people's interactions and the atmosphere here as opposed to matches played at the site of the Tennis Complex. The new outdoor tennis facility on campus consists of eight outdoor courts with lights, a mezzanine with stands and seats, an indoor space that holds a players' lounge, locker rooms, offices, bathrooms and a kitchen.

Other research sites used for participant observations included any other space in which people who have formed relationships through the tennis program got together for informal or formal events. For instance, if an informal happy hour meeting occurred in a restaurant, the site of the restaurant was used for participant observation. Another example

included informal dinners that took place at the supporter's houses in which people spent time together and interacted with each other.

The critical approach

Within critical theory, scholars have tended to lean towards social constructionism as a form of epistemology, perhaps due to the belief that through social constructionism reality is very much socially defined (Davidson et al., 2006, p. 36). Through forces that shape society, critical theory has been used to “understand change by balancing concepts of power, domination, and resistance while calling for steps collective action” (Davidson et al., 2006, p. 37). These are all examples of concepts that this research explored in the phenomenon of community around the university's tennis programs. In particular, the use of critical theory in this research can be used to understand major changes and shifts at the organizational level and how those changes have impacted this phenomenon through the decades. Critical theory does not just focus on one individual, but it emphasizes the relation of one person to another. Furthermore, it does not focus on just exploring groups of individuals per se, but rather their conflicts with a particular class within the relationships that already exist in world (Horkheimer, 1972, p. 211). Critical theory seemed to be the theoretical perspective that best fit this study as the research aimed not to simply observe an individual or group of individuals, but also dig deeper into their relationships with one another and gain their perspectives on concepts of power, conflicts and external forces on the formation of community. In order to explore these dynamics, it is critical to describe in detail the site in which most of these relationship take place.

Description of the Tennis Complex

The Tennis Complex used as the main site of study for this research is an indoor tennis facility based in the area of Middle Tennessee. The 70,000-square foot complex offers eight indoor tennis courts with two electronic scoreboards for fans to follow the game

scores from the lounge area with a mezzanine dedicated for spectator viewing. The indoor part of the complex also includes men's and women's locker rooms, as well as a pro shop and two kitchen rooms. The location also includes a total of 24 outdoor courts (16 of which are lit). Since 2015, the Tennis Complex has been the official home of the university's tennis program, located just ten minutes' drive from the university campus. The project came to life as a joint partnership between the city, the University and a nonprofit organization. The project has been part of the university's \$80 million Centennial Campaign announced in April 2012, from which the university provided \$1.8 million to help fund the Complex. The nonprofit foundation provided the City with a \$500,000 check, and the rest of the funds were provided by the City to amount to a total of \$5.8 million. The Complex is operated by the City's Parks and Recreation, including outdoor court usage and reservations.

The Tennis Complex does not only serve to enhance the university's men's and women's tennis programs to showcase their excellent teams, but it also gives a wonderful chance for the tennis community in the city to practice both leisure and competitive activities through the sport of tennis. It especially provides a site in the city for kids to get involved with the sport of tennis outside of school hours. The site is also home to USTA (United States Tennis Association) and UTR (Universal Tennis Rating) tournaments, which are great developmental opportunities for young tennis players. Due to its grand space and numerous amount of courts, the Tennis Complex is also considered to be one of the best sites in the state to host the collegiate Conference tournament for the university tennis teams.

The agreement finalized between the city and the university guarantees the university's tennis programs access to the Complex every day from 1 to 4 p.m. for tennis practices and scheduled times during weekends for tennis matches. The total court time reserved for the university's tennis team in a year is 14.2%, leaving the rest of the time to be assigned to public use. The city community has access to the Complex's courts during

morning and evening hours. There are currently 900 members registered in the Tennis Complex system. Not all of the members are necessarily involved in activities with the University tennis teams and/or with other people who are part of such tennis community. About half of the members of the Tennis Complex are people who play tennis recreationally and do not consistently engage in conversations and interactions with other people at the Complex or support of the university tennis teams in any way. These people are simply members of the Tennis Complex that use the facility to merely play tennis recreationally. Two tennis Professionals then serve the community members with private lessons and tennis clinics for all age groups. For those who wish to use the indoor courts at the Complex, the fees vary for members and nonmembers. Members can have access to the indoor courts for free if they reserve within 24 hours. If reserved outside of 24 hours, the court fee is \$12 per court per hour. Nonmembers must prepay if they reserve a court outside 24 hours and their fees include a court fee of \$15 per court per hour and a guest fee of \$10 per person.

As established, the space of the Tennis Complex is a shared site for a site for both public and university sport. Some of the activities that are hosted at the Tennis Complex include formal or informal dinners and refreshments, usually organized by the head coaches of the programs after holding tennis clinics for the community. Examples of other events also include fundraising initiatives advertised by the university to get the community members involved into contributing financially back to the university tennis teams.

Gaining Entry

Mike and I had just sat on opposite sides of the couch in his living room after having had a lovely dinner together with his wife and two kids. We were both sipping on a glass of white wine that I had brought as a gift for the Italian dinner he cooked for us. The friendship between Mike and I started in 2020. Him and his family moved to town in 2019. When they moved here, Scott became an employee of the Tennis Complex working as a Pro

there. The following year, he took over the position of volunteer assistant coach for our women's tennis team. Our friendship started then, and it initially revolved around conversations about the tennis program and the Tennis Complex. After serving as the volunteer coach for two years, he decided to step back from this commitment to the women's tennis team. He also stepped back from this role as Pro at the Tennis Complex in 2023. However, he remained involved in activities and events at the Tennis Complex. To this day, the athletes on our team still have a good relationship with him and he holds the record for rowdiest fan during home games as a spectator.

"So, how's the team looking like this year?" he asked after taking the last sip of his white wine.

"Well, we'll have four new girls. So, half of the team will be brand new. Of course, I am hoping for a better season than last year. If anything, I think our doubles will look much stronger than ever with the new recruits."

We spent the next fifteen minutes talking about the new recruits in detail, and I explained what I thought each one of them could bring to our team. At some point during our conversation, we got interrupted by his one-year-old crying from the baby crib across the room. Mike got up and walked over to pick up his son. After a few minutes, his baby stopped crying and Mike turned back to me and changed the topic of the conversation.

"So, how is school going to look like for you this next year?" he asked.

"Well, I am about to start collecting data for my dissertation. So that's what I will be working on for most of this fall semester."

"That's awesome! I know we talked about this already but remind again how are you going to do that?" As he asked this question, he poured himself another glass of wine.

"I'm going to spend most of my time observing all the people that participate

in any event or activity that is associated with the tennis program, and then I have in plan to interview different kinds of subjects from all the people who participate. In fact, it would be amazing if in a few weeks you would be willing to participate in the study through a semi-structured interview”.

“For sure Lu! Just let me know when. By the way, you should totally come to our Monday night league if you want to be introduced to other guys who follow the tennis program that you could interview as well”.

“That would be awesome! What is Monday night league?”. I had never heard of this before Mike mentioned it that night.

“It’s just a group of men of different ages who get together and play tennis on Monday nights at the Tennis Complex from 4 to 6 pm.” He explained.

“Oh nice! How long have you been part of this group and played tennis with them?”

“I only joined a month ago when one of the guys invited me, but it’s been going on for a year now. They have been meeting every Monday night of every week. You should totally come hit with us one day and I’ll introduce you”.

“That would be incredible, yes!”

“Yeah and we go get drinks at the bar after tennis every Monday as well. You could talk to them about your study then and see if they are interested in participating”.

“Yes! That’s exactly what I need. Thanks Mike!”.

As described in this journal entry, I had been familiar with people who participated in events at the Tennis Complex. Whether these were acquaintances or friendships, they evolved during my nine years being part of the tennis program. Like this journal entry shows, most times I would gain entry to other people associated with the tennis program by simply having conversations and being invited to informal events (e.g. Monday

night league and informal dinners). This section of the journal also points out how, although I had been pretty involved and thought I knew of all the activities that went down at the Tennis Complex, I was not aware of this important group formation that had been going on for about a year now. This instance represents a problem for researchers who want to study contexts that they are already part of as they may miss out on important details that are not always noticeable unless they gain more information from participant's perspectives. This particular example in the journal made me especially curious to identify how this group of men got together in the first place and how they got to know each other. Mike mentioned that this group followed the tennis program, hinting that they were probably supporters of the program in some kind of way.

Institutional Ethnography as a Mode of Inquiry

According to Brewer (2000), ethnography is defined as follow:

“the study of people in naturally occurring ‘fields’ by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally” (p. 6).

Being present in the research context was the primary reason why ethnography was chosen as the methodology for this study. Gobo (2011) wrote that “what most distinguishes ethnography from other methodologies is a more active role assigned to the cognitive modes of observing, watching, seeing, looking at, gazing at and scrutinizing” (p. 31). Moreover, Brewer (2000) claimed that ethnography has been used in recent years as a way to “persuade readers of the credibility of the account offered as to present ‘findings’ (viii). Wolcott (1973) discussed the way in which ethnography is often interviewing by the terms ‘method’ and ‘methodology’. Brewer (2000) wrote that ethnography is often viewed as “a method to collecting data” (p. 7) but Wolcott (1973) referred to ethnography as a perspective rather than a way of data collection. For the purpose of this study, it is worth noting the difference between ‘big’ and ‘little’ ethnography pointed out by Brewer (2000).

Some researchers have used the term ‘ethnography’ to refer to qualitative research as a whole. When ethnography is understood as the qualitative method, it can be referred to a ‘big’ ethnography, as Wolcott (1973) viewed it as a perspective on research rather than a way of doing it (Brewer, 2000, p. 18). On the other hand, ‘little’ ethnography is what other researchers have defined it through ‘field research’ or ‘fieldwork’. As such, ethnography becomes a way of doing qualitative research (Brewer, 2000). This specific study uses ‘little’ ethnography to study real-life situations. When doing so, the researcher observes people in the setting in which they participate in their day-to-day activities. Brewer (2000) stated that through ‘little’ ethnography, the methods used are “unstructured, flexible and open-ended” (p. 18). According to Hammersley (1990) and Atkinson and Hammersley (1994) ethnography contains the following features:

“studying people’s behavior in everyday, collective data in a flexible and unstructured way but primarily by means of observation, focusing on a single setting or group, and analyzing the data by attributing the meanings of the human actions described and explained” (p. 1-2; p. 110-111).

While much thought was given to the use of critical ethnography for this research, I found that the procedures and methods of institutional ethnography, especially for the analysis of the project, were best fit to approach this part of the research. According to Smith (2006) “the aim of institutional ethnography is to explore particular concerns or strands within a specific institutional complex, in ways that make visible their points of connection with other sites and courses of action” (p. 17). The institutional complex explored in this study is the university’s tennis program. Smith (2006) discussed the power of institutional ethnography as a way of “discovering beyond one individual’s experience, including the researcher’s own” (p. 1). The difference between institutional ethnography and other types of ethnographies is that the first proposes a sociology that “does not begin in theory but in people’s experiences” (Smith, 2006, p. 2). In fact, this type of ethnography begins “in the actualities of the lives of some of those involved in the institutional process and focus on how

those actualities were embedded in social relations” (Smith, 2005, p. 31). The institutional processes that this study focuses on are the history of tennis facilities in the city; the customs, activities, contributions and interactions of participants; and the collaboration between a city and a university through a shared tennis facility to investigate how the two entities operate and interact with each other. The objective of this approach is to explore people’s ordinary knowledge on “how things are put together in our every day lives to dimensions of the social that transcend the local and are all the more powerful and significant in it for that reason” (Smith, 2006, p. 3). This type of methodology starts by “looking at where people are in their own lives, activities and experiences, to open up relations and organization that are actually present in them but are not observable” (Smith, 2006, p. 4). IE provides a chance to find out “how people doings in everyday are articulated to and coordinated by extended social relations that are not visible from within any particular local setting and just how people are participating in those relations” (Smith, 2005, p. 36). The use of institutional ethnography seemed to be best fit to use for this particular study to help the researcher discover ‘how things are actually put together’. Smith (2006) stated that interviews and participant observation with institutional ethnography are “treated by the authors as autonomous methods” (Smith, 2006, p. 6). Institutional ethnography starts from establishing a standpoint (experiences and concerns of participants) which gives the director of the researcher’s further steps (Smith, 2005, p. 31). Such issues, concerns and problems, situated in people’s relationships to an institutional order are then “explicated by the researcher in taking with them and setting the director of the inquiry” (Smith, 2005, p. 32). From here, the researcher will specify the ‘problematic’ of the research (Campbell and Gregor, 2002; Althusser, 1971). Smith (2005) addressed the problematic as a way to:

“differentiate between the actual properties of the every day worlds that are always tied in multiple ways to complexes or relations beyond them, making the actual organization the problematic of an inquiry that tracks from people’s experiences of

the local actualities of their living into the relations present but only partially visible within them” (p. 38-39).

The problematic of the research was identified after conducting the first fifteen interviews and hearing points of discussions about concerns and conditions to be improved from the participants. The following section is extracted from an entry in the research journal from March 16th, 2024:

After hearing the responses of the participants interviewed so far, many of the concerns were brought up following discussions about the Tennis Complex and the power dynamics within the community context. One of the concerns identified was regarding the new tennis facility that opened on the university’s campus in January 2024. Both supporters and coaches showed thoughts of concerns knowing that most of the practices and matches of the university tennis teams would now move to the campus facility rather than the Tennis Complex. Would people still support the team on and off the court? Would the lack of regular interactions occurring every day at the Tennis Complex between the university teams and the recreational players change the conceptualization of community for these groups? Would people show the same pride and sense of identity towards the new campus facility as shown at the Tennis Complex? Would the Tennis Complex’s administration drastically change in the management of the facility now that the university tennis teams would not be as present at the Tennis Complex? Other concerns included worries about the community members not attending the tennis matches on campus due to the lack of indoor tennis courts and the discomfort of a further drive to the campus location. Another problem discussed was the hypothetical question of what would happen if the head coaches of the university tennis teams would change in the following years. Would the outreach of the university tennis programs into local schools, local recreational players of the Tennis Complex and other local tennis facilities still be the same? Would any drastic change occurring to the university tennis program would change the conceptualization of community for its members?

Burawoy (1991) stated that institutional ethnography may be used “to uncover the macro foundations of a microsociology” (p. 282). At the micro level, the researcher explores the ‘life world’ using participant observations while at the macro level, the researcher looks at ‘the system’ using theory that is operative (Smith, 2005, p. 35). With

participant observation, the research analysis is ‘hermeneutic’ (Smith, 2005, p. 36). The investigation of the daily life and experiences of participants enables the researcher to then discover ‘the properties of the system world’ (Smith, 2005, p. 37). According to Burawory (1991), this process is commanded by theory, which turns the research to be ‘scientific’ (p. 284).

Data collection

Participant Observation

Ethnography is a technique that was born based upon using the method of direct participant observation (Gobo, 2011; Madison, 2011). While participant observation is generally the primary method associated with ethnography, other terms such as ‘fieldwork’ and ‘case study’ also merge with this type of methodology (Gobo, 2011, p. 33). For this research study, participant observation will be the main type of method use to generate data due to the fact that through this method, the researcher is ‘being present’ in the research context and is able to gain “firsthand experience in naturally occurring events” (Wolcott, 1999, p. 46). Madison (2011) stated that “ethnographic presence opens the passageways for readers and audiences to experience and grasp the partial presence of a temporal conversation constituted by other’s’ voices, bodies, histories, and yearnings” (p. 13). The importance of participant observation for this study lies particularly in two reasons. The first reason is tied to the fact that I have been present in this environment for years which in consequence led to me being able to bring up the questions for this research. In addition, being present in the midst of dynamic events unfolding and evolving should facilitate the process of participants forgetting about my presence around them as a researcher. This is particularly important because in studying issues of social science, scholars tend to usually just observe behavior of participants instead of examining the culture, community, and power that they all work with and that shape their behaviors (Wolcott, 1999).

With institutional ethnography, De Vault and McCoy (2002) stressed the point of starting with people's experiences. This research began similarly to Diamond's (1992) study, in the way that it started with the researcher's own experiences through participant observational interviews and then proceeded to engage with others who were similarly involved in the institutional process. My personal observations started by describing details of the research sites (Tennis Complex, outdoor campus tennis facility, restaurants, houses) through the use of all the senses (sounds, smells, textures, temperature). Observations then gradually moved into describing demographics of the participants, and description of their interactions with each other and their conversations. These entailed observing participants that ranged from student-athletes, coaches, members of the Tennis Complex, recreational players, and supporters of the tennis programs while they engaged in habitual activities at the Tennis Complex. Activities involved tennis clinics, lunches, dinners, matches, and other social events held at the Tennis Complex and at other relevant settings.

Though I have been present at the Tennis Complex for several years as a player and a coach, I turned to make a commitment to observe participants and activities related to the university's tennis program as a researcher for a period of six months (October to March). As a present researcher in the process of participant observation at this site, I was aware that I was going to be the primary instrument for data collection. While much of the efforts put forth in the participant observations focused on the participants' experience, I also kept track of my own experiences as well. This allowed me to take a step out of objective observations and add my own subjective perceptions to provide additional data. I did so by writing in a research journal, which was used as the main tool to collect data on my own personal experiences. This process had the goal of highlighting my role as a participant at the Tennis Complex, but it also acted as way to spot how my own subjectivity could be blinding

me to important aspects of the phenomenon. The following section is a sample of a journal entry taken on December 1st, 2023, reflecting on the first six interview conducted at that time.

I knew who Miranda was for a long time before the interview and have seen her around the tennis complex for years, but I was not as familiar with her background as I was with James and Christy. I felt like she took the interview very seriously. What was interesting with this interview was the fact that when I asked about power dynamics and politics within this community, she got stuck for a second, refused to answer and then asked me to ask her a different question. However, towards the end of the interview Miranda was the one who brought up a very interesting topic of group formation who took a political stance on matters regarding the management Tennis Complex, and then proceeded to ask me why I had not asked a question about this matter. Reflecting on this, this interview made me realize that perhaps the way that I am asking certain questions may come off as too aggressive or not clear enough for people to form an answer in a matter of seconds. Her initiative to talk about this topic at the end of the interview has helped me think about how to rephrase the question and perhaps offer more hypothetical scenarios based on her answer.

One example of a significant event worth observing for this research was the Pro-Am tournament held at the Tennis Complex every year. This is the most prominent fundraising event at the Complex, organized by the university's head tennis head coaches. This event acts as a great example as it was used as a major focus of data collection, along with other organized events that occur at the Complex throughout the year. The tournament usually takes place in the Fall season every year, and it is a two-day event organized by the university's tennis program at the Tennis Complex. A professional player (anyone who is a tennis student-athlete or a coach) gets paired up with an amateur to compete in a doubles tournament where each pro-am team will compete against another Pro-Am team. Many people participate by donating a monetary gift and hanging out at the event, watching the tournament from the stands and interacting with others during the dinner or the lunch. The event includes a tennis clinic in which the head coaches do their best at engaging with all the

amateurs on court and the people watching from the stands through competitive and fun tennis games. Games often involve winning small prizes, such as university's tennis hats, backpacks, or beer coolers. The clinic is followed by a dinner where every participant mingles with others and the tennis teams introduce their players to the participants. The following day the tournament takes place in the morning, and the event concludes with a lunch where everyone continues to interact with each other.

With the Pro-Am tournament taking place in October, the Tennis Complex only holds a few more events during the Fall season that bring groups of people together. Even though my job as assistant coach required me to spend a few hours a day at the Tennis Complex, I was not able to observe valuable interactions at the facility every day. The most active events that tend to bring people together at the Tennis Complex occur during the Spring season (January-May), as the site holds tennis games mostly every weekend. Due to the timing of the research, much of my observations took place during the events being held in the Fall season. Nonetheless, I also include observations from early tennis games at the Tennis Complex in January, especially the season's home openers of the university's men tennis team.

My own personal observations, as well as the participants' observations at the Tennis Complex, generated the main type of data collection for this study through the creation of field notes. These included both my personal observations at the Tennis Complex throughout the years, my observations of participants engaging in their activities at the Complex, and the participants' experiences and observations that will be gained through ethnographic interviews during participant observations. In trying to answer questions related to community, observations were used to describe the research context, what people usually do at the Tennis Complex and how they interact with each other. The same process was used to conduct participant observations at any other site relevant for the research, such as the

outdoor campus tennis facility. Other relevant examples of events in which I conducted participant observations were seasonal tennis matches, baby showers held at the Tennis complex, tennis clinics, formal and informal dinners.

The process of field notes was initiated orally into voice recording. Similar to the method used by Dunlap (2008), this process used the “oral shorthand” method. This method permitted the researcher who was present and fully immersed in a social situation to step back in the midst of the observations, and record her experience to be transcribed into valuable and detailed field notes in a later moment with the goal to transcribe these recordings as soon as the observations are over. I used audio ‘jottings’ for several events. For events that were very loud such as the men’s tennis game at the Tennis Complex and the Local Ladies Mixers, I stepped out of observing the event to take the audio recordings. I would often use a bathroom excuse to record these jottings. For other events, I could generally step out from a conversation, or a group of people and record details observed into my phone for a time of one to two minutes. Audio recordings were then written into notes as soon as the event was over.

The Research Journal

Prior and throughout the time of the research, I kept record of my own personal experiences and observations in a personal research journal. The journal was the initial data generated for this study as it started as an entry of my personal observations and experiences of the Tennis Complex and its participants during the years that I have been involved in this context prior to when the research started. The research journal also contained writings in narrative form from conversations that I had personally had with participants over the course of the years in this specific environment. Specifically, through this journal I kept record of relevant events worth exploring, details about people’s background and how they came to be involved with the university’s tennis program or the

Tennis Complex itself. From here, the journal kept track of the process and development of the study as I informed participants of the process of observation and interviews. The research journal was separate from the field notes, and served as a way to be responsive to my own thoughts or feelings in the way that they shape data collection and make sense of people's behaviors.

Interviewing

Using interviews as another method for this study will be critical to building an understanding of the phenomena from the participants' perspective and comparing the data collected here with the data from the field notes. Through the process of ethnography, Wolcott reminded us of the important difference there is between *experiencing* and *enquiring*. In experiencing, the researcher is a passive observer of what is going on, while through enquiring the researcher takes an active role in asking about what is going on (Wolcott, 1999, p. 47). In the process of interviewing, this will present the challenge to know when to remain silent and let the flow of natural conversations take place and when to be intentional in imposing the research's agenda into such conversations.

With participant observation, I will describe the dynamics of the research context through my own personal eyes as I observe them. The interviews will then allow participants to offer their own thoughts and experiences. Such descriptions of participants' experiences have the potential to bring up to the surface important details that could have not been accessed otherwise. An interview is essentially "a conversation that has a structure and a purpose" ... "to understand themes of the *lived daily world* from the subject's own perspectives" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 3, p. 24). This is particularly crucial for this study as the group of people observed varies in several aspects. The participants interviewed include different genders, ages, occupations, income, and background in terms of relation to the sport of tennis and to the university's tennis program. During the process of interviewing,

the hope was to find answers to the questions of power that some of these individuals may have exerted directly or indirectly onto others within groups of people associated with the university's tennis program. Using the method of interviewing is not only a way to collect 'natural discourse' (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2019), but this research method is also used to construct such discourse scientifically so that it can provide scientific explanation to the problem at hand.

When conducting research during tennis games and events, I was fortunate enough to be already familiar with most of the participants who were part of the research process, which made these interviews informal in their nature.

The ethnographic interviews were used a strategy for getting people to talk about what they knew based on their experiences with the tennis program and their interactions with other individuals involved. Such interviews did not use formal recording or protocols such as for the semi-structured interviews, but they were conducted by bringing up topic of interests between the researcher and the participants. Examples of questions will be: how long have you been attending events related to the tennis program? Have you ever attended events outside of tennis home games? How did you get involved in following the tennis program? The data gathered from these informal interviews will then be either transcribed into field notes or recorded into an audio recorder as soon as possible.

In addition to ethnographic interviews, twenty-three semi-structured interviews were conducted with core members of the tennis community. The participants interviewed were chosen with the goal to have a variety of different subjects' perspectives, based on their different association with the tennis program. The list of participants included two university's head tennis coaches, one associate head coach, four current student-athletes, two former student-athletes, two former head coaches, one employer of the Tennis Complex, and eleven fans/donors of the tennis' program. The following table shows the number of

participants interviewed, their role and affiliation with the university or city, the date and length of the interview, a note about their length of involvement with the Tennis Complex, and the length of time that I have known them.

Table 3.

Participants Interviewed

Participant	Role/affiliation with the university	Date	Time	Length of transcript	Involvement with the Tennis Complex	Length of time knowing this person
#1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Coach for the university women's tennis team • Employee at the Tennis Complex • Supporter 	10/16/2023	53:56:00	7993 words	Very involved with the Tennis Complex as he was a full time Pro there between 2018 and 2022, and now a current part-time Pro.	6 years
#2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student-athlete 	10/28/2023	34:23:00	6285 words	Spent nearly every day practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex since she was a student-athlete. Used to take lessons from Pros and paly tournaments there as a teenager.	4 years
#3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporter • Recreational player • Member of the Tennis Complex 	10/28/2023	53:53:00	7866 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex.	8 years
#4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Recreational player • Member of the Tennis Complex 	10/18/2023	68:35:00	9251 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Was involved in contributing	8 years

					financially to construction of the Tennis Complex.	
#5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Member of the Tennis Complex 	11/05/2023	37:12:00	5150 words	Does not spend time at the Tennis Complex except for when his kids play there or when the university tennis teams compete there. Contributed financially to the university tennis program	6 years
#6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former student-athlete • University Alumni 	11/18/2023	50:32:00	7742 words	Spent nearly every day of her college career practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex.	8 years
#7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor • Fan • Member of the Tennis Complex 	11/18/2023	67:54:00	10307 words	Not a regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to the university's tennis program.	1 month
#8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student-athlete 	12/08/2023	55:32:00	8269 words	Spent nearly every day practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex since she was a student-athlete.	4 years
#9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex • Donor 	12/14/2023	34:08:00	4737 words	Does not spend time at the Tennis Complex except for when her is kids play there or when the university	6 years

					tennis teams compete there. Contributed financially to the university tennis program.	
#10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex 	12/14/2023	62:30:00	7884 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Was involved in contributing financially to construction of the Tennis Complex as well as contributing to the university' tennis program.	4 years
#11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex 	12/22/2023	72:04:00	11434 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Was involved in contributing financially to construction of the Tennis Complex as well as contributing to the reuniversity' tennis program.	7 years
#12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former university men's head coach • University Alumni 	12/19/2023	93:53:00	12449 words	Does not spend time at the Tennis Complex. Not currently involved.	1 year
#13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Member of the Tennis Complex • Alumni 	01/02/2024	55:02:00	7520 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both the construction of the Tennis	4 years

					Complex and the university tennis programs.	
#14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Former student-athlete Alumni 	01/03/2024	45:22:00	7590 words	Spent nearly every day of his college career practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex.	6 years
#15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current student-athlete 	01/08/2024	29:21:00	4101 words	Spent nearly every day of the past year practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex.	1 year
#16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current student-athlete 	01/10/2024	44:26:00	7670 words	Spent nearly every day practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex since she was a student-athlete.	4 years
#17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fan Donor Member of the Tennis Complex 	01/18/2024	81:51:00	11666 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	6 years
#18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fan Donor Member of the Tennis Complex Former university women's head tennis coach University Alumni 	01/18/2024	81:58:00	11666 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	6 years

#19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex 	01/18/2024	54:12:00	9105 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	1 year
#20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee of the Tennis Complex 	02/05/2024	42:05:00	6412 words	Works at the Tennis Complex every day. Also plays tennis recreationally at the facility.	6 months
#21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current university associate head men's tennis coach 	03/25/2024	49:26:00	7033 words	Spent nearly every day coaching the university men's team at the Tennis Complex since he started coaching for the university.	3 years
#22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current university head men's tennis coach 	04/08/2024	54:18:00	10063 words	Spent nearly every day coaching the university men's team at the Tennis Complex since he started coaching for the university.	8 years

#23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current university head women's tennis coach 	04/03/2024	57:54:00	8672 words	Spent nearly every day coaching the university women's team at the Tennis Complex since she started coaching for the university.	6 years
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Familiarity with the participants was also helpful in the sampling strategy process. I started by interviewing current and former student-athletes and supporters whom I was familiar very with. For the first ten interviews conducted, I chose participants who had been associated with the university tennis program or the Tennis Complex for several decades or their whole life, as well as people who had only spent their last three to five years in this research context. These initial interviews were helpful as these participants provided suggestions and recommendations of additional people to interview. The following set of participants interviewed were people who I was not familiar with, who provided additional relevant insights on the research. In this process, I tried to chose participants who I thought would provide the most honest answers, especially regarding power dynamics around the formation of the tennis community. Finally, the last five interviews were conducted with who I considered to be 'high profile' targets, the current head coaches of the university's tennis program. I saved these participants for last as I expected for interviews' questions to keep on evolving through the process as people would react and respond to them. This gave me the chance to make sure I would ask the best questions to the last five to ten participants interviewed. In these interviews, participants were specifically asked about the concept of community and any external forces that may have affected the evolution of the tennis program under all aspects (recruitment, facilities, community formation, and funds) through the years.

The interviews started off with a briefing section in which I introduced myself, explained what the research was about, what research questions I was looking to find answers to, the interview agenda, a discussion of benefits and risks in participation to the interview, and consent to record. Before diving into questions related to the university's tennis program and participants' experiences, I asked each participant some background questions about their biography. For instance: where did they grow up? How long have they lived here? Do they still play tennis? In what setting? And so on. Questions then moved into understanding how the participants were currently associated with the Tennis Complex and the university's tennis program. When starting to talk about the tennis programs, questions then turned into exploring how the participants' experiences around the tennis teams have changed and evolved through time. Questions continued to mold based off answers that the participants provided. As the researcher, my job during these interviews was to guide the conversations and to dig deeper about the participants' conceptualization of community (e.g. what makes them use that specific term, what it means to them, etc.). Questions guided the participants to talk about their experiences with other people at the site of the research, but also about their interactions with others outside of the research setting. These questions aimed to target both their experiences with the university tennis program and its members, but also others who may just participate in recreational activities at the Tennis Complex. The last section of the interview questions then turned into asking questions about power dynamics and their impact on the process of community. For instance, understanding if and how the leadership power exerted by the tennis head coaches have impacted this phenomenon. Other questions targeted the dynamics involved between the Tennis Complex being a partnership between the university and the city, as well as the power that some individuals may have had in terms of decision-making that may have impacted this collaboration through the years. In addition, the interviews will touch on questions related to

people's power exerted onto the program through monetary gifts and how that might influence other people's behaviors in the broader context of the research. Finally, I ended each interview by asking participants if there was anything else that they would like to share based off their experiences in the setting related to the concept of community, and if they could recommend anyone else for me to interview who could provide valuable answers to the research.

Description

Compared to other research methodologies, the work of ethnography is unique in the way that it provides the readers with a sense of being immersed into the study itself by having the feeling of 'being there' (Dunlap, 2008, p. 56). Brewer (2000) explained ethnography as such:

...the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by means of methods which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally (p. 10).

Through ethnography, the researcher is studying a natural setting by using descriptions that come directly through all the senses such as seeing, hearing, smelling, and any other kind of experience that the researcher finds necessary to share. Wolcott (1999) labeled the information gained through the researcher's senses during participant observation as 'experiencing' (p. 46). In the description of participant observation and how the experience might manifest at the site of the Tennis Complex, the goal was to bring up as many details as possible from seeing, smelling, hearing, and other sensations from being around the people who get together at the Tennis Complex during relevant events held by the university's tennis program. It can be rather easy for an ethnographer to 'get lost' in descriptions from participant observation. There would be endless details from the researchers' senses that could be included in his/her descriptions. On the other hand, description cannot be

comprehensive of all that is happening in an observed context either. As much as the ethnographer tries to make the description of observations as pure as possible, there will be details that he or she may miss to describe. The experience of the ethnographer in balancing what to include in the description of observations and the awareness that this method alone will not stand to produce comprehensive data to answer the research questions were crucial in the methodology process.

Description through the method of field notes will begin by describing the site and what it all contained, and then quickly graduate to describe the people and what they do through their activities. Finally, description moved into how people interpret what they do at the research site. In order to still capture rich descriptions filled with relevant details but make them manageable for the researcher, the process of description will be guided by the research questions for this study: 1) What has shaped the participants' subjective understanding of the concept of community around the university's tennis programs? and 2) How have power dynamics (social, political, economic, cultural) in the context of the research played a role in shaping the meaning-making of community around the university's tennis program?

Data Transformation

Despite the fact that participant observation served as the main method of data generation, the description of the research context followed a thorough analysis of the data. Wolcott (1994) explained that "analysis pulls data transformation toward the more scientific and quantitative side of the work" (p. 176). During this process, both the researcher's experiences and the participant's experiences are analyzed and interpreted. The beginning of this process entails the researcher reviewing the data and identifying patterns in order to make meaning of the data. Nonetheless, Wolcott (1994) pointed out a reminder for researchers on the difference between analysis and interpretation, in that the two are actually

opposite to each other (p. 176). He stated that “rather than attempt to see the two blended or balance, the researcher should regard them as sufficiently distinct be able to recognize which process they are engaging in at any one time” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 176). In this interplay between raw data the researcher first organizes data, then identifies emerging findings and themes, and then interprets them (Caudle, 2004, p. 420). Patton (2002) made the point that “interpretation involves explaining findings, answering “why” questions, attaching significance to particular results, and putting patterns into an analytical framework” (as cited in Caudle, 2004, p. 424), while analyzing is more concerned with managing codes and making sure that a code matches the concept it describes.

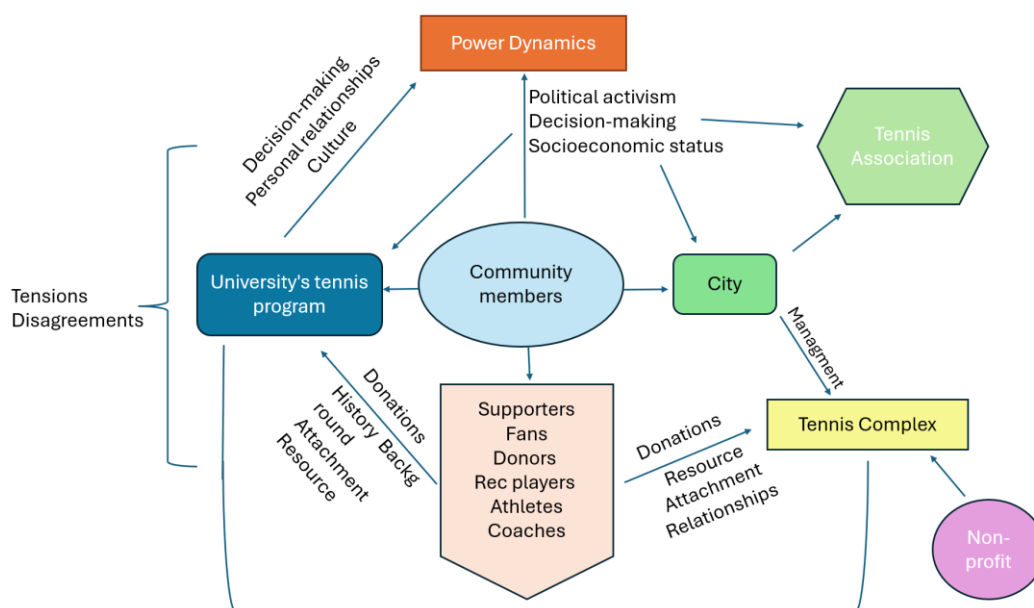
Analysis

Grauce (2015) stated that “qualitative data analysis is a process of the description, classification, and interconnection of phenomena with the researcher’s concepts” (p. 8) which has the objective of acting as a “link between theory and concepts with research data” (Bryman and Bell, 2011, p. 392). With ethnographic studies, data are usually, but not exclusively, made of words rather than numbers. Therefore, the first step in the analysis process is data reduction. This is the process of “selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming ‘raw’ data that appear in written-up field notes” (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 21). Here, it is the job of the researcher to carefully read and review data and identify significant words and passages. During this process, I used Turner’s (2006) method of *mapping* institutional processes. Smith (2016) described this process as a “powerful means of assembling the complex data that make up institutional action” (p. 9). Rankin (2017) explains that “in mapping work, the ruling relations are first tracked from the local work of people into the work of other people” (p. 5). From here, the goal is to “lay out a display of what is happening, either in words or diagrams, that describes the features of the social practices and their respective relationships” (Rankin, 2017, p. 5). Mapping can be done however preferred

by the researcher. For instance, Turner (2006) originally “did the mapping work by hand” (p. 146), “taping large sheets on a wall in her home and adding data as she discovered it” (Rankin, 2017, p. 6). The figure showed below represents the mapping process at this point in the research.

Figure 1.

Mapping



In line with the process of mapping is *indexing*. Similar to Rankin’s (2017), I used indexing to begin the analytical process after having collected a large amount of data with interview transcripts and filed notes. Rankin (2017) described indexing as a “way to discover linked practices going on in society” (p. 6). An example of indexing for this project started with establishing an index heading “community” and then sub indexing all the instrumental behaviors/actions for the larger group or organization, relationship actions, interpretations/appraisals of relationships as thoughts or feelings, and characteristics of community. The indexing process served as a “way to organize one’s data around empirical happenings” (Rankin, p. 6). The following table is a small sample cut from the indexing analysis used for this study.

Table 4.*Indexing Sample*

Indexing		
Characteristics of Community	Relationship Actions	Interpretations/Appraisals of Relationships
Longevity	Talking the same language: business/work/tennis	Having people to fall back on
Sharing a facility	Making friends	Feeling connected
Seeing familiar faces regularly	Looking after rec players' kids while they are playing	Forming a bond
Trust	Wanting to help	Extended family
Participation	Texting/Talking to people regularly	Support of kindness

This initial step of analysis is critical in formulating a problematic. The research problematic is a methodological tool that helps to deal with the complexity of the data that the institutional ethnographer gathers. Smith (1995) explained that the research problematic begins “with the everyday events in people’s lives, and in their problems of knowing – being told one thing, but in fact knowing otherwise on the basis of personal experience” (p. 21). Generating the problematic starts from the data, and according to Rankin (2017), it often “rests on stories (accounts) that reveal troubles arising in (or conflicts between) authorized and experimental knowledge (p. 3). Rankin (2017) continued by explaining that “the tensions that standpoint informants know about and experience are either invisible or misrepresented within the authorized accounts (p. 3). This tool of analysis, as explained by Grahame (1998) “directs attention to a domain of possible questions and questions which have not yet been formulated, but which are implicit in the way the everyday world is organized” (p. 350). After conducting eighteen interviews and before completing the

rest of the interviews, I paused the data collection process to use the method of *ruling relations* in IE (Rankin, 2017).

The next step in the analysis process was identifying a *code* (Saldana, 2013). After reviewing the data collected, a code was a construct generated by the researcher that acts a symbol that interprets meaning to any kind of category, theme, or theory building (Saldana, 2013). Codes acted as a link between the data collection and the explanation of the meaning later on in the data transformation. This process of organization is referred by Miles and Huberman (1984) as *pattern codes*, through which emergent *themes* are identified (p. 67). Streubert & Carpenter (1995) explained the concept of a theme as something that “holds multiple interpretations” (p. 439). The mechanics of coding as discussed by Saldana (2013) starts with laying out printed transcripts, field notes, and other researcher-generated material keeping a wide side margin for writing codes and notes (p. 17). In addition to coding with words and short phrases, Layder (1998) showed how to use ‘pre-coding’ by circling or highlighting significant quotes or passages. As discussed by Saldana (2013), this process began as data are collected and formatted, rather than after all the fieldwork has been completed (p. 20). Litchman (2010) suggested to “generate between 80 and 100 codes that will then be organized in 15-20 categories and subcategories, which will eventually synthesize into five to seven major concepts” (p. 194). The coding process was conducted through a qualitative software called NVivo. The process was initially conducted by placing the appropriate codes identified into category such as ‘facilities’, ‘community’ ‘power dynamics’. Then, subcategories such as ‘design of facility’ or ‘interpretations of community’ were created. Each category had on average five sub-categories. At the end of the coding process, the NVivo software showed six major concepts to be created: community, donations, facilities, groups organized by the head coaches, groups organized by recreational players, and power dynamics.

Following this process, I used the method of analytic memos (Saldana, 2013) to reflect on the coding process and challenge my own assumptions about the research findings. Rogers (2018) described analytic memos as something comparable to a journal, a lab notebook, or a blog that allows the researcher to reflect on the codes chose, how the inquiry is taking place, and how the findings can possibly lead towards theory.

Finally, the last step in the analysis process is what Miles and Huberman (1984) called *drawing conclusions*, which involved “making meaningful statements about how the data illustrates the topic of interest” (as cited in Mezmir, 2020, p. 20). Lacey and Luff (2009) discussed the analysis process as a “‘process of constant comparison’, in which the researcher looks for relationships between the themes and categories found and constantly compares them to form the basis of the emerging theory” (p. 9)

Interpretation

After having analyzed the data collected, the next step in data transformation is interpretation. Interpretation is a subjective analysis that the researcher conducts of the codes, themes, categories and findings to offer personal opinions of the findings and address the quality of the material. In particular, the researcher’s opinions are targeting the relation of the findings to the work that other scholars have done before. This process moves beyond the data and the coding (Wolcott, 1994). Here again, the decision on what is relevant and significant in participant observations and interviews is up to the researcher. Associated with the term *interpretation* is “a threshold in thinking and writing at which the researcher transcends factual data and cautious analyses and begins to probe into what is to be made of them” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 36). Through this process, “the researcher is welcome to their opinions of the findings but should exercise caution in offering too much or too little interpretation, or fall in the temptation to reach beyond the analysis and speculate about its meanings or implications” (Wolcott, 1994, p. 37). As Sanjek (1991) put it: “the relationship

between field note evidence and ethnographic conclusions should be made specific” (p. 621). Wolcott (1994) suggested to turn back to theory when interpreting findings to provide a link between the study and the larger issues (p. 43). By keeping in mind all of the above, the objective of interpretation was to develop a framework.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is often a point of discussions when it comes to qualitative studies due to the fact that “*objectivity* of scientific discourse is honored as more acceptable than other *interpretive* ways of knowing” (Rose & Johnson, 2020, p. 433). Critics in the literature have often asserted “systematic objective methods to be the only methods that can produce sharable understandings” (Charney, p. 588). These are methods that “pay attention to individuality in order to make sure that the situations and samples studied are representative and can produce reliably similar results in similar studies” (Charney, p. 584). Nonetheless, Cooper (1997) argued that “all research paradigms do not share the same notion of what knowledge is, how it is produced, and how it accumulates” ... “thus, particular methods in different paradigms should also differ and need to be evaluated on how well they achieve the goals of the particular paradigm” (p. 556).

Trustworthiness of a qualitative study refers to “the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of a study” (Polit & Beck, 2014, as cited in Connelly, 2016, p. 435). Essentially, it is a rigor of the credibility of the researchers and the believability of the findings. Sandelowski (1993) explained the rigor of trustworthiness in qualitative inquiry to be a matter of persuasion whereby the scientist is viewed as having made those practices visible and therefore auditable (as cited in Gunawan, p. 10). Rose and Johnson (2020) suggested that to increase trustworthiness of a qualitative research there should be a “depth of literature reviews, the appropriate theoretical positioning of the argument, the selection of often conflicting data collection techniques and analytical

procedures undertake, and the connection of empirical material to larger theories and discourses” (p. 435). These are examples that show how the researcher can use scholarly practices through the research and offer them to the reader as proof that the quality of the study stands on the rigor of qualitative inquiry.

Reliability and validity should be addressed as components of trustworthiness. Reliability of qualitative research refers to “the soundness of the research, particularly in relation to the appropriate methods chosen, and the ways in which those methods were applied and implemented in a qualitative research study” (Rose and Johnson, 2020, p. 435). In order for a study to be reliable, the researcher needs to provide justification of the methods used, clarity in the analytical procedures, and address the consistency associated with the actual conduct of the research (Miles et al., 2014; Creswell, 2013; Rose and Johnson, 2020). Addressing reliability of a qualitative study is important to answer questions such as: “can this research project be replicable? If the research were to be conducted again, would it offer similar results? Can another researcher conduct a similar study with the description provided in the study?” (Rose and Johnson, 2020, p. 435).

Often associated with the term *validity*, the reader of the ethnographic research must ensure that the quality of the study is logical and accurately describes the facts observed and gathered during the research. As cited in Gunawan (2015), Sandelowski (1993) argued that “validity in qualitative studies should be linked not to the truth or value, but a study should be considered trustworthy if and only the reader of the research report judges it to be so” (p. 10). Similarly, Wolcott (1990) referred as validity in ethnographic studies as ‘absurd’ and stated that “the ethnographer’s intentions is not to tell readers what to think of an experience but to show them the experience from beginning to end” (p. 364). For the author, validity should stand on the ability of the researcher to tell a story so that the reader can recognize and unfold problems and puzzles themselves (Wolcott, 1990). Experts of qualitative research have

shared different opinions about the concepts of validity and reliability. Guba and Lincoln (1989) claimed the technique of member checking to be “the single most critical technique for establishing credibility” in a qualitative study (as cited in Gunawan, 2015, p. 10). On the other hand, Sandelowski (1993) referred to the term reliability as “threat to validity” and questioned the primary technique that qualitative researchers use such as *member checking* or *peer checking* (as cited in Gunawan, 2015, p. 10). Though dismissive of this technique, Sandelowski (1993) believed that the technique of triangulation must be highlighted in order to ensure the trustworthiness of a qualitative study.

Based off the explanation that Noble & Heale (2019) provided:

triangulation can enrich research as it offers a variety of datasets to explain differing aspects of a phenomenon of interest. It also helps refute where one dataset invalidates a supposition generated by another. It can assist the confirming of a hypothesis where one set of findings confirm another set. Finally, triangulation can help explain the results of a study (p. 67).

Such explanation of triangulation makes sense for qualitative research following the explanation of Sandelowski (1993) in which she claimed that validity should not be linked to truth as opposed to the positivist inclination towards trustworthiness of qualitative inquiry. As Dunlap (2008) explained, that is, refuting the “idea that by using rigorous methodology, a researcher could arrive at a true and definite interpretation of events” (p. 60). The researcher would not only have to deal with all the impossibilities of arriving to a true definite interpretation of an event, but this would also imply that only those researchers who have access to the most rigorous methodological tools would be the only ones with a chance to reach such truths. Ethnography should be more concerned with the researcher attempting to express the ways in which individuals interpret experiences, rather than representing a definite truth of an experience. Vendler (1984) discussed the difference between *knowing* and *understanding*, in which “to understand, it may not be enough to know” (p. 204). Essentially, Wolcott (1990) believed that we, as researchers, “cannot ‘know’ with a certain level of

certainty and our understanding is also not guaranteed by some pre-determined level of verified facts” (p. 367). Despite this perspective, according to Wolcott (1990) *understanding* can perhaps do a little bit more than validity (p. 367). In particular, the author talks about understanding the individual perspectives which also include the perspectives of the researcher through the process of a qualitative study.

Therefore, when it came to the concept of validity, my approach aligned with the one used by to Sandelowski (1993) and Dunlap (2008). When I observed events at the Tennis Complex, my objective will not be to find The Truth to the representation of such events. With this study, my hope will be for the readers to be able to understand the power dynamics that influenced group formations through the years and how the participants conceptualize the concept of community (e.g. do they feel like they are part of a community? What does that look like for them?). To those who would argue that the research lacks valid measurements, I should note that I used other rigorous strategies to ensure trustworthiness of my representation of the participants’ interactions that unfolded during events held at the Tennis Complex. My honesty in this process will be supported by strategies that will be used to confirm my description of events at the Tennis Complex.

Amongst these strategies, member checking was the most useful method to check for my honesty and faithfulness representation of my observations at the Tennis Complex. The process of member checking allowed the participants who were subject to my observations to review, critique, and provide feedback to my field notes and interview transcripts. Both the participants and I reviewed the observations provided in my field notes for a more accurate representation of the data. This process was a of collaboration between the participants and I, in which we discussed the description of events until both parties were satisfied.

In addition to the process of members checking field notes and interview manuscripts,

participants were also asked to review draft manuscripts. The review process was also overviewed by my supervisor in this research, Dr. Dunlap. His expertise on ethnographic research helped to identify the ways in which my data generation methods could be improved. This process included reviewing field notes, research journals, and interview transcripts.

CHAPTER IV:

Dora's First Match at the Tennis Complex: Place Identity at a Tennis Community¹

¹ Zirilli, M., & Dunlap, R. To be submitted to *Sport in Society*

Abstract

This study used an ethnographic methodology to explore the formation and experience of place identity at a semi-public facility, known as the Tennis Complex.

The researcher spent six months coaching tennis and participating in events at the Tennis Complex to describe the lived experience of being part of a tennis community. The manuscript used a narrative through Smith's (2016) *storyteller creative non-fiction* by reacting to actual events from the filed notes with the use of fictional characters. While the literature only presents a few studies on community participation and engagement in college athletics, understanding a community in relation to sport programs and sporting facilities can allow coaches, managers and administrators to use the right techniques and strategies to enhance community engagement collaboration. This study used Proshansky's (1978) perspective of place identity as determined by the affiliation of the participants in relation to the university's tennis program. Analysis revealed that community members' understanding, and interpretation of the tennis community was mainly associated with their identification with the Tennis Complex. In particular, the most significant factors included the Tennis Complex's design and layout, its symbols and meanings, and the regular interactions occurring at the facility.

When I walked outside the indoor Tennis Complex that Friday evening after team practice, I spotted my friend Dora waiting for me in her black Nissan car in the parking lot. Dora was a former volleyball student-athlete who now worked at her alma mater in New Jersey as a sport marketer. That week, she had decided to pay me a visit and spend a few days with me. It was late January, and after 4 p.m. it was frigid cold and already dark outside. I put my hands in the pockets of my jacket and made my way to the car.

“Hey!” She looked at me as I was opening the door and gave me a big smile. “Ready to go?” she asked.

I had totally forgotten to tell her that that night I wanted to attend the men’s tennis match at the Tennis Complex where I was conducting my dissertation research. I could not skip this event. I really wanted to be there to watch the match as the men were playing a high ranked team, plus this was a great event for me to conduct participant observations.

“Hey!” I smiled back at her. “Actually... um... I forgot to tell you that today at 5 p.m. the men’s tennis team is playing a match here at the Tennis Complex. Would you like to come back here in an hour to watch it with me?”

“Oh, um... sure! It’s just that... I was hoping to eat something for dinner.” She seemed disappointed.

“There will be food and drinks at the match! In the meantime, we have an hour to spare and we could go get a beer at this brewery down the street. What do you say?” I asked.

“Alright, I guess. You convinced me with food and drinks. Is it going to be one of those lame tennis matches no one goes to?”

“I guess you’ll have to find out once you get there.” Dora laughed and put the car in drive. My hands were starting to finally warm up after sitting in her car for just a couple of minutes. I looked at my phone, it was 4:07 p.m.

“Alright” I said “We don’t have a lot of time and you don’t want to miss out the start of this match. Let’s go check out this brewery.”

Introduction

Over the last two decades, researchers have started to address community sport in relation to place, geography, and identity (Bale, 2003; Tonts & Atherley, 2010; Wise & Harris, 2010-2011; Shobe, 2008; Wise, 2014; Wilson 2018). It is hard to disregard the fact that humans are place-based. Though online interactions in the last few decades have impacted the course of our relationships with others, individuals still exist in physical places through which they connect with each other. Glover & Sharpe (2021) noted that through their complexity and symbolisms “sport contexts offer an ideal setting for the exploration of the evolving nature of community” (p. 28). In particular, the concepts of place and space have been central in the geography of sport (Bale, 2003; Bale & Vertinsky, 2004). Parnell et al. (2019) explored how sport participation for local people is tied to the way that sport facilities have a “geographical distribution” (p. 6). Sampson & Goodrich (2007) added that communities are unique and specific in the way that they bind with the locales, especially through the use of symbols, parameters, and boundaries to construct a sense of place identity. Such studies have mainly explored the ‘nature’ of place identity – “the formation of personal identity in relation to ideas, symbols, beliefs, values, sensations, behaviors, and practices integrated into the production of place” (Chen, 2020, p. 147). While the ‘nature’ of place identity is a central idea that underlies this manuscript, the present inquiry also explored how place identity has formed in a particular community. Paasi (1991) discussed the formation of place identity as something that is achieved after a place has established status in both the spatial structure of the society and its social consciousness (as cited in Peng, 2020, p. 4).

Purpose and Research Questions

This study examined the formation of place identity in a local tennis community. The investigation of community-athletic relationships is not only important because of the benefits of these influential relationships on both parties [e.g increasing game attendance, bringing local excitement, gaining financial contributions, improving social and mental health (Hixon, 2013)], but also because athletic departments and collegiate sport's programs heavily rely on community engagement and participation to keep their programs afloat and successful. As such, coaches and administrators should gain knowledge on the importance of the surrounding community, community involvement, affiliation and strategies to use in such collaborations. This is especially important in the context of small and rural communities around the nations where collegiate sport may be one of the few activities around which a group of individuals who share an interested can gather, interact and identify with. These dynamics are especially relevant for non-headline sports such as tennis, soccer, rugby, swimming, or field hockey due to the fact that there is likely no other way for people to connect with these sports in a rural place.

This research targets leaders of sport organizations who are actively involved in community engagement and development at the local level. The purpose of the study is to identify the factors that played a role in the formation of place identity for the community at the site of a jointly owned tennis facility, known as the Tennis Complex. The study answers the following research question:

How did the tennis community develop place identity at the Tennis Complex?

In answering the research question, the following sub questions will help guide the results of manuscript:

1. What factors played a role in the community's expressed identification with the Tennis Complex?

2. What feelings were developed through place identity?
3. What helped foster such feelings at the Tennis Complex?

The Tennis Complex

The Tennis Complex is an indoor tennis facility that opened in 2015 through a partnership between the city, the university and a nonprofit organization. The facility holds eight indoor tennis courts, twenty-four outdoor courts, two electronic scoreboards, a pro shop, and lounge area with a mezzanine for spectator viewing. Currently operated by the City's Parks and Recreation, the Complex has roughly 900 members who play tennis recreationally. Annual passes are available to people of all skill levels, ages and disabilities. Rates range from \$600 for a family pass to \$450 for an individual pass to \$250 for collegiate, youth, senior and military passes. Activities organized by the Tennis Complex are free for all members and require a \$10-dollar fee for drop-in guests. In addition, the Complex provides tennis Pros for members to be able to take private lessons (single or group lessons). The cost of a private lessons typically ranges between \$60 and \$80.

In using the university's tennis match as an example of the various events taking place at the Complex, the narrative of Dora's visit and participation in the event is facilitating the description, nature, formation, and function of the place. The present analysis used Smith's (2016) *storyteller creative non-fiction* by creating a story that is "grounded in research findings and composed using the techniques of fiction" (p. 208). Specifically, I have chosen to draw on field notes that were composed after my participation in a number of tennis matches held at the Tennis Complex. The narrative is used to capture the most notable features of the place and the tennis community. Thus, description of the tales was a reaction to actual events through the use of fictional characters. Similar approaches of data transformation through narrative form in qualitative inquiry can be seen in Glover (2007), Johnson and Samdahl (2005) and Dunlap (2009).

Dora had been fortunate to come visit me after the snow had finally melted in the streets our city. Coming from the northeast, she was used to the cold and the snow. However, here in the South the snow would pretty much make everything come to a stop. Inside the Irish brewery there weren't many people, but the pub was nice and warm. As we ordered two IPAs, Dora took her scarf off and set it on the side of the bar.

"You guys are certainly lucky to have an indoor facility to play your matches during this weather" Dora said.

"Oh, I know. The Tennis Complex is considered to be one of the best in the State!" I exclaimed.

"It's great that your university invested so much money in the tennis teams, back in my college years our volleyball facility was not the greatest" she laughed and took a sip of her beer.

"Well, actually, the Complex came to life as a joint financial collaboration between the city, the university and a non-profit organization. Most of the money that came from the university was actually private contributions from the tennis community to our tennis programs".

"Oh, wow! Do you have a lot of fans?"

"You'll see once we get there!" I said, taking a big gulp of my beer.

"Okay, okay. Does this have anything to do with your research? You've mentioned something to me before but I am not sure I remember."

"Yep. That's exactly it! I am doing a research project on our tennis community for my dissertation." I responded.

"So, are you just going to look at your fans? That seems easy enough."

“Well... the research is also going to explore if there is a difference between fans and a sport community, but I am really interested in learning how the tennis community identifies with the Tennis Complex and their conceptualization of the place identity in relation to the university”.

“That’s interesting. What made you want to research tennis players?” she asked.

“Well, all the years spent working as a tennis coach at Complex and being in close contact with the players definitely drew me in to conduct this study. I always thought that a community was clearly evident at the Complex, but it was never clear how it was interpreted by its members. I always thought that there was something special about this tennis facility and the way that players related to it, but these dynamics needed to be explored.

“Wow. I am excited to go to this tennis match now and see what you’re talking about.”

“Great! I’m excited too.” We continued drinking our beers until I glanced down on my phone and it was time to go.

Relevant research: sport, place and community

The literature on sport, space, place and community has noted how sporting activities, sporting clubs, symbols, and culture have played a role in how communities are able to create a sense of identity in relation to sport. Space and place are “basic components of the lived word” that are often taken for granted and used interchangeably. (Tuan, 1977, p. 3). While the term ‘space’ contains an abstract essence to it, Tuan (1977) explained that an “undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value” (p. 6). Furthermore, the value that we associated to a space and place through our experiences

is often mediate by symbols to which we attach some kind of emotion (Tuan, 1977, p. 6, 16). Additionally, Smith et al. (2012) claimed that *environment* may be placed at the center of the relationships between organizational culture, identity, structure, strategy and performance (p. 13). In exploring the environment of local communities, factors such as place, identity, symbols, signs and meanings have all been central to the relevant research in the literature.

In the world of sport, the use of symbols has often been used to convey a specific message (O'Hallarn et al., 2021). Walsh & High (1999) pointed out that social space and relevant symbols are significant part of the process of community that should not go unnoticed (Walsh & High, 1999). For instance, Rothenbuhler (1989) explored the values and symbols of Olympic sports, to patterns for symbols in sports such as display of flags, anthems of winners, presentation of awards, and closing ceremonies (p. 147). Other scholars such as Stewart & Smith (1999) also found that sport organizations often try to “link emotions and identifying symbols with brand features” (e.g. logos and mascots) (p. 94).

Tonts (2005) discussed competitive sport, sense of place and community in contributing to well-being of the physical and mental health benefits of rural citizens. Spaaij (2009) added to the literature on rural sports in Australia by concluding that local sport clubs act as “vital community hubs fostering social cohesions, local and regional identities and a shared focus and outlet” (p. 1132). Moreover, Little (2017) opened the discourse of cultural isolation for heavily migrant communities in rural areas of New Zealand and how the impact of sport activities (specifically football, rugby ad Australian Rules football) contributed to a unique sense of space through identity, class, and ethnicity (p. 915).

Drawing from the literature presented, Mooney (2019) then examined the specificities of place and social space that contributed to a local community in which a regional football and netball club functioned as a social space to create social connections and identities (p. 31). As football and netball have often been viewed as community hubs in

rural Australia, the cultural messages reproduced within the sport context can serve to further understand both individual and community identities (Mooney, 2019, p. 31). Similarly, a study conducted by Wise (2014) used football to explore a rural community in a Villa consisting of Haitian and Dominican residents. Wise (2014) also found that the research site was recognized to have multiple layers of meaning for the community (p. 212). One the same note, a study by Shobe (2008) also investigated the social construction of collective identification of the Catalan people through the use of a football club in Barcelona and its stadium as the research site.

While these studies have been pivotal in the literature regarding sports communities and place identity, not a lot of research has explored these concepts in the university-community context. Little research has been conducted on intercollegiate athletic communities in relation to these concepts (see Gumprecht, 2003; Warner & Dixon, 2011). Specifically, more scholarly inquiry should explore Western intercollegiate athletic organizations and community to interpret the nature and formation of place identity for community members and organization leaders. This is important because there are far more colleges and universities (5,999) than major professional sport leagues (153) in the U.S., suggesting that more communities may have access to university athletics rather than professional sport leagues.

Place identity as a theoretical perspective

In understanding the role of place within the context of leisure and sport experiences, scholars have used several perspectives to address human-place bonding (e.g. place attachment, place identity, rootedness, sense of place, place dependence, and place satisfaction). For instance, Low & Altman (1992) used the term 'place attachment' to refer to emotion and feeling in relation to cognition (e.g. belief) practice (e.g. action and behavior) (p. 4-5). The term place attachment is often used as a synonym of place identity, and both terms

are often treated as components of sense of place (Peng et al., 2020, p. 3). Kyle & Chick (2007) used 'sense of place' as another way to describe people's relationship with place (p. 211). However, Hay (1998) discussed how studies that use sense of place address broader issues than place attachment by looking at both subjective qualities of participants and the social context (p. 7). On the other hand, place identity has been considered a versatile concept used to explain how human-environment relations are built (Peng et al., 2020, p.1). This particular perspective was initially introduced by Proshansky (1978) through his definition of place identity:

'those dimensions of self that define the individual's personal identity in relation to the physical environment by means of a complex patten of conscious and unconscious ideas, feelings, values, goals, preferences, skills, and behavioral tendencies relevant to a specific environment (p .155).

While many scholars have used place identity as the focus of their studies, they have seldom followed Proshansky's (1978) theoretical framework, which argues that "for each role-related identities of an individual, there are physical dimensions and characteristics that help to define that identity" (p. 147). This study particularly chose place identity as determined by "the strength of the affiliation" (Kyle & Chick, 2007, p. 212) of the participants in relation to a university's tennis program. By looking at the fans, supporters, donors, and coaches' identification and affiliation with the university, place identity was used as an interpretation of the participants' *self* through the meaning constructed in affiliation with the university. Affiliation was seen through individual's' participation at university's events, donations to the tennis program, and their history with the university (e.g. alumni or family or friend of an alumni).

The use of place identity was also determined by similar findings from other research studies. For instance, Tonts & Atherley (2010) showed how the role of sport in rural Australia contributed to the formation of place identity through "diverse local and

regional social interactions, practices and memories” (p. 381). Shobe (2008) also considered the social construction of identity through a Spanish football Club in relation to stadiums and nationalities, arguing that geographical notions of place should be prominent in theoretical approaches (p. 330). Similar studies in the literature that explored the concept of place identity were used as a reference for the material and methods used in this study.

At 4:56 p.m., we were back at the main parking lot of the Tennis Complex. As Dora pulled in, we realized there were no parking spots left.

“I should have known it was going to be packed. There’s another big parking lot over here” I said, pointing to the right.

“Was that a food truck there in the front?”

“Yes! The doubles matches are about to start but we can make a quick stop at the food truck, I am getting pretty hungry too”.

We ordered food and I could tell that the doubles matches had just started because we could hear noises of chatter and commotion coming from the building.

“Have you ever attended a collegiate tennis game?” I asked.

“Um... not really. Tennis was not really considered a big sport at my school. Most of my friends in college were football or softball players and so I attended quite a few of their games. But never tennis.”

“Well, tennis is not considered a big sport in college athletics. It generally falls under the category of ‘minor sports’. I explained. “I am hoping you will have a good time tonight and maybe learn a little bit about the sport!”

“Me too!” We grabbed our food baskets and made our way inside the Complex.

Walking through the front door entrance we were greeted by Emma and Felix at the front desk. I saw their faces pretty much every day working at the Complex. In front of us was a glass window through which we could see four of the eight indoor courts, but the doubles matches were taking place on the other side. We could hear what seemed over a hundred people talking and cheering upstairs. The warmth of the building was bringing some feeling back to my face and my hands. I led the way for Dora as we walked up the stairs and into the upstairs mezzanine.

“Holy shit... that’s a lot of people.” She whispered to me as we reached the top of the stairs.

“Yep... I told you. Let’s find a spot where we can sit and eat this.”

The place was loud. People were talking to each other, screaming ‘Go Blue!’ or applauding every few seconds. In the background, we could hear the echoing sounds of the men competing down in the courts. I scanned the bleachers on the mezzanine to find a spot where we could sit down and watch the doubles. I quickly realized there was no space available. Most people were sat on four lengthy bleachers that stretched all the way to the end of the mezzanine on each side of the railings. I looked in the middle of the mezzanine and I spotted an empty high table. It was hard to focus on what was going on down in the tennis courts. There were between a hundred and two hundred people in attendance. I was familiar with nearly every person present. I knew most of the people’s names and had exchanged some kind of interaction with each of them through the years. As we made our way to the table, I glanced at the big blue scoreboard on top of the courts and noticed our men were leading the score in the first doubles games played.

Though the Complex was owned by the city and mainly used by the public, the details inside the building made it look like it was owned by the university. All the walls that wrapped around the tennis courts showed the university’s logo and the tennis teams’

Conference logo. Big banners with logos were hanging from the ceiling right next to the side walls. One of the supporting walls in the middle of the mezzanine showed both the men and women's tennis roster. The entire wall at the end of the mezzanine showed printed pictures of both the tennis teams and their former star players.

"This place is really cool!" Dora was walking and looking around trying to take everything in. "Is this where you competed at when you were a student-athlete?"

"Yep. But the interior features of the Complex have evolved greatly since then." At this point, our team must have won a big point because the crowd exploded in a communal cheer and got ever rowdier than before. "C'mon, let's eat. Sounds like the men are winning!"

Materials and Methods

The research started in the Fall of 2023. During the month of October, I began studying the tennis community by conducting participant observations and semi-structured interviews at the Tennis Complex. I spent the next six months continuing working at the Complex as a coach and exploring the tennis community in this setting in order to create an ethnographic representation of its unique characteristics. Being present in the research context was the primary reason why ethnography was chosen as the methodology for this study. Through the use of ethnography, participant observation (Aktinson and Hammersley, 1994; Wolcott, 1999; Musante, 2015) was the primary method used to generate data for this research. Similar studies that used ethnographic observation to explore the construction of place identity in sports were carried out by Wilson (2018) and Wise (2011).

Twenty minutes into the tennis game, Dora and I had not been able to actually watch and pay attention to the tennis matches yet. Auntie Sim saw me standing behind the bleachers with Dora and came over to us.

“Namaste Guddiya” she always called me pet names in Hindi.

“Namaste Auntie. This is my friend Dora who came to visit me from New Jersey”. She gave both of us a warm hug.

“Dora, this is Simran, she is like my mom away from home for me”. It was true. Auntie Sim acted as a motherly figure to me since she had been in town, and I had been teaching tennis to her kids. She would often invite me over to her house for dinner and had always been there for me when I needed her. “In fact, she is actually one of our ‘team moms’” I said.

“What is ‘team moms’?” Dora asked.

“Team moms is a group of ladies who play tennis here and who signed up to support our girls during our matches with snacks and whatever they may need. Most of our athletes are international students and don’t have family around. Our head coach came up with this idea of organizing an event every year where ‘team moms’ sign up and our players get to meet and know them and vice versa.” I explained.

“Oh, we love it!” Sim exclaimed. Then she turned to Dora. “Is this your first time here?” she asked.

“Yes. Luisa and I grew up together in Italy and I played volleyball in college in New Jersey. I thought it was time to come visit her. She said this tennis match would be fun, and I’ve never been to one before.” She looked around the facility as she said that.

“It is. This is the best atmosphere and energy you will find in college tennis. Our kids love it. We love seeing our tennis teams and everyone here. We are so lucky to have Luisa here”. Auntie put her hand on my shoulder. She would always fill our conversations with sweet comments. Before I could say anything back, her son ran into her and grabbed her hand to pull her away.

“See you around auntie!” I said as she waved at us rolling her eyes.

The mezzanine was packed with people. The majority of the people were wearing university's gear such as blue and white t-shirts or hats to represent the colors of the university. Most of them were sitting on the bleachers or standing by the railings. Some others kept moving around, watching different courts. People would switch from frantically cheering on the team to talking with each other. Most of the adults present at the event were drinking beer out of a clear plastic cup. I noticed that on our right, next to the big mural on the wall, was set up a table selling beer from a local brewery.

"Do you want a beer?" I asked Dora, pointing at the table with the kegs on it.

"I'd love one! I would also like to try to see some tennis points. I can barely see behind all these people". Dora was a former volleyball player and was 6'1" tall. She stood on her toes, trying to catch what was going on down in the courts.

"We will. The game is pretty long."

We walked over to the beer table to order our drinks. From that moment on, we did not watch much tennis. Rather, I kept bumping into people and ended up introducing Dora to our tennis community for the rest of the night.

Tennis matches at the complex

Collegiate tennis matches were held at the Tennis Complex throughout the weekends of the Spring season (January – April) and lasted around three hours. The number of attendees ranged from fifty to three hundred individuals. The most prominent factor affecting the number of attendees at the tennis matches was the promotion and advertisement work of the head coaches. Other factors included fun opportunities for kids to engage in (e.g. inflatables, ball kid program) and food, drinks and perks for adults (e.g. special giveaways such as rackets, water cups, and t-shirts).

The nature of the place identity developed by the community members is

represented through the customs, behaviors, interactions, activities, values, symbols and leisure practices seen at the Tennis Complex. In many respects, the tennis match resembles other collegiate games that occur in a variety of sports. Therefore, I chose to highlight several features and conversations taking place at the tennis match that may distinguish it from other types of sport communities and sport organizations. The purpose of narrative description of the tennis match is also to present the spatial structure that the Tennis Complex has offered to the community as the formation of place identity has developed through the years. The example of the tennis match does not only describe the tennis community physical and social setting, but it also explores the norms and values of the community, the function of sharing the Tennis Complex and the meaning that people associate with it.

Data Generation, Analysis, and Transformation

The research started in the October of 2023 and ended in March 2024. During the six months at the Tennis Complex, I spent time coaching tennis clinics with recreational players, participating in tennis activities with both the men's and women's teams, and attending every event organized by the university's head coaches or administration at the Tennis Complex. The observations highlighted in the field notes and the semi-structured interviews served to quantify the demographics of this study. The age of the participants interviewed included seven individuals between the age of 18 to 30, nine individuals between the age of 35 to 55, and seven individuals of age 60+. Fourteen of the participants interviewed were Americans, and only four of them grew up in the city where the Tennis Complex is located. Other interviewees included two British, one Australian, one German, two Indians, and two Italians. Though the race of the interviewees was mainly White, with only one African American, one Hispanic and two Asian participants, my observations noted a significant amount of Black, Asian and Hispanic individuals who regularly spent their time at the Tennis Complex.

The participants interviewed and observed in this study, which I refer to as community members, are individuals who are either affiliated with the university's tennis program or with the Tennis Complex through the Parks and Recreation Department. These are supporters, fans, donors, student-athletes, and tennis alumni of the university's tennis program; recreational players and members of the Tennis Complex; employees and leaders of both entities. Particularly, supporters refer to those people who support the university's tennis team by attending tennis games but also by attending events related to the tennis programs. Supporters also include those individuals who offer encouragement and attention to student-athletes and coaches outside of the tennis-context (e.g. offering help to the needs of the student-athletes or coaches by bringing snacks or providing extra food and beverages during home games). Fans include those individuals who show an interest or admiration for the student-athletes competition during their tennis games, but who are not as involved as the supporters. Donors refer to those people who financially contributed to the university's tennis program. Athletes and coaches refer to the current tennis student-athletes and coaches of the program. Leaders include both the athletic administrators and head tennis coaches of the university and the administrators of the Tennis Complex.

Participant observations served to gather data describing the participant's activities, behaviors, interactions, and tensions at the site of the Tennis Complex. Semi-structured interviews then served to gather participants' experiences and perceptions on the concepts of community and power dynamics. Both the semi-structured interviews and my own personal observations kept in a research journal were used to compare data to the context specific field notes. During the six months period, I conducted a total of 46 hours of participant observations at the following research sites:

Table 1.*Research Sites*

Research Site	Tennis Complex	New Campus Tennis Facility	House of community member	Local restaurant
Hours	33.5 hours	5 hours	6 hours	1.5 hours
Date	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • October 17th, 2023 • October 18th, 2023 • November 13th, 2023 • November 24th, 2024 • January 9th, 2024 • January 10th, 2024 • January 13th, 2024 • February 3rd, 2024 • February 9th, 2024 • March 6th, 2024 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 7th, 2023 • February 1st, 2024 • March 10th, 2024 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • November 12th, 2023 • October 25th, 2023 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • January 22nd, 2023

As shown in the table, I spent most of my time conducting participant observations at the site of the Tennis Complex. The following table indicates the events attended, what was observed and described, and the hours spent at each event at this research site.

Table 2.*Participant Observations at the Tennis Complex*

Research Site: Tennis Complex				
Event	Observations/Descriptions	Date	Hours	Length of Fieldnotes
Doubles tournament between women's tennis team and a group of male recreational players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits, equipment) • Description of format and rules of the tournament (scoring, pairings, rounds) • Description of behaviors of participants around each other • Description of interactions and conversations heard 	10/17/2023	3	2910 words

Men's and Women's team practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptions of interactions with others when teams arrived at the Tennis Complex • Behaviors of teams at the Tennis Complex • Interactions between team members and outsiders during practice times • Interactions between team members and employees of the Tennis Complex 	01/09/2024 01/10/2024 02/03/2024	9	6846 words
Free tennis clinic organized by the university's tennis team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits, equipment) • Description of format and rules of the tennis clinic (court pairings, adult vs. kids drills) • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions between team members and participants of the clinic • Description of interactions and conversations heard 	01/13/2024	2	2075 words
Pro-Am tournament: dinner and drinks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of the set up and format of the dinner • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits) • Description of food and beverages consumed. • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions and conversations heard • Description of speeches made 	10/17/2023	2	3393 words
Pro-Am tournament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits, equipment) • Description of format and rules of the tournament (scoring, pairings, rounds) • Description of behaviors of participants around each other • Description of interactions and conversations heard 	10/18/2023	5	6689 words
Pro-Am: lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the set up and format of the lunch • Description of participants (demographics, outfits) • Description of food and beverages consumed. • Behaviors of participants around each other 	10/18/2023	2	4161 words

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactions and conversations heard • Description of speeches made and prize winners 			
Local Ladies Mixer (Clinic and Refreshments organized by the women's tennis teams for female recreational players only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of the clinic format • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits) • Description of food and beverages consumed • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions and conversations between university's women's team and recreational female players • Description of 'Team Moms' • Description of speeches made by coaches 	11/13/2023	2.5	9259 words
Women's Head Tennis Coach Baby shower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of the set up of the baby shower • Description of the set up of the dinner and helpers • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits) • Description of food and beverages consumed • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions and conversations heard • Description of games played • Description of gifts • Description of speeches made 	02/09/2024	2.5	4516 words
Friends giving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all the sense • Description of participants (demographics, outfits, number) • Description of food and beverages • Description of conversations made • Descriptions of interactions between participants 	11/24/2023	2	2714 words
University men's team home opener game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all sense • Description of people in attendance (number, outfits, demographics) • Description of partnerships (food truck, breweries, inflatables, campus bookstore) 	01/13/2024	3.5	8436 words

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of tennis game and participants • Description of attendees' behaviors at the game • Interactions between attendees • Interactions between attendees and men's tennis team • Description of conversations heard • Behaviors of men's student-athletes and coaches during the games and their engagement with the crowd 			
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During my participation and observation, I initially created jottings. From the jottings, I then composed field notes from which I elaborated my observations and my experiences at the Tennis Complex during such events. In addition to participant observation, I conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with various members of the Tennis Complex to provide addition context and contrast to my observations and the characterizations of community formed through my own experiences and the community members'.

Table 3.

Participants Interviewed

Participant	Role/affiliation with the university	Date	Time	Length of transcript	Involvement with the Tennis Complex	Length of time knowing this person
#1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Coach for the university women's tennis team • Employee at the Tennis Complex • Supporter 	10/16/2023	53:56:00	7993 words	Very involved with the Tennis Complex as he was a full time Pro there between 2018 and 2022, and now a current part-time Pro.	6 years
#2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student-athlete 	10/28/2023	34:23:00	6285 words	Spent nearly every day practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex	4 years

					since she was a student-athlete. Used to take lessons from Pros and paly tournaments there as a teenager.	
#3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporter • Recreational player • Member of the Tennis Complex 	10/28/2023	53:53:00	7866 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex.	8 years
#4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Recreational player • Member of the Tennis Complex 	10/18/2023	68:35:00	9251 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Was involved in contributing financially to construction of the Tennis Complex.	8 years
#5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Member of the Tennis Complex 	11/05/2023	37:12:00	5150 words	Does not spend time at the Tennis Complex except for when his kids play there or when the university tennis teams compete there. Contributed financially to the university tennis program	6 years
#6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former student-athlete • University Alumni 	11/18/2023	50:32:00	7742 words	Spent nearly every day of her college career practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex.	8 years
#7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor • Fan • Member of the Tennis Complex 	11/18/2023	67:54:00	10307 words	Not a regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to	1 month

					the university's tennis program.	
#8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student-athlete 	12/08/2023	55:32:00	8269 words	Spent nearly every day practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex since she was a student-athlete.	4 years
#9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex • Donor 	12/14/2023	34:08:00	4737 words	Does not spend time at the Tennis Complex except for when her kids play there or when the university tennis teams compete there. Contributed financially to the university tennis program.	6 years
#10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex 	12/14/2023	62:30:00	7884 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Was involved in contributing financially to construction of the Tennis Complex as well as contributing to the university's tennis program.	4 years
#11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex 	12/22/2023	72:04:00	11434 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Was involved in contributing financially to construction of the Tennis	7 years

					Complex as well as contributing to the university' tennis program.	
#12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former university men's head coach • University Alumni 	12/19/2023	93:53:00	12449 words	Does not spend time at the Tennis Complex. Not currently involved.	1 year
#13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Member of the Tennis Complex • Alumni 	01/02/2024	55:02:00	7520 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	4 years
#14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former student-athlete • Alumni 	01/03/2024	45:22:00	7590 words	Spent nearly every day of his college career practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex.	6 years
#15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student-athlete 	01/08/2024	29:21:00	4101 words	Spent nearly every day of the past year practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex.	1 year
#16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student-athlete 	01/10/2024	44:26:00	7670 words	Spent nearly every day practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex since she was a student-athlete.	4 years
#17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Member of the Tennis Complex 	01/18/2024	81:51:00	11666 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed	6 years

					financially to both the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	
#18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Member of the Tennis Complex • Former university women's head tennis coach • University Alumni 	01/18/2024	81:58:00	11666 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	6 years
#19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex 	01/18/2024	54:12:00	9105 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	1 year
#20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employee of the Tennis Complex 	02/05/2024	42:05:00	6412 words	Works at the Tennis Complex every day. Also plays tennis recreationally at the facility.	6 months

#21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current university associate head men's tennis coach 	03/25/2024	49:26:00	7033 words	Spent nearly every day coaching the university men's team at the Tennis Complex since he started coaching for the university.	3 years
#22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current university head men's tennis coach 	04/08/2024	54:18:00	10063 words	Spent nearly every day coaching the university men's team at the Tennis Complex since he started coaching for the university.	8 years
#23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current university head women's tennis coach 	04/03/2024	57:54:00	8672 words	Spent nearly every day coaching the university women's team at the Tennis Complex since she started coaching for the university.	6 years

Data analysis for this inquiry was guided primarily by Wolcott's (1994) stages of data transformation for ethnographic data, which took place over three stages of analysis. The first step of the analysis process started by composing interviews transcripts and the field notes based on the observations of the research sites and its community members. The field notes were initially composed by describing the structure of the sites in detail. I then elaborated the filed notes by describing the community members who participated in the various events at the Tennis Complex, followed by writing notes on what people did during the events, their activities, and their interactions with each other. Much of the focus was

placed on identifying who was in charge of organizing events and the dynamics involved between leaders and the community. Such descriptions served as the core of data generation, while in addition I also included my subjective experiences in participating in such events.

The next step in the analysis process was reviewing field notes and interview transcripts. During this stage, I used Miles & Huberman's (1984) method of *selecting* and *simplifying* data where I read and reviewed the data and started to identify significant words and passages. Then, I used Turner's (2006) method of *mapping* to where I laid out a display of words or diagrams, from what was happening based on my field notes and the interview transcripts. Following, I used Rankin's (2017) method of *indexing* as way to identify categories, subcategories, and themes. As part of institutional ethnography, I also used the methodological tool of formulating a problematic (Smith, 1995). The research problematic was identified through stories that revealed experiences, troubles arising, or conflicts that are either invisible or misrepresented within authorized accounts (Rankin, 2017, p. 3).

Following these steps, the analysis moved into identifying *codes* (Saldana, 2013). Coding was done by using a qualitative analysis software: NVivo. After the coding process, I used the method of analytic memos (Saldana, 2013) to reflect on the coding process and challenge my own assumptions about the research findings. Finally, the last step of the analysis was presenting the data into narrative form. This particular narrative was created to respond to the research questions: What factors have participants identified with place identity at the Tennis Complex? How have participants conceptualized place identity for the tennis community?

“Do you know that group of guys over there?” Dora pointed somewhere behind my shoulder.

“Um...” I turned around and glanced at a group of three guys and two girls

who were standing next to one of the bleachers. “No, actually, I don’t know them. Why do you ask?”

“Oh, nothing... I thought that guy in the green sweatshirt was cute.” She chuckled. “Maybe you could introduce us”.

“Is there a time you don’t think about boys?” I rolled my eyes.

“No... I guess not.” She laughed. “I thought maybe you knew everyone here who is part of the community”.

“Hmm, I don’t know them.” I said, shaking my head.

“Maybe they’re just tennis fans?” Dora asked while still keeping her eyes locked on the group.

“I think everyone in attendance is a tennis fan, don’t you think?” I asked, interested by her comment.

“Well, yeah. But they don’t seem like they are part of your tennis community, that’s what I meant.”

“What makes you say that?” I was intrigued.

“Well, they’re all wearing random clothes and colors. And then, they don’t seem to know others. They’re just hanging out by themselves.” She explained.

“That’s interesting you say that.” Her comment made me think about some of the data collected during the research so far. Some participants have referred to those kind of people as ‘outsiders’ of the community, usually people who would simply show up to eat popcorn and then leave. It seemed like this sport community in particular was characterized by people who knew each other’s faces and names, who proudly represented the university teams’ values and symbols, and who could always find each other at the Tennis Complex.

“I don’t usually pay attention to these things, but that guy caught my attention... Do you want to walk over with me?” She hesitantly asked.

I laughed and rolled my eyes again. “Sure. You can lead the way though.”

Results

Results showed the numerous factors identified by participants with the concept of place identity at the Tennis Complex. The study found that the main factor that the community identified to contribute to the conceptualization of place identity has been the physical presence and design of the Tennis Complex. The layout of the facility, along with the formal and informal events taking place at Complex impacted regular interactions between community members and fostered a sense of family and home for participants.

Design of the Tennis complex

The set up and interior design of the Tennis Complex was a significant factor that facilitated members of the community identifying with the place. Participants referred to the Tennis Complex as the ‘tipping point’, the ‘hub’ and the ‘key’ for the tennis community. Prior to the Tennis Complex, different indoor tennis facilities outside of the city served to offer a place where the tennis community could play tennis and support the university’s tennis teams. Such places came with a number of limitations, such as commuting outside of the city and not offering enough space or viewing opportunities to watch tennis matches and mingle with each other.

The Racket Club had bleachers down in between the two courts and you couldn't watch from above. [...] When that closed and we moved to The Village, we almost lost everybody. They had nobody that would come in. During matches, the players couldn't hear you cheer because you weren't in with them... they had glass walls between the courts and the indoor space
(Participant #11, 01/18/2024, from interview transcript).

As highlighted in the narrative above, the Tennis Complex’s design was found by the participants to be ideal to accommodate larger groups. The mezzanine on the second floor of the Complex allowed people to move back and forth to watch different matches during the

university's tennis games or USTA tournaments. The open space of the mezzanine also allowed the community to interact with players on court and vice versa. Interactions during matches included talking, cheering, and making eye contact.

It makes it easy for the community to get together and talk. And... the match is really accessible. It's spread out. You've got plenty of room indoors... but it's still tight enough. You can see three matches very easily from one perspective. You can take fifteen steps and be on other side and see those three matches. And we're seeing other people. (Participant #13, 01/02/24, from interview transcript).

In addition to the Tennis Complex's architecture, many of the details inside the Complex acted as 'markers' of identification for the tennis community. For instance, each tennis court and the two scoreboards showed the name of some core community members who contributed financially to the university's tennis program. Other details such as banners, murals, rosters, and colors inside the Tennis Complex presented the place in a way that community could easily identify with. The downstairs hallway of Tennis Complex also included printed pictures on the walls showing old newspapers articles and pictures of local tennis players' achievement throughout the years in the community.

Regular Interactions

Bucholt & Hall (2005) pointed out the connection between interactions and identity in the way that interaction is where identity is constructed. As such, Wilson (2018) discussed how context, interaction, identity, and space are all linked to each other in the process of constructing meaning and identity. Having participated in months of activities at the Tennis Complex, I noted that the facility acted as a place where most tennis players and fans in town would meet, interact and see one another regularly. Though my field notes also included observations at other research sites in which the tennis community interacted, I concluded that the Tennis Complex acted as a focal place where community members spent

most of the time encountering others and interacting with others on a regular basis. The Complex's values and practices served to shape the meaning of the tennis community.

Opportunities for recreational players

The Tennis Complex assigned its courts as first come first serve, except for a weekly designed 'block time'. The block time placed random members together in groups to use the courts for four hours each week. In addition, the Tennis Complex offered weekly tennis clinics for recreational players in the area. Doubles pairings formed through tennis classes served as a way for members of the Complex to meet other member players. The relationships formed through block time and the group classes, often translated into players booking courts at the Complex regularly and playing tennis against each other without a coach on court. For instance, many participants interviewed mentioned 'Monday Night League', an event organized by one of the recreational players in the community. Roughly twenty members of the community used four indoor courts between 4:00 and 6:00 p.m. every Monday night to play tennis. The only requirement to join the event was possessing a USTA ranking of 4.0. Participants stated that the ranking is not hard to achieve for people who have been playing tennis recreationally for a long time, but it is a tougher requirement for people who start playing tennis later in life. Besides the requirement, the event was open to any player who wanted to drop in at any time.

The facility also hosted United States Tennis Association (USTA) events at the end of March every year. Adult recreational players who met at the Complex through classes or doubles matches often formed doubles teams to compete in the USTA tournament. Tennis-related relationships that were established through such events often translated into relationships that continued to be nourished outside of the tennis context. With its many indoor and outdoor courts, the Complex also served as a place to host middle school and high school practices and matches throughout the spring season. Through these matches, middle

school and high schools' players, often accompanied by their parents to practice, got to know each other and often end up scheduling tennis practices together outside of school activities at the Tennis Complex.

University's tennis teams at the Complex

Being a partnership between the city and the university, the Tennis Complex held a contract with the university's tennis teams to provide eight indoor or outdoor courts every day between 1 and 4 p.m. for practices, as well as courts availability for the team's matches during the Spring season. In my observations at the facility, student-athletes were always greeted when walking into the Complex by both recreational players, coaches and employees.

Every time we would go practice at the Tennis Complex, people would be walking around going to their clinics and... you always saw their faces pretty much everyday when you're training and... they can see the work that you're putting in which is pretty cool (Participant #14, 01/03/24, from interview transcript).

Other than welcomes and greetings, other kind of interactions were generally initiated by adult players whose interest was in the athletes' well-being, teams' matches and travels. The promotion of seasonal tennis matches at the Complex through flyers and head coaches 'spreading the word' incentivized the members of the Complex, middle/high school kids and their parents to attend the university's tennis matches during the Spring season.

Fostering a sense of family and home

The Tennis Complex provided a place where different demographics of people could play the sport of tennis. The responses presented in the interviewed showed that participants perceived as a safe place, especially for families where both parents and kids spent time playing tennis recreationally. Parents discussed the ability to play tennis on court

or attend events at the facility without worrying about their kids wondering around the Complex in the presence of strangers or physical danger.

So, me and other moms would come out and we would bring our kids. And they'd bring toys, and they would play. Cause we had four courts, you know, enclosed. And they'd play on a couple courts with their trucks and their cars and their bikes. And me and the other moms would play tennis. And so that's how I started playing (Participant #11, 01/18/2024, from interview transcript).

Eight of the participants interviewed referred to the Tennis Complex as a second home. In my observations, community members and staff members of the Complex would often babysit for parents for short periods of time (generally one to two hours). One of the Tennis Complex' Pros and volunteer coaches for the university's tennis teams mentioned:

At the matches, one thing I'm famous for is showing up with my infant daughter, or now, my infant son, and just giving them to other ladies and parents that I've coached or known (Participant #1, 10/14/23, from interview transcript).

The Tennis Complex also played a significant role for the international student-athletes interviewed in the research. These participants were often student-athletes of the university who did not hold a membership at the Complex but still expressed feelings of sense of family of home from their experiences at the facility. Student-athletes were involved with the Tennis Complex merely through their time spent practicing and competition at the facility. As opposed to other community members, student-athletes spent roughly 14.2% of their time at the Tennis Complex in the time frame of year.

A lot of people would come and watch our games at the Tennis Complex which was usually pretty great. And being away from home it's kind of nice to have people who are like the same age as your parents talking to you. For instance, Jacob's parents... His parents acted as

my American parents to me. And they would always let me know if I even needed... If I would get stuck to go somewhere, I could always get to them. And same with the people around the Tennis Complex (Participant #14, 01/03/24, from interview transcript).

For instance, the 'team moms' is a system that Coach Haley put together at the Tennis Complex where we have one or two basically 'team moms' um... so ladies that have signed up to provide food and snacks on our match days which I think is just fabulous. It also brings in people to come watch our matches. It's linking members of the community together [...] that's also why it feels like home now, because I do have those connections and family members around like, you know, people that I can call family (Participant #8, 12/08/23, from interview transcripts).

So it feels like there is lots of people that care about you at the Tennis Complex, just sort of like an extended family. I've met several people, for example Tammy, one of the older women and tennis players at the complex. She invited me over for dinner. So I cooked a typical Italian meal for her. And we just got to know each other that way (Participant #15, 01/08/24, from interview transcript).

The sense of safety and the relationships developed at the Tennis Complex played a significant role in fostering a sense of extended family and a sense of home towards all kinds of individuals in the community (different ages and ethnicities).

Events

Another significant finding in the individual's place identity associated with the Tennis Complex resulted in the numerous formal and informal events held at the facility throughout the year. The difference between formal and informal events was the social media promotion of the event, the leadership and structure of the events, and the organizer of the event. Most of the formal events were usually organized by the university's team head

coaches and the city, while all of the informal events were also organized by the community members.

Table 4.

Formal and Informal Events

	Type of Events	Organizer	Participants	Descriptions
Formal	Team Moms	Unichpter versity	Student-athletes, coaches, recreational players, donors,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis clinic • Introduction of 'team moms' idea • Team moms sign up • Dinner • Refreshments
	Pro-Am	University	Student-athletes, coaches, administration, recreational players, donors,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis Clinic • Dinner • Breakfast • Doubles tournament • Lunch • Speeches of coaches and tournaments winner awards
	USTA events	City	Recreational player, city administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Doubles tournament
	University's Tennis Matches	University	Student-athletes, coaches, supporters, fans, donors, administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College Tennis Game • Food and beverages consumed
	Bump	City	Recreational players, members of the Tennis Complex	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis drills • Tennis points
	Tennis Clinics	University/City	Student-athletes, coaches, supporters, fans, donors, recreational players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis drills • Tennis points
Informal	Birthdays	Community members	Student-athletes, recreational players, coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebration • Food and beverages consumed
	Baby Shower	Community members	Student-athletes, recreational players, coaches, city administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Celebration • Food and beverages consumed • Group games played
	Friends giving	Community members	Student-athletes, coaches, recreational players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food and beverages consumed

	Monday Night League	Community members	Recreational players, members of the Tennis Complex, university coaches	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis points • Tennis drills
	Mixed Doubles tournaments	Community members	Recreational players, members of the Tennis Complex.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tennis points

Annual fundraising tournament

One of the most prominent formal events at the Tennis Complex was the ‘Pro-Am’. The tournament stretched over the course of two days, and it consisted in pairing up a professional player (a student-athlete or a coach) with an amateur player to compete in a doubles tournament. In my observations of the ‘Pro-Am’ tournament I was able to see who participated in the tournament and all the activities that took place during the two days. Activities included a tennis clinic and a dinner on the first day and matches and a lunch the following day.

The event has been expressed by the participants of the study to be one of the best examples in which the tennis community has been able to meet every year to have fun, play tennis and hang out with each other. The ‘Pro-Am’ allowed recreational players in the community to have a direct relationship with coaches and athletes of the university tennis team, meet people who are new members of the Tennis Complex and support the university’s tennis program financially. Dollars raised through the ‘Pro-Am’ have been used to upgrade the tennis program during the years (e.g. buy vans for the tennis team or buy a tennis ball machine). In the last few years, the money raised has been used to improve the interior design of the Tennis Complex. For instance, new banners and university logos have been put up all around the indoor tennis courts; new court signs with donors’ names, numbers, and directions have been placed in the downstairs area of the Complex and a tennis mural with pictures of the tennis teams has been printed on a wall on the upstairs mezzanine.

The additions to the Complex described above through the annual fundraising

included a variety of symbols and meanings that members associated with the tennis community as soon as they stepped foot inside the Tennis Complex. Participants interviewed pointed out some of these markers and their meanings:

If you look at when people donate money, you've got a scoreboard with your name on it.

You've got a tennis court that's got your name on it. You've got a brick on the on the ground, walking to the tennis courts that's got your name on it. Like there's a lot of pride. [...] and in the viewing seats on the new campus courts, they're gonna have some seats with people's name on it (Participant #6, 11/18/23, from interview transcript).

I'm gonna have a seat with my name on it [...] and I feel very comfortable coming here. You know how, when you first do something new somewhere and you're really intimidated and... obviously I'm here regularly. So, It's easy. I know where the bathrooms are (Participant #4, 10/18/23, from interview transcript).

Tonts and Atherley (2010) stated that “local communities have often invested heavily in sporting facilities, providing substantial amounts of money and volunteer hours for their construction and maintenance” (p. 388). The tennis community showed a great level of investment and commitment to the Tennis Complex and its sporting activities. Events such as ‘the Pro-Am’ were designed by the university’s teams head coaches not only to facilitate social interactions within the tennis community, but also to instill commitment into contributing financially to support the local tennis teams and improve the indoor facility. The Complex acted as a place in which social networks and relationships could be expressed. Through their contributions, members of the community associated their identity to the Complex through the symbolic attachment of names, courts, pictures and logos.

Signs and Symbols

During activities held at the Tennis Complex the tennis community used a

number of 'markers' to help define community identity and distinctiveness. university's colors and gear with the university's logos were generally worn by the players, coaches, and the community members. For instance, colors and logos were used by 'Team Moms' to decorate tables during university's tennis matches at the Tennis Complex. Funds raised through tennis events at the Complex were used to add banners and other details inside the facility representing the 'markers' of the local university. Thus, even though the university was only a legal user group of the facility, they were able to claim some ownership over the Tennis Complex through branded signage. Members of the tennis community, such as supporters and donors of the university's teams but also members of the Tennis Complex, often wore bucket hats, sweatshirts, and t-shirts that carried both the tennis club logos and the local university's colors and logos. In discussing the member's identity with the Tennis Complex, such symbolic markers helped signify the identity of the members and the contrast between 'locals' and 'outsiders' (Tonts & Atherley, 2010, p. 387).

Discussion

The nature of place identity

As established in the literature, places are important parts of our every day life. Places do not just serve us to relate ourselves to others and establish relationships, but they are also essential to construct our personal and social identity (Goffman, 1974). In relation to sport, place identity is not just seen in the physical space, but also in the symbols and signs that people use to identify with such place. Members of the tennis community have described the meaning of the Tennis Complex and their feelings of identification with the space through the design of the Tennis Complex, the layout of signs and symbols related to the university's tennis program, their feelings of family and home associated with the facility, the regular interactions occurring between community members, and the events held at the

facility which created and nourished relationships and interactions between different members in the community.

The research found the Tennis Complex to act as a “meeting place” (Massey, 1994) where social relations within the tennis community occurred regularly. The nature of place identity was found through the Complex’s symbols, meanings, values, and practices in which the community associated with. Toma (2003) discussed the distinctive songs, colors, symbols, rituals and tradition associated with institutions and its sporting teams (p. 20). The features and values of the Tennis Complex created a sense of pride and belonging for a number of members of the community, especially the ones who contributed financially. Other features inside the Complex, such as university banners, signs and names impacted the tennis community in using symbols that carried pride and commitment in the representation of the university’s tennis program at the Complex. Following Tuan’s (1977) discussion of space and place, I observed as the physical space of the Tennis Complex turned into a place where community members got accustomed to the facility, spent time regularly there, and started to associate meaning with it.

Meaning of Place Identity for Different User Groups

The findings offered ways to interpret how these factors were more or less important and/or had different meanings to different community members. As established, the community members who participated in this study were fans, supporters, donors, student-athletes, coaches of the university’s tennis program and members, coaches, and employees of the Tennis Complex. The design of the Tennis Complex seemed to be particularly important to the university’s coaches, the community members who contributed financially to the construction of the Tennis Complex, those community members who have been living in the city all their life. The layout of the tennis courts and scoreboards, as well as the large space of the mezzanine designated for spectators was especially important to the

people who contributed financially to the facility (donors) and the people who contributed by giving their opinions and making decisions over such details (coaches and administrators of both university and city). The meaning of the design of the Complex also highlighted by older community members who have been born and raised in the city and have used several different tennis facilities prior to the construction of the Tennis Complex. Donors, coaches, and members of the Tennis Complex also highlighted the importance of signs and symbols displayed at the facility in their meaning of place identity. These individuals especially found that signs and symbols that displayed the university's tennis teams at the Complex impacted their meaning and attachment to the facility.

The meaning of the Tennis Complex fostering a sense of home and family was found to be specifically important for the international student-athletes of the university's tennis teams and the adult members of the Tennis Complex with kids. International student-athletes identified the Tennis Complex as a place in which they associated feelings of family-like emotional support, similar to the support of their parents and family in their home country. Adult members of the Complex who often brought their children to the facility also discussed feelings of home when playing and hanging out at the facility.

Finally, the events held at the Tennis Complex, whether they were organized by the university tennis' teams, the city, or the recreational players themselves, were highlighted by all different users' groups as one of the main factors in which they associated meaning with the Tennis Complex.

Process of place identity formation

The findings of this manuscript not only represented the nature of community's identity with the Tennis Complex, but they also offered ways of interpretations on how such place identity was formed. The presence of the indoor Tennis Complex itself was an incredibly significant for all different members of the community as it always provided a

place where people could play indoor tennis and engage in events and regular interactions throughout the year. The connection of the Tennis Complex with the university, the symbolism and meanings that shaped the Complex, reflected Paasi's (2003) process of place identity formation. The sense of family and home described by the community members occurred as a process in time after the Tennis Complex established status in both "spatial structure of society and its social consciousness" (Paasi, 1991). As community members became more aware of other people at the Tennis Complex, they expressed feelings of safety, comfort and family as if walking into a second home. The mutual support and assistance between various groups at the Tennis Complex provided a sense of togetherness between members who felt like they could rely on each other over matters that were not necessarily tennis related.

Though the findings did not show any signs of active exclusion, it is worth acknowledging that the Tennis Complex could still be 'out of reach' for many people. The data collected through my observations have shown the Complex to be accessible to different demographics (both kids and adults), especially when participating in tennis group clinics. However, the present study did not investigate the larger population in the city who may feel as such the Tennis Complex is inaccessible for a variety of reasons: living in poverty, feeling socially marginalized, lacking a knowledge of the sport, dealing with tangible obstacles such as possessing tennis equipment and other logistical considerations such as transportation. More research should consider exploring these factors to find out if there are groups of people or individuals that may not feel a sense of home at the Tennis Complex.

After presenting the findings identified through this study, my understanding of place identity for the tennis community lies on the Tennis Complex being able to make people feel welcome, comfortable and familiar with each other. As such, the Complex has been a key factor in bringing the tennis community closer together and providing a structure

in which a small portion of society identifies with its meanings and values. Many of the participants pointed out that before the construction of the Tennis Complex, the tennis community was much more fragmented. The regular interactions established over time through the opportunities for recreational players and the presence of the university tennis teams at the facility shaped participant's understanding of the community through place identity, as opposed to when the community participated in tennis activities at other sites over the course of previous decades. The concept of place identity was also influenced by the community's financial contributions and investment into the university's tennis teams, which had a major impact on construction of the Complex itself. The meaning of what the Tennis Complex represents to the community was tied to both the involvement and attachment to the university's tennis teams and to the Tennis Complex's symbols, values and practices.

Conclusion

Without disregarding the many important approaches to community in sport management (e.g. community as an outcome, community as a site for struggle, community as a form of regulation and social control), this manuscript explored the factors and conceptualization expressed by the tennis community in relation to place identity with the Tennis Complex through the physical space, meanings, signs, and values of the Tennis Complex and the university's tennis teams. When gaining context in addition to the interviews, participant observations showed evidence suggesting that the winning success of the men's tennis team versus the women's tennis team drew more engagement and participation in terms of game attendance at the Tennis Complex. While this manuscript does not address the gender issue highlighted in the success of the local tennis teams at the Complex, future research on the impact of gender on sporting communities and place should be further explored.

Scholars should continue to explore the messiness of sport in community contexts, especially in regard to physical space and how to manage diverse forms of participation between diverse members of a sport community (Rich et al., 2021, p. 4). In particular, more studies should investigate how the concept of place identity may exclude individuals who do not have the chance to access the place and identify it. As such, further research should also investigate how community-building and place-identity can impact people's social and mental health. Moreover, research should focus on communities that exist in the context of university athletics, as the number of college athletics' programs outweigh the number of major professional sport leagues in the U.S. Understanding how a community interprets itself in relation to sport programs and sporting facilities can offer sport organizations' leaders more knowledge on strategies and techniques to use for community engagement and building.

Finally, conducting an ethnographic study to examine the subjective understanding of the tennis community was an evolving process. As I selected specific individuals (e.g. student-athletes, donors, coaches, etc.) for the semi-structured interviews process, my interview questions continued to develop, following the direction of what most people would emphasize in their responses. This process shaped both the research question and the findings for this manuscript. My advice for future ethnographers who find themselves in a similar research context would be to consider selecting specific participants for focus groups interviews rather than one-on-one interviews, in order to obtain answers that build on each other in a faster data collecting process.

The rest of the evening proceeded with our men's tennis team winning the game with a score of 4-1. Dora had the chance to talk to the guy she had set her eyes on, and apparently we were going to grab another drink with his group of friends next. After our

exchange with this group, I continued to introduce Dora to a few more people throughout the night. At 7:40 p.m. we were getting ready to leave when the athletes came up from the tennis courts to the mezzanine and started shaking hands with every person present.

Ian, one of the seniors, walked towards us and in quick passing he shook both of our hands. "Thank you for coming" he said.

I got the sense that Dora was not expecting this interaction and she was not sure what to say back.

"You guys played very well. Congrats. Keep it up!" I said back.

It seemed like there were still as many people on the mezzanine as when we first arrived at the Tennis Complex. Most people had stayed until the end of the game and the athletes and coaches were now exchanging quick conversations with most of the people present. After a few minutes, Dora seemed ready to go, so we walked downstairs and made our way back to the car.

"Did you enjoy the game?" I asked her.

"Yes! It was great. You know, I can start to understand now why you are studying these tennis people. The bond they have with the tennis team and others is very evident. The Complex is really functional too. I have not experienced this kind of environment with volleyball in the past, and certainly not at a tennis game".

"I'm glad you had a good time!" I exclaimed with a smile on my face.

"I wasn't expecting to meet this many people." Dora paused for a second. "Are there any more tennis games at the Complex this weekend?" she asked.

"The next one is Sunday morning." I said smiling as I opened the car door, knowing we would be going back to the Tennis Complex again in two days.

CHAPTER V:**‘Getting Things Done’: An Exploration of
Power Dynamics in Partnership between a City and a University ¹**

¹ Zirilli, M. & Dunlap, R. To be submitted to *Sport Management Review*

Abstract

Changes in society throughout the 20th and 21st century have led sport organizations to embrace public-private partnerships and other forms of collaborative partnerships. When successful, these partnerships can bring great benefits to the parties involved. However, the reality of these collaborations is complicated and difficult to manage, sometimes even resulting in failure. This study explored a partnership between a city, a local university and the surrounding tennis community at the site of a semi-public facility, known as the Tennis Complex. The facility came to life as a financial collaboration between a city, a local university, and a non-profit organization. The research specifically examined power and influence of the partnership and its actors at the site of the Tennis Complex. The use of Institutional Ethnography (Smith, 2006) as a methodology uncovered the ‘behind the scenes’ of power relations within the tennis community and any conflict or tension within the University, the Tennis Complex, and the community. The researcher spent six months at the Tennis Complex to conduct participants’ observations and semi-structured interviews. The manuscript used Pfeffer’s (1994) model of power and influence as a theoretical framework for this research. The results concluded how power manifested in this setting, especially how sources of power were created and how power was exercised within the partnership at the site of the Tennis Complex. The results also highlighted the importance of knowing relevant background information of such partnerships and the history and involvement of high valued participants in such joint collaborations.

Introduction

New structures in society emerging through environmental factors such as “globalization, changing technologies, economic challenges, and evolving social expectations” (Babiak, 2007, p. 338) have forced sport organizations to find new innovative strategies to create and maintain personal relationships. Many scholars in the field of sport management explored the changes that sport organizations have applied when dealing with changes related to external factors in society. A major change for sport organizations has been creating partnership of collaboration and cooperation (Clegg & Hardy, 1999; Doz & Hamel, 1998; Harrigan, 1995; Hennart & Zeng, 2005; Kanter, 1994). Babiak (2007) presented a number of practices in the ways that sport organizations have been evolving through the last two decades. Some of the changes have included governments embracing public-private partnerships (Boase, 2000; Coulson, 2005; Grimsey & Lewis, 2004; Lehman & Tregoning, 2004), organizations creating strategic alliances (Das & Teng, 2002; Spekman et al., 1998); and nonprofit organizations establishing collaborative partnerships with nontraditional partners (Alexander, 2000; Andreasen, 1996; Roussin Isett & Provan, 2005).

When successful, these partnerships and collaborations can bring great benefits to both parties involved. However, the reality of these shared projects can be complicated and difficult to manage, sometimes even resulting in failure. Harris & Houlihan (2016) discussed partnerships in community sport, especially through the involvement of non-profit organizations with the British government. Authors provide several examples of the efforts of managing the performance of such partnerships, such as creating performance management frameworks, clarify roles and responsibilities, and provide a rationale under which performance of partners can be evaluated and rewarded (Harris & Houlihan, 2016, p. 4). Since the introduction of public-private partnerships (PPP) in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, Singapore has also been motivated to use PPP. Singapore created innovative networks

through the opening of the Sports Hub, in the hopes to “unlock value by bringing in major sporting and entertainment events, to maximize utilization of the facility” (Ho, 2022). The early termination of Singapore Sports Hub PPP is an example of how these forms of innovations don’t always work out (Ho, 2022). In explaining why such partnerships may not work out, El-Gohary et al. (2006) pointed out that stakeholder opposition is usually the main cause of failure. In addition, the stakeholder relationship may also be the cause of poor project performance (Davis, 2014). The importance of exploring power relations and influence within a university and a city in this particular study can add to the body on knowledge on the management of public-private partnerships and the problem found in the possible failure of such partnerships. In addition, literature on sport organizations lacks on articulating of how power operates within partnership practices, as well as expressing the impact of these practices on outcomes (Wallerstein et al., 2019). In particular, scholarly inquiry is missing on how power is exercised structurally and relationally by partners in response to collaborations.

Research Context

Since 2015, the Tennis Complex has been the official home of the university’s tennis program, located just ten minutes’ drive from the university campus. The project came to life as a joint collaboration between the city, the University and a nonprofit organization. The project has been part of the university’s \$80 million Centennial Campaign announced in April 2012, from which the university provided \$1.8 million to help fund the Complex. The nonprofit foundation provided the City with a \$500,000 check, and the rest of the funds were provided by the City to amount to a total of \$5.8 million. The Complex is now operated by the City’s Parks and Recreation, including outdoor court usage and reservations. The agreement finalized between the city and the university guarantees the university’s tennis programs access to the Complex every day from 1 to 4 p.m. for tennis practices and

scheduled times during weekends for tennis matches. The public has access to the Complex's courts during the rest of the time. The Tennis Complex does not only serve to enhance the university's men's and women's tennis programs to showcase their excellent teams, but it also gives a wonderful chance for the tennis community in the city to practice both leisure and competitive activities through the sport of tennis.

In this research context, community refers to large groups of people who are either affiliated with the Tennis Complex, with the university tennis program, or both. These are supporters, fans, donors, student-athletes, and tennis alumni of the university's tennis program; recreational players and members of the Tennis Complex; employees and leaders of both entities. Particularly, supporters refer to those people who support the university's tennis team by attending tennis games but also by attending events related to the tennis programs. Supporters also include those individuals who offer encouragement and attention to student-athletes and coaches outside of the tennis-context (e.g. offering help to the needs of the student-athletes or coaches by bringing snacks or providing extra food and beverages during home games). Fans include those individuals who show an interest or admiration for the student-athletes competition during their tennis games, but who are not as involved as the supporters. Donors refer to those people who financially contributed to the university's tennis program. Athletes and coaches refer to the current tennis student-athletes and coaches of the program. Leaders include both the athletic administrators and head tennis coaches of the university and the administrators of the Tennis Complex.

In understanding the notion of power and influence between the city and the university, the involvement of the tennis community has been crucial. It is worth to note that when referring to the university as a financial contributor in the construction of the Tennis Complex, nearly all the money contributed by the university came from private donations of the community members for the project of the Tennis Complex.

Furthermore, many people in the community have served as sponsors of organized events taking place at the Tennis Complex and have played a role in facilitating relationships within community members through their statuses, titles, or financial contributions. The tennis community discussed in this study, which included leaders of both Parks & Recs and the university's tennis program, contained people of different ranks and titles in terms of leadership and socio-economic status.

Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of the study is to explore the dynamics of power and influence at play at the Tennis Complex through the collaborative partnership of the city and the university. Due to the involvement of the tennis community through financial contributions to the university's tennis program, the study takes in consideration the subjective perspective of community members on the power relations examined.

As such, this manuscript will answer the following research question:

How have power and influence been created and exercised in the partnership between the city and the university through the facility of the Tennis Complex?

In answering the research questions, the following sub questions will serve to guide the findings presented:

1. What goals were shared between the city and the university?
2. What were the university-community dynamics?
3. What sources of power were created in this context?
4. What were some of the disagreements and tensions between the city and the university?

Literature review

Only a few scholars and practitioners of community have specifically explored community-university dynamics and engagement. For instance, Bringle & Hatcher (2002), Peters (2005) and Weerts & Sandmann (2008) pointed out the role of peer relationships,

mutual benefit, and reciprocity of creating partnerships between campus and community leaders. Campus-community partnerships are complex ones. Bender (1993) discussed the differences between universities and communities in the way that they each create knowledge and solve problems. Bringle & Hatcher (2002) suggested that one way of examining these relationships is by focusing on the “the personal level where a relationship develops between individuals” (e.g. organization personnel, community residents, students, etc.) (p. 505). When exploring these dynamics, it is important to be aware how such relationships initiated. Bringle & Hatcher (2002) argued out that some relationships may “create unintentionally (e.g. following crises), may occur through coincidence, or they may be arranged through third parties” (e.g. City government connecting campus and community organization) (p. 506). In fact, scholars like Peters (2005, p. 267-269) and Weerts & Sandmann (2008, p. 76) highlighted the importance of discussing the motivations for pursuing these kinds of partnerships, as well as knowing the history and role of such partnerships.

When individuals who work in sport organizations, such as head coaches, assistant coaches, managers, and administrators have control over resources as a result of interrelationships within the organization, they also gain power to dictate how other individuals gain access to such resources (Kleinrichert, 2008, p. 476). Kleinrichert (2008) stated that “these relationships are resources in themselves” (p. 476). In order for individuals who are part of an organization to create relationships and establish ties to other people and to other organizations, Culbert (1996) claimed that one must have a “view of the world that the other person actually lives in” (p. 14). Furthermore, Kleinrichert (2008) stated that “how an individual perceives their reputation within an organization may shape both their motivate to establish ties to the community and their view of how they may establish inter-organizational sources of power” (p. 477).

Babiak (2007) is another scholar who discussed inter-organizational relationships and

partnerships of groups formation that spark from collaboration between nonprofit, public, and private organizations in a sport context. The author pointed out how effectiveness of sport organizations is now generated within networks of interactions among organizations, such as embracing public-private partnerships (p. 338). Chojnacka (2021) explored public-private partnerships as a source of financing of sport and recreation infrastructure, the same method used for finance and construction of the Tennis Complex. Lee et al. (2018) used a qualitative systematic review of public-private partnerships to address the promotion of physical activity. While cross-sector partnerships certainly serve to promote health and physical benefits of the public through the construction of sporting facilities, underlying challenges between such partnerships are always present, even if not visible. Catry et al. (2022) showed that “lack of communication and imbalances in power dynamics” can negatively impact on the quality of partners’ relationship for a specific project (p. 2). Demirag et al. (2011) also pointed out the difference in interests in infrastructure projects between public and private stakeholders, often holding different views and responsibilities. Such obstacles can also impact joint decision-making on projects and cause further difficulties in policies.

Power relations

Feddersen et al. (2011) defined power relations as systematic power (e.g. formal) and informational power (e.g. tacit feeling of belonging). These examples of power relations are worth to keep in mind when researching organizational relationships between public-private partnerships as power relations may change the process of an organization. In fact, Alvesson (2017) and Heinze & Lu (2017) have claimed power relations to be a key feature to understanding social process of organizational change and organizational culture change. Grounded in power, the *capacity to produce intended results*, Himmelman (2001) claimed that “power relations need to be guided by leadership development and community organizing” (p. 278).

The conceptualization of power for this study is centered around financial contributions to the university's tennis program, political activism of the community members, the establishment of personal relationships between the two entities and the tennis community, and the leadership and presence of both the Tennis Complex and university's tennis program representatives in 'getting things done' for the tennis community. The implications for this study consist in providing an account of the history of the university tennis program, the Tennis Complex, and their partnership with the city. In particular, the study will unpack the practices, strategies and values used by leaders of the organizations. White (2010) wrote that "the effort to carry out these principles focuses specifically on the quality of interpersonal relations" (p. 67). In particular, this research targets the interactions and relations between the Tennis Complex and the university's tennis leaders (coaches, managers and administrators).

Theoretical Framework

The introduction to this study presented the reader with a number of changes approached by sport organizations in the 21st century, followed by a literature review on the dynamics and challenges of collaborative partnerships. Pfeffer (1994) also discussed the difficulties that many organizations have faced with implementing the changes described. In relation to these issues, the author examined the role of power and influence in the implementation process, as to consider ways to *get things done* through "hierarchical authority" (Pfeffer, 1994, p. 23). However, there are a number of problems with examining organizations using this kind of approach. Needless to say, it is badly outdated, authority still derives from the fact that all of the people in the organization and its community need to cooperate and work together to achieve goals and objectives. In addition, when one individual is placed at the top of the hierarchical pyramid, the organization can face extreme difficulties in the case of that individual's failure. Another way of getting things done is by

developing a shared organizational vision and culture to provide a common perspective on what to accomplish and how to accomplish it. Without denying the importance of culture in the implementation of changes within an organization and its community, it is worth to remember time is required to establish a culture (whether that refers to cultural norms in society or the culture of an organization) and new ideas can always penetrate into culture.

Pfeffer's (1994) outlook on power in organizations started from the problem that he noticed with corporations getting rid of their personnel due to ineffective management. Such problem has often led to organizations disappear at a higher rate. In examining this problem, the author stated that "it is not clear that by ignoring the social realities of power and influence we can make them go away". By pretending that power doesn't exist in organizations or partnerships of collaboration, Pfeffer (1994) believed that we contribute to the major problem of today's organizations: the incapacity of taking action and getting things done (p. 10). Similarly, the reason why collaborative partnerships fail or encounter major challenges is because no one is paying attention to power in organizations. While Pfeffer used examples of corporations in its hierarchies (e.g. CEOs, directors, managers, etc.), this study focuses on the collaboration of two organizations (city and universities) in a more complicated context of a tennis community. At the City level, actors such as the Mayor or the Executive Directors of Recreational Services may not be as involved in the every day work process of the organization as the Facility Superintendent or the Facility Coordinator at the Tennis Complex. Similarly, the President or the Athletic Director of the university may not be as involved as the university head tennis coaches in the decisions made at the Tennis Complex at practical level.

This study explored power relations between the partnership of the city and the university at the site of the Tennis Complex through the use of Pfeffer's (1994) concepts of power and influence. The understanding of power and influence through his definition

does not necessarily involve having to use formal authority, nor having to rely on a strong organizational culture. Rather, power and influence are used as a set of ways to get things done (Pfeffer, 1994, p. 28). In this model, power was defined by “the ability to influence behavior, to change the course of events and to get people to do things that they would not do otherwise” (Pfeffer, 1994, p. 30). Pfeffer (1994)’s model continued to be used in studies that explored the nature of power within institutions and organizations, such as Kleinrichert (2008), Magee & Galinsky (2008), Scott (2013), Scott & Davis (2015) and Robbins (2013). In his most recent publication *7 Rules of Power*, Pfeffer’s (2022) emphasized the necessity for political skills in today’s organizations as a means of getting things done. He recognized the importance of knowing who has the power, understanding that decentralized organizations hierarchical authority is often insufficient to make things happen and placing emphasis on interpersonal influence as a way to accomplish innovation (Pfeffer, 2022, p. 4).

Materials and Methods

In January 2016, I started my experiences at the indoor Tennis Complex as a student- athlete. After four years of practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex, I took on the job of assistant coach for the women’s team. During this time, my role and experiences at the Complex shifted in their meaning. As a coach, I was much more aware of other coaches, staff and people who played tennis recreationally at the Complex. The years spent working at Tennis Complex and being in close contact with the tennis community drew me in to conduct the following scholarly inquiry. My initial feelings about the concept of community, the university’s tennis program and the Tennis Complex were as such that a tennis community was clearly evident. My impressions were also as such that the two entities that played a role in the construction of the Tennis Complex had power and influence in shaping the interpretations of the community and in the management of the facility, but these dynamics needed further exploration.

Institutional Ethnography

A qualitative approach was selected to address the research question of this inquiry. In order to explore power relations between the public-private partnership at the Tennis Complex, the methodology for this study was guided by Smith's (1995, 2006) explanation of institutional ethnography. IE is a type of methodology used to "explore particular concerns or strands within a specific institutional complex, in ways that make visible their points of connection with other sites and courses of action" (Smith, 2006, p. 17). The difference between institutional ethnography and other types of ethnographies is that the first proposes a sociology that "does not begin in theory but in people's experiences" (Smith, 2006, p. 2). As a result, the research questions don't arise from the literature, but rather from the researcher's observations in the field and any dissonance between what is observed and what authoritative knowledge claims should be happening. This type of ethnography begins "in the actualities of the lives of some of those involved in the institutional process and focus on how those actualities were embedded in social relations" (Smith, 2005, p. 31). The institutional processes that this study focuses on are Parks & Recs through the administration of the Tennis Complex and the local university through its tennis program, to investigate how these two entities operate and interact with each other. While ethnography as a qualitative method starts from the individual actors and ends with an analysis at the individual, IE also start from the individual actors but ends with an analysis at the institutional complex.

Often used in qualitative inquiry to discover 'how things are actually put together', institutional ethnography primarily uses participant observations and semi-structured interviews as "autonomous methods" (Smith, 2006, p. 6). In particular, institutional ethnography uses interviews as an approach to "investigate participants' inner experiences in order to reveal the 'ruling of relations' that shape local experiences" (DeVault & McCoy, 2006, p. 15). As identified by Smith (1999), 'ruling of relations' are "the forms in

which power is generated and held in contemporary societies” (p. 79). Burawoy (1991) added that IE is a type of methodology that is often used by researchers to “uncover macro foundations of microsociology” (p. 282), as the researcher first explores the ‘life world’ using participant observations and semi-structured interviews and then the ‘system’ using theory that is operative (Smith, 2005, p. 35). Recent studies in the field of sport have used Smith’s (1995) methodological approach of IE, such as McCulloch & Safai’s (2002) analysis of care in Ontario youth volleyball, Finn’s (2022) exploration of underrepresented women coaches in Canadian university sport and Krahn’s (2022) exploration of university sport coaching work and professionalization.

Data Generation, Analysis, and Transformation

The research started in the October of 2023 and ended in March 2024. During the month of October, I began studying the tennis community by conducting participant observations and semi-structured interviews at the Tennis Complex. I spent the next six months continuing working at the Complex and exploring the tennis community in order to create an ethnographic representation of its unique characteristics. Being present in the research context was the primary reason why ethnography was chosen as the methodology for this study. Through the use of ethnography, participant observation (Aktinson and Hammersley, 1994; Wolcott, 1999; Musante, 2015) was the primary method used to generate data for this research. Participant observations served to gather data describing the participant’s activities, behaviors, interactions, and tensions at the site of the Tennis Complex. Semi-structured interviews then served to gather participants’ experiences and perceptions on the concepts of community and power dynamics. Both the semi-structured interviews and my own personal observations kept in a research journal were used to compare data to the context specific field notes.

During the months spent collecting data, I conducted time 33.5 hours of

participant observations at the Tennis Complex. The following table indicates the events attended, what was observed and described, and the hours spent at each event.

Table 1.

Participant Observations at the Tennis Complex

Research Site: Tennis Complex				
Event	Observations/Descriptions	Date	Hours	Length of Fieldnotes
Doubles tournament between women's tennis team and a group of male recreational players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits, equipment) • Description of format and rules of the tournament (scoring, pairings, rounds) • Description of behaviors of participants around each other • Description of interactions and conversations heard 	10/17/2023	3	2910 words
Men's and Women's team practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Descriptions of interactions with others when teams arrived at the Tennis Complex • Behaviors of teams at the Tennis Complex • Interactions between team members and outsiders during practice times • Interactions between team members and employees of the Tennis Complex 	01/09/2024 01/10/2024 02/03/2024	9	6846 words
Free tennis clinic organized by the university's tennis team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits, equipment) • Description of format and rules of the tennis clinic (court pairings, adult vs. kids drills) • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions between team members and participants of the clinic • Description of interactions and conversations heard 	01/13/2024	2	2075 words
Pro-Am tournament: dinner and drinks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all senses • Description of the set up and format of the dinner • Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits) • Description of food and beverages consumed. 	10/17/2023	2	3393 words

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Behaviors of participants around each other Interactions and conversations heard Description of speeches made 			
Pro-Am tournament	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the place using all senses Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits, equipment) Description of format and rules of the tournament (scoring, pairings, rounds) Description of behaviors of participants around each other Description of interactions and conversations heard 	10/18/2023	5	6689 words
Pro-Am: lunch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the set up and format of the lunch Description of participants (demographics, outfits) Description of food and beverages consumed. Behaviors of participants around each other Interactions and conversations heard Description of speeches made and prize winners 	10/18/2023	2	4161 words
Local Ladies Mixer (Clinic and Refreshments organized by the women's tennis teams for female recreational players only)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the place using all senses Description of the clinic format Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits) Description of food and beverages consumed Behaviors of participants around each other Interactions and conversations between university's women's team and recreational female players Description of 'Team Moms' Description of speeches made by coaches 	11/13/2023	2.5	9259 words
Women's Head Tennis Coach Baby shower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of the place using all senses Description of the set up of the baby shower Description of the set up of the dinner and helpers Description of participants (number, demographics, outfits) Description of food and beverages consumed 	02/09/2024	2.5	4516 words

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Behaviors of participants around each other • Interactions and conversations heard • Description of games played • Description of gifts • Description of speeches made 			
Friends giving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all the sense • Description of participants (demographics, outfits, number) • Description of food and beverages • Description of conversations made • Descriptions of interactions between participants 	11/24/2023	2	2714 words
University men's team home opener game	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the place using all sense • Description of people in attendance (number, outfits, demographics) • Description of partnerships (food truck, breweries, inflatables, campus bookstore) • Description of tennis game and participants • Description of attendees' behaviors at the game • Interactions between attendees • Interactions between attendees and men's tennis team • Description of conversations heard • Behaviors of men's student-athletes and coaches during the games and their engagement with the crowd 	01/13/2024	3.5	8436 words

During my participation and observation, I initially created jottings. From the jottings, I then composed field notes from which I elaborated my observations and my experiences at the Tennis Complex during such events. In addition to participant observation, I conducted 23 semi-structured interviews with various members of the Tennis Complex to provide addition context and contrast to my observations and the characterizations of community formed through my own experiences and the community members'.

Table 2.*Participants Interviewed*

Participant	Role/affiliation with the university	Date	Time	Length of transcript	Involvement with the Tennis Complex	Length of time knowing this person
#1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteer Coach for the university women's tennis team • Employee at the Tennis Complex • Supporter 	10/16/2023	53:56:00	7993 words	Very involved with the Tennis Complex as he was a full time Pro there between 2018 and 2022, and now a current part-time Pro.	6 years
#2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student-athlete 	10/28/2023	34:23:00	6285 words	Spent nearly every day practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex since she was a student-athlete. Used to take lessons from Pros and paly tournaments there as a teenager.	4 years
#3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporter • Recreational player • Member of the Tennis Complex 	10/28/2023	53:53:00	7866 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex.	8 years
#4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Recreational player • Member of the Tennis Complex 	10/18/2023	68:35:00	9251 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Was involved in contributing financially to construction of the Tennis Complex.	8 years
#5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Member of the Tennis Complex 	11/05/2023	37:12:00	5150 words	Does not spend time at the Tennis Complex except for when his kids play there or when the university tennis teams compete there. Contributed financially to the university tennis program	6 years
#6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former student-athlete 	11/18/2023	50:32:00	7742 words	Spent nearly every day of her college career practicing	8 years

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • University Alumni 				and competing at the Tennis Complex.	
#7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor • Fan • Member of the Tennis Complex 	11/18/2023	67:54:00	10307 words	Not a regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to the university's tennis program.	1 month
#8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student-athlete 	12/08/2023	55:32:00	8269 words	Spent nearly every day practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex since she was a student-athlete.	4 years
#9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex • Donor 	12/14/2023	34:08:00	4737 words	Does not spend time at the Tennis Complex except for when her is kids play there or when the university tennis teams compete there. Contributed financially to the university tennis program.	6 years
#10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex 	12/14/2023	62:30:00	7884 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Was involved in contributing financially to construction of the Tennis Complex as well as contributing to the university' tennis program.	4 years
#11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donor • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex 	12/22/2023	72:04:00	11434 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Was involved in contributing financially to construction of the Tennis Complex as well as contributing to the university' tennis program.	7 years
#12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former university men's head coach • University Alumni 	12/19/2023	93:53:00	12449 words	Does not spend time at the Tennis Complex. Not currently involved.	1 year
#13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor 	01/02/2024	55:02:00	7520 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both	4 years

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member of the Tennis Complex • Alumni 				the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	
#14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former student-athlete • Alumni 	01/03/2024	45:22:00	7590 words	Spent nearly every day of his college career practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex.	6 years
#15	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student-athlete 	01/08/2024	29:21:00	4101 words	Spent nearly every day of the past year practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex.	1 year
#16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current student-athlete 	01/10/2024	44:26:00	7670 words	Spent nearly every day practicing and competing at the Tennis Complex since she was a student-athlete.	4 years
#17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Member of the Tennis Complex 	01/18/2024	81:51:00	11666 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	6 years
#18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fan • Donor • Member of the Tennis Complex • Former university women's head tennis coach • University Alumni 	01/18/2024	81:58:00	11666 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	6 years
#19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporter • Member of the Tennis Complex 	01/18/2024	54:12:00	9105 words	Regular recreational player at the Tennis Complex. Contributed financially to both the construction of the Tennis Complex and the university tennis programs.	1 year

#20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employee of the Tennis Complex 	02/05/2024	42:05:00	6412 words	Works at the Tennis Complex every day. Also plays tennis recreationally at the facility.	6 months
#21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current university associate head men's tennis coach 	03/25/2024	49:26:00	7033 words	Spent nearly every day coaching the university men's team at the Tennis Complex since he started coaching for the university.	3 years
#22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current university head men's tennis coach 	04/08/2024	54:18:00	10063 words	Spent nearly every day coaching the university men's team at the Tennis Complex since he started coaching for the university.	8 years
#23	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Current university head women's tennis coach 	04/03/2024	57:54:00	8672 words	Spent nearly every day coaching the university women's team at the Tennis Complex since she started coaching for the university.	6 years

Data analysis for this inquiry was guided primarily by Wolcott's (1994) stages of data transformation for ethnographic data, which took place over three stages of analysis. The first step of the analysis process started by composing interviews transcripts and the field notes based on the observations of the research sites and its community members. The field

notes were initially composed by describing the structure of the sites in detail. I then elaborated the filed notes by describing the community members who participated in the various events at the Tennis Complex, followed by writing notes on what people did during the events, their activities, and their interactions with each other. Much of the focus was placed on identifying who was in charge of organizing events and the dynamics involved between leaders and the community. Such descriptions served as the core of data generation, while in addition I also included my subjective experiences in participating in such events.

The next step in the analysis process was reviewing field notes and interview transcripts. During this stage, I used Miles & Huberman's (1984) method of *selecting* and *simplifying* data where I read and reviewed the data and started to identify significant words and passages. Then, I used Turner's (2006) method of *mapping* to where I laid out a display of words or diagrams, from what was happening based on my field notes and the interview transcripts. Following, I used Rankin's (2017) method of *indexing* as way to identify categories, subcategories, and themes.

As part of institutional ethnography, I also used the methodological tool of formulating a problematic (Smith, 1995). The research problematic was identified through stories that revealed experiences, troubles arising, or conflicts that are either invisible or misrepresented within authorized accounts (Rankin, 2017, p. 3). The problematic of this research was found in the challenges and disagreements in the management and administration of the Tennis Complex following the partnerships between city and the university. In addition to practical disagreements and conflicts about court times and court assignment, the research problematic found signs of tensions and unhappiness on the vision and administration of the Tennis Complex through Parks & Recreation for the development of junior tennis. Specifically, concerns were identified on the difference in knowledge on the sport of tennis between the city elected employees and the coaches and administrators of the

university's tennis program. Following these steps, the analysis moved into identifying *codes* (Saldana, 2013). Coding was done by using a qualitative analysis software: NVivo. Finally, I used the method of analytic memos (Saldana, 2013) to reflect on the coding process and challenge my own assumptions about the research findings.

Results

Shared Goals

Most community members referred to the university's tennis program as a 'culture' that has integrated with the tennis community. In particular, the tennis program's culture has been described in different ways: accessible, competitive, a reaching-out culture, and a culture that has the goal of always 'getting things done' for the better of the tennis program and the tennis community. For the university tennis program, these things were goals such as building a competitive university team (e.g. top 50 ranking), generating community support for the teams (packing up the Tennis Complex during their matches), and building up tennis in the community. Participants have described accessibility in different ways: holding events for the community, setting up players for tennis sessions, hanging out after matches to meet fans, responding for requests for help.

It's great to see how approachable the coaches and the players are in this setting. It makes it very real. It doesn't make you think "Oh, this is the university's tennis team, and you can't speak to them" (Participant #9, 12/14/2023, from interview transcript).

Coaches are accessible. It's a lot of fun for us and it make us more involved at the matches, because we know the players. And both teams and coaches... they have always made me feel welcome. So, it's a big part of it (Participant #13, 01/02/2024, from interview transcript).

The men's head coach has done a lot of things within the community. Especially when he organizes tennis clinics, mixers, and other events at the Tennis Complex and it's like "come and meet the team" (Participant #4, 10/28/2023, from interview transcript).

I think part of it is the head coach. He offers up his athletes for hits. If you go to him and you say "you know my child is at this level. We've been advised to have him get beat up college boys to build up his game over time. Do you have anyone who can hit?" And he'll tell you who's available and get you in touch with them and help arrange it (Participant #5, 11/05/2023, from interview transcript).

A former student-athlete spoke about the program's culture and his experiences during his time on the tennis team:

The head coach would always make us go shake hands with the fans after the match and that just kind of kept coming [...] he also got every single tennis alumni and brought all of them together. We have a group chat, and I could see on it this morning there was a message about someone's birthday, so he keeps that group alive that way. We actually have a reunion coming up soon here. (Participant #14, 01/03/2024, from interview transcript).

Analysis of the data also showed that the university's tennis coaches' involvement in the community played a significant role in how community members perceived the power and culture established around the tennis program.

I think the coaches here really want to interact with the community and make an effort for that. We've got an alumni reunion coming up that men's head coach has put together. He will also come out here with our Monday night tennis group and play with us (Participant #13, 01/02/2024, from interview transcript).

The men's head coach will reach out to me. You know, he'll invite me to see the matches.

The administration as well will. Now that I know you and the ladies' coach. You guys reach out to me. The coaches are very aware of meeting the community (Participant #7, 11/18/2023, from interview transcript).

The men's head coach has done an amazing job at reaching out and bringing more people into the tennis community. He is constantly going into the community, not asking for favors... but wanting to do. "I want more people to play tennis, how can I make this happen?" For instance, going into the local schools here... like St. Rose, they have tons of kids. And so that outreach is incredible. People would say to me like "We're not tennis people". But that kind of outreach made them come to one match, and that kind of just made people feeling like part of something. (Participant #11, 12/22/2024, from interview transcript).

On the other hand, results showed the Tennis Complex's administration had its own separate goals to accomplish with the community, such as re-building a competitive junior program in the city, making the Tennis Complex more inclusive and affordable (rather than a 'country club' feel), and nourishing and growing its relationship with the university tennis program. Despite the city and the university having their own things wanting to get done, both organizations shared similar goals. These were the promotion of the sport of tennis, players' skill development, excitement around the sport of tennis, growing attendance of community members during events held at the Tennis Complex, and the management and improvement of the collaboration between the city and the university's tennis program.

University-community dynamics

Though members of tennis community interpreted the coaches' involvement as a genuine effort to meet the community and connect it with the program's activities and values, coaches have discussed their views and struggles in their involvement with the

community. For instance, the current tennis coaches mentioned how their power as leaders of the organization is used through the application of strategic approaches to gain the community's interest over a number of areas that may benefit the tennis program.

We are friends with some of the people in the community. So you know, it's just a normal friendship relationship. But there are other tennis people in the community were, you know, coaches need them more to help the program. They need them to financially help the program. And so, doing some lunches, coffees, or some beers with them... It's more just... in a very blunt way, to just get their money to help the team or to build a new facility for the team. Um... and then some of these general events like some tennis clinics, the Friday night beer... it's more strategic, to get the community more excited and involved within the tennis program. And then, out of these things some genuine relationships start or develop. (Participant #21, 03/25/2024, from interview transcript).

So, some people in the community I consider like the key folks in town. I mean these are people I have to stay in touch with. Whether it's a text message or whether it's like "Hey, let's go play tennis or and let's go grab a beer" whatever. I mean, I have to. If I want to raise that \$100,000 or \$50,000, I just have to. Sometimes I value it more than practice. I do value it sometimes more than practice. I value it more than, you know, taking my kids to an event. It's just as important as recruiting and those things. (Participant #22, 04/08/2024, from interview transcript).

On the one hand, community members recognized the coaches' power through their personal relations with the community, their connections with others (e.g. how many people they know in the City and in the field of sport) and how they use such connections to get things done for the community (e.g. providing more tennis courts, organizing tennis events for the community, bring local excitement through the success of the tennis teams). On the other hand, the responses generated by the coaches, showed their involvement in the community as

something that is instilled in their job, and it requires pre-determined thoughts and strategies.

On this topic, a former men's tennis head coach at the university mentioned the following:

Forty percent of the universities have dropped men's tennis because it's kind of a low hanging fruit in some of their eyes. Now, the way you counteract that is what? A good example is what the coach here has done. He's a promoter... he's a community activist... because he knows that tennis can be dropped with a drop of a hat. He is constantly selling himself and selling the program. (Participant #12, 12/19/2024, from interview transcript).

As a consequence, leaders of the tennis program highly valued relationship building and involvement with the community as a job security. The current women's head coach spoke on her struggles and experience when she initially was hired at the university:

The men's tennis coach did a pretty decent job at attempting to introduce me to people, whether it was a former player, alumni, or donors. He kind of helped me kind of meet these people. Because to an extent but I was just kind of thrown into this job just saying "Go, make, do, or figure it out". I just knew that I had to take initiative and start doing more to feel more part of the community. I had to do the work. I can't expect other people to do the work. And so, after a couple of years of kind of figuring it out I was like "okay, let me just go in and just do it". Whether it's continuing to do the community service with the team and getting that recognition. People say "Oh, they're doing stuff... putting on programs and social events for the local tennis people", which helps... and just kind of really trying to put tennis in people's faces, and women's tennis in people's faces in different ways to try to help either me feel like I'm part of the community and my team (Participant #23, 04/03/2024, from interview transcript).

This specific piece of interview transcript showed how coaches' involvement in the tennis community is something that is expected by the athletic administration of the university as part of the head tennis coaching position at the school. While their relationships with

community members are both genuine and strategic, the tennis community can be seen as a hierarchy organized based on power and importance of individuals.

Sources of power

One source of power discovered through this study described the tennis community members' likelihood to bring valued resources to the university's tennis program and the Tennis Complex. The community's source of power within the context of the partnership was mainly gained through their support and financial contributions to the university's tennis program and the Tennis Complex. Fans and supporters of the tennis teams also created a source of power through their affiliation with the university. Whether they were alumni, friends and family of alumni, or they had been affiliated to the university through events attendance or donations, these groups of people acted as a source power in this context. One of the university tennis program's goals was to continue to generate community support for its teams, and the fans' degree of affiliation with the university was an important source of power in attaining this goal.

Another way in which such sources of power were highlighted by the results was through the value of local leaders and community members who were well connected. The research showed that people's status was usually well-known within the tennis community. Community members who established a relationship with others in the community were aware of where people fell in the social hierarchy of the community. Leaders knew every detail about community members: their occupation, their wealth status, their connections with the university, their donations in the past, etc. The value of community members also resulted to be significantly important within others in the community, to benefit in both their personal and work life.

There is a power dynamic. There's an established hierarchy where you have to approach this person to get in touch with this person... (Participant #9, 12/13/2023, from interview transcript).

Tennis is the crux of my group of friends. It's also how I built my business. Probably half the people you see at the Tennis Complex- or not half, there's probably 30 families from the Tennis Complex that are very high clients of mine, and so it has benefited me professionally (Participant #10, 12/14/2023, from interview transcript).

The research also showed that the societal status and value of community members was used to bring a change in tennis community over the decades. Therefore, working as a group was revealed to be a source of power in the context of the research.

Our group that was pulled together, I think we had some assigned people. Twice in the last year the community had to be politically active. We've had meetings at people's homes about the redevelopment, redefining of the Tennis Complex... There were talks about how the tennis Pros were paid, etc. [...] These were people who contributed financially. So that became a community of people talking about how the Tennis Complex was run [...]and discuss issues in order to influence politicians at the City level. (Participant #4, 10/18/2023, from transcript interview).

With their personal and working connections, certain members mentioned how they used their power to influence policies and decision-making to make practical changes at the Tennis Complex. For instance, one participant mentioned how she would often act as a constituent to the mayor of the city because she personally knew him. Several members of the community stated to have had one-on-one meetings with the Mayor to bring changes to the tennis facilities in the City. The data collected showed that those members of the community who are currently politically active at the city level have mostly been the people who have contributed financially to the university's tennis program.

The Tennis Association

The description and role of the Tennis Association is to present the history and background of the sport of tennis, its facilities, its partnership with the university and the community throughout the daces. Three of the community members interviewed in the study presented a story in which they described their initiatives and collaboration in the 1980s to try and make a change for the tennis community in the city. One of the oldest participants interviewed discussed how in the 1960s, the recreation department controlled public tennis in the city by providing two courts in each neighborhood community where people would ride their bikes to the tennis courts. In the 1970s, one community member pointed out how society became more mobile, but the Parks and Recs in the City did not change. The recreation department would not maintain the tennis courts spread around the city, which soon turned into gravel. Therefore, the only usable courts in the city for recreational activities were the university's tennis courts on campus. Sometime in the 1980s, the city built eight new outdoor courts at the same location where the Tennis Complex currently stands. He mentioned that the eight courts were left with no maintenance for thirty years while the City's population quadrupled in size.

That's why Izzy and I started the Tennis Association. Well... when I found out Izzy was advocating for the same thing, she and I joined together and... really we were the Tennis Association. The idea was to put together a group that would have a voice to try to get facilities in our town. [...] We put together a once a month meeting with somebody important in the city just to educate them that this was a City of over a hundred thousand and only had eight tennis courts (Participant #17, 12/19/2024, from interview transcript).

He stated that his initiative to put together the Tennis Association came from his concerns as a tennis player and as a citizen of the Middle Tennessee area. He partnered up with another community member to put together a number of meetings with the City's Mayor elected at

the time. Despite many pushbacks at first, the mayor eventually recognized the need for more tennis courts in the City, and announced the making of a new indoor tennis facility. The university's men's head tennis coach at the time also played a significant part in the initiation of the Tennis Association.

We started the Tennis Association to help build what we have today. If it wasn't for the Association, we would not have the Tennis Complex that we have today. We initiated all that, we got the outdoor courts built first. [...] In 2005, I met with the mayor. The mayor said "hey, you have a tennis association?" Get a lot of people involved and get some community support behind building this new indoor Tennis Complex". So we formed it and got several hundred members. We raised a lot of money. We ran some tournaments. We finally got the outdoor courts built. The indoor was a different fundraising. The university of course didn't put in a penny. I hope you know that. They basically only gave about 400 thousand dollars. There's 7 million into it now (Participant #12, 12/19/2024, from interview transcript).

In the process of trying to 'get things done' for the tennis community, its members are acting as an interest group. The responses presented above showed how some community members were driven through political activism to establish norms for the sport of tennis in the City and to bring change in the policies and facilities in the City. Members' concerns and initiatives served to advocate for the better improvement of the tennis resources in the city.

Tensions and Disagreements

The use of the Tennis Complex as the central tennis facility for both the city and the university also resulted in some collisions and feelings of unhappiness between the partners:

I knew there was a partnership between the university's tennis program and the city before I got here. But I didn't realize how complicated it was until I really got here. I think there is opportunity to form a better partnership between the university, the city and the donors. I still kind of see these entities operating by themselves, and not really working with each other.

The university men's tennis team doesn't agree with the direction where the city is going. The members of the Tennis Complex often don't agree with the university's decisions at the Tennis Complex. They feel like there isn't enough court time for them, and these small things keep us from all coming together (Participant #20, 02/05/2024, from interview transcript).

While these disagreements were recognized by the administration of the Tennis Complex, leaders of the university tennis program had a different view on the partnership:

When the Tennis Complex turned to be a joint venture... at first, I was like, ugh, it's not going to be so good. But it's been a blessing in disguise. I really like where it's at right now. Relationships have gotten stronger (Participant #22, 04/08/2024, from interview transcript).

On the other hand, community members also showed different contrasting opinions and discussed how the university and the city publicly express their collaboration through the Tennis Complex as being a positive one, while the community members have described feelings of disconnections between the two entities.

The city doesn't see the university as a positive thing or... vice versa. They talk about that. Some of the city's brochures say, "The university is valuable to our goals", but they don't reach out to the university (Participant #7, 11/18/2023, from interview transcript).

I think it's a great mutual two-way partnership (Participant #4, 10/18/2023, from interview transcript).

Participants also pointed out that as the Tennis Complex's administration has changed through the years, the Tennis Complex has been perceived in different ways (e.g. exclusive like a country club, or very inclusive to everyone). As an issue in the public sector, different actions from different administrations at the Tennis Complex through the years fed these perceptions in the community. The data collected showed previous administration at the

Tennis Complex to show favoritisms over courts 'block time', especially for those recreational players considered as big donors of the university's tennis program. Responses of the participants also discussed that the previous administration at the Tennis Complex offered less tennis clinics and opportunities for recreational players and members of the Tennis Complex of all levels, and particularly focused on the development of the junior tennis program.

The junior program I built, it's gone. Gone. It's completely dissolved, because there was no one to step in for me (Participant #1, 10/16, 2023, from interview transcript).

It was good to see how much better my kids were getting.... If you have a strong adult program, you're going to have a strong junior program. And it was happening, and it took a very long time to get there. You need to have a beginner, intermediate, and advanced, and it was finally happening years ago at the Tennis Complex. (Participant #11, 12/22/2023, from interview transcript)

While the data showed goals overlapping between both partners and their engagement with the tennis community, results also showed conflicts, disagreements, and collisions between the two entities. While both the Tennis Complex and the university's tennis program expressed feelings of inclusiveness with the tennis community, results showed that many events organized by the university tended to be exclusive to certain individuals. For instance, many events were organized and designed as fundraising events, excluding those people who would not donate any monetary gifts. Other tennis events organized by the university's tennis teams required a specific tennis ranking to participate in them. The program coordinator of the Tennis Complex discussed some of these issues and their view on the partnership:

Unlike a Country Club, Parks and Recs is all inclusive. We want to be open to everybody. So that's the difference when you work with Parks and Recs. You're open to all skill levels, all mobility levels... I think that in the previous years it operated more like a private club.

(Participant #20, 02/05/2024, from interview transcript).

Specifically, participants perceived that the current administration employed by Parks and Rec at the Tennis Complex did not possess a vast knowledge of the sport of tennis in order to offer the best opportunities for the younger tennis players to achieve their full potential and growth. Specifically, it has been noted that Parks and Recs prioritized the use of indoor courts to their Pro Coaches for private lessons, while disregarding the need to establish a junior tennis development program for kids. Here, the city tended to privatize the space of the Complex for the period of time that the Pro Coaches rented the indoor courts.

The research also showed tensions and feelings of unhappiness in regard to community members who contributed financially to the university's tennis program and the decision making of the head coaches on how to use the money raised from the community. On the other hand, the challenge for leaders of the university's tennis program has been managing community members wanting to make important decisions about how the money raised is spent by the organization. One of the university's head coaches spoke on the issues that arose in the past due to people's contributions and their power in decision-making:

The Tennis Complex and our new campus tennis facility would not be here if for certain people and their desire. But I imagine people that give money or give input. They're like "I'm going to do this. And I would like this." But the administration or the coaches might turn and say "well, that does not benefit the group we want to benefit" which is our student-athletes. So that's good because we are not having people just jump on decision-making because they have money (Participant #23, 04/03/2024, from interview transcript).

The tennis community also showed considerable awareness of the dynamics involved in contributing to the university's tennis program. The following section is extracted from the field notes composed on the observation of the night tour of the new on-campus tennis facility. Most of the community members present at the presentation and tour included those who contributed financially to the project.

As I was sitting at the table and waiting for the presentation to start, I engaged in a quick conversation about college basketball with Richard but then remained silent. I could hear the woman sitting at my table talking under her breath with the two men sitting next to her. One of them was complaining at how long the presentation was taking to get started. One of them said something like "how long is this thing going to take?". The woman then said "right? Just thank for us for our money and let's get it wrapped up". She looked a bit annoyed to be there in that moment. It seemed like they were all aware that this event was a formal courtesy that needed to be done on the part of the athletic department. From their comments it also seemed that they had been attending similar events in the past and they knew how these kinds of events would play out (11/13/2023, from field notes).

The tennis community's involvement through their dollar donations to the university's tennis program was a main topic of discussion in the interviews conducted. The participants discussed their awareness of other community members' monetary gifts.

The people's power in this is money. Because you could have a bunch of citizens clamoring for first rate indoor tennis facility. But without the donations to make it happen it doesn't matter. It's not going to get done (Participant #10, 12/14/2023, from interview transcript).

It is worth to note that the context of the conversation in this quote still refers to donations to the university's tennis program. Therefore, while the involvement of the community through financial contributions can be a valuable source of power, the partnership between the

university and city is key to allow these entities to accept donations to contribute to a public facility such as the Tennis Complex.

Discussion

Influence and Power manifestation

Results identified different sources of power that impacted the capacity of individuals to be influential in the context of both the city and the university. For instance, individuals joining together resulted in a source of power. Whether that referred to the city and the university joining together into the venture of the Tennis Complex or the community members joining together in the venture of the Tennis Association. Similarly, the community members working as group in their political activism and involvement with the Tennis Complex was also considered a source of power. As a consequence, personal connections functioned as a source of power as well. Whether these personal connections were established between the community and the leaders of the university's tennis program, or the city's officials and the community members, they acted as a source of power that led to decision-making in the context of the Tennis Complex. In such way, individuals in the tennis community gained influence through the ability to impact other's behaviors and actions.

Differently from sources of power which were seen through collaboration or affiliation, power was also gained and used at the individual level. It cannot be dismissed that leaders of the Tennis Complex and leaders of the university's tennis program inherited power through their job titles. Their positions in partnerships and within the community were used to get people 'around a table' in order to make decisions. An example of the complex nature of power relations was particularly seen in the university men's head tennis coach and his influence in both the management of the partnership with the city and the community's engagement and participation. Seemingly, his position and authority provided him with influence and power within the tennis community. However, in order to keep having an

influential role in this context, the coach relied on fans, supporters, donors, and rec players at the Complex to ‘pack the stands’ and continue engaging in events and activities related to the university’s tennis program. His relationships established and maintained through the years with the community members were influential in the way that people spent their time at the Tennis Complex, attending events and matches. Both the events organized by the head coach and the atmosphere created by the tennis community led people to become donors and to contribute financially to the university’s tennis program. In this way, the head coach’s example indicates how power relations often worked in two directions. While inherited power was used by institutional actors to also manage sources of power within the community (e.g. donations that led to decision-making), the results showed that leaders in position of the sport of tennis at both the University and the City level exercised power when it became available to them through the relationships established with others in the community. Such findings reflect Bringle & Hatcher’s (2002) exploration of community-university dynamics, in which they suggested that relationships between leaders and the community develop at the personal level between individuals. Similarly, this study explored the nature of the relationships between the leaders of the university’s tennis program and the rest of the community members, concluding that most of these relationships were strategic in nature.

Though most of the results generated from the data collection were of positive nature, as the research evolved, it brought to the surface tensions and issues not easily recognizable otherwise. Similar to the results highlighted in Fedderson et al. (2021), ethnographic methods were able to show conflicts and issues between the partners and the surrounding community. For instance, power was deployed by the head coaches of the university through their personal connections, by allowing to consume alcoholic drinks at the Tennis Complex during their home seasonal matches. While this decision was highly praised

by fans, supporters, and donors, Parks and Rec viewed the decision as a concern for the public driving home under the influence. Another example was described through members of the Tennis Complex and donors of the university's tennis program who worked together to be politically active and change specific policies and times at the Complex. The stories told during their interviews described a positive end result for the group but raised more tensions for the administration of the Tennis Complex.

Distinction and Overlap of Community Members

As presented in the description of the participants, the term 'community members' referred to different groups of people in the tennis community. Interpretations of the findings identify the distinction and overlap between these groups. Some of these community members tended to be more involved and connected to the city rather than the university, and vice versa. For instance, those people whom I referred to as 'fans' were mostly identified to be recreational players who were members of the Tennis Complex and who developed a sense of admiration for the student-athletes of the university who practiced and performed at the Complex. However, fans were also identified to be either alumni of the university or to have been affiliated with the university in the past through attendance of sporting events.

There was a reoccurring overlap found within the community members who, at some point in time, were involved with both partners. For instance, one participant was at some point a Tennis Pro at the Tennis Complex, the volunteer coach for the university's women tennis team, and a supporter of the teams. Most of the donors who were affiliated with the university's tennis program through their financial contributions were also members of the Tennis Complex. Nonetheless, there were groups of people in the community who leaned more towards one of the entities over the other. For instance, student-athletes of the

university were mainly involved with the university and employees of the Tennis Complex were only primary affiliated with the city.

This overlapping was important to note in the interpretation of the community members' role within the partnership. Different groups of community members and their degree of affiliation with each partner provided different outcomes through the creation of sources of power. For instance, recreational players joining together to form the Tennis Association served to advocate for more tennis resources at the city level. On the other hand, the involvement of the university's men's head coach in the Tennis Association started a collaboration between the city and the university, which ended up being beneficial for both parties. However, the overlapping also created some issues based on the different goals of different groups. Those individuals who leaned more towards achieving the goals set by the city didn't often agree with those who were trying to push for different changes at the Tennis Complex in order to accomplish the goals set by the university's tennis program. The Figure 1 shown below, illustrates the mutual goals of the two partners under the heading 'getting things done'. Though different roles and goals of different groups in the tennis community sparked disagreements and issues, the shared goals between the two partners were observed to outweigh the rest. The main reason why the partnership at the Tennis Complex continued to work well despite the conflicts within groups was because the most important thing in this context was getting things done for the tennis community.

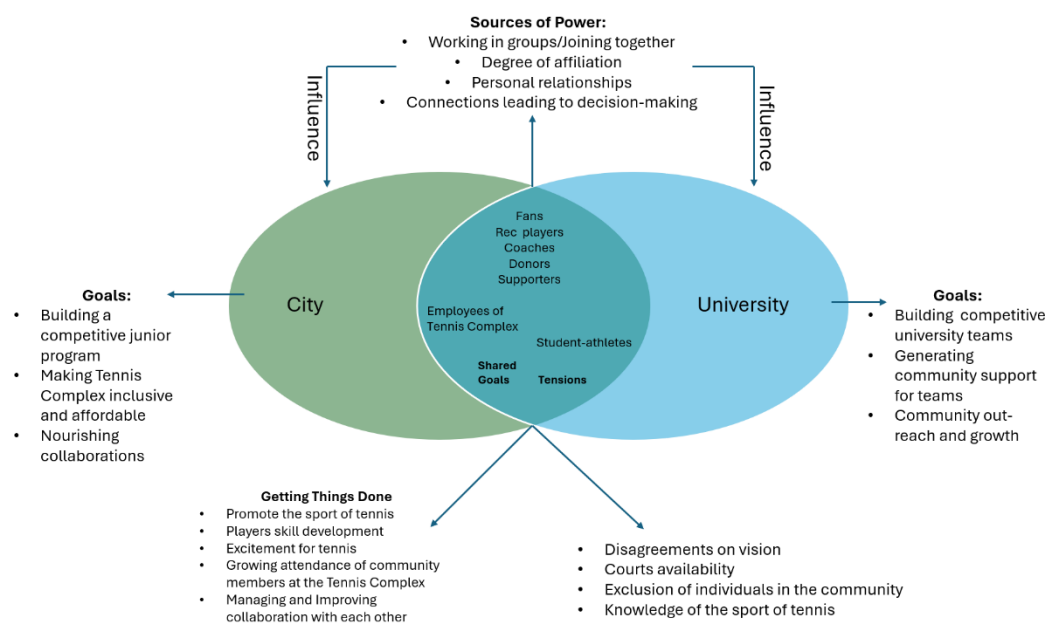
Relationships and connections formed as a source of power also served to better contribute to either one of the partners depending on the degree of affiliation that community members had with the entities. Personal connections that recreational players had with city council members or the city's major facilitated their involvement in advocating for certain decision-making at the city level. For instance, a group of supporters and donors worked together to influence the decision of the city council to tear down four outdoor tennis

courts at the Tennis Complex to build four pickleball courts instead. On the other hand, the relationships and connections formed by the university's coaches with rest of the community served to primarily benefit the university's tennis program and its goals (e.g. raise more money to improve the program's resources, increase game attendance and game day support).

Getting Things Done

As the head coaches of the university's tennis program created sources of power through their personal relationships with the community members, their actions conformed to Pfeffer's (1994) model of power and influence used as the theoretical framework for this study. My observations showed that both administrators and coaches of the tennis program constantly mentioned the goals set for the organization and made sure to show the tennis community when those goals were attained. These were often discussed at the beginning and end of tennis clinics and fundraising tennis events. As seen from the responses of the head coaches interviewed, leaders were very aware of the most influential and important individuals in the tennis community that they relied on to achieve such goals. Even within the community, members were aware of others' wealth and social status in the city. Specific individuals were considered to be valuable targets due to their likelihood to donate in relation to the history and background with the university, their wealth, and their past financial contributions to the tennis program. As a consequence, leaders of the university's tennis program applied strategies to gain control over the tennis community and the Tennis Complex. One of the most significant strategies was developing and maintaining a close, direct relationship the community, and especially through 'high valued' individuals. As presented above, coaches of the tennis teams spent valuable time going on coffee, lunch, and dinner dates with community members. Keeping the community engaged through tennis clinics, events, and matches at the Tennis Complex was just as important as having those direct relationships. As seen in the results, making the university's tennis teams accessible

was an effective strategy perceived by the community members. Participants felt as if, in many ways, the university's tennis teams were not a separated entity from the tennis community. The tennis program's culture was strategically developed to achieve goals of community involvement and participation. Indeed, the results noted how coaches and administrators of the university's tennis program understood the importance of their personal involvement in the city tennis community. Pfeffer's (2022) model would characterize these instances as the use of interpersonal skills (political skills) to make a change and accomplish innovation. These were especially used by the university men's tennis head coach throughout the years to develop connections, establish relationships, raise funds, and advocate for an indoor tennis facility for the tennis teams. As a consequence, the university bought into the project of the Tennis Complex with the City. While some community members were more aware of the strategies and power relations used within the tennis community, awareness of strategies did not matter so long the tennis community and its leaders all stood for the values and goals of the sport of tennis in the city. In this process, the results followed Pfeffer's (1994) model in the way that sources of power and power were used to influence behavior and to change the course of events to get people to do things.

Figure 1.*Representation of Power Relations and Influence***Conclusion**

This paper used Pfeffer's (1994) power and influence model to examine the source of power between the city, the university, and the tennis community at the site of the Tennis Complex. I contend that there were number sources of power within the city-university partnership and the community-university dynamics, such as affiliation, collaboration, and personal connections that led to decision-making. The interpretations of the research also distinguished between sources of power and power as exercised by the organization's leaders within this setting, as well as the distinction and overlap of community members.

The results also showed the nature of personal relationships established by the university's head tennis coaches with the community. Though some relationships were genuine in nature, most of them were initiated with a strategic mindset, as a result of job security for the coaches. Understanding how a community interprets power relations can

offer sport organizations' leaders strategies and tactics to use when engaging with sport communities, as well as using techniques for community participation and engagement in sporting activities.

The use of institutional ethnography (Smith, 2006) as a methodology was essential to uncover the tensions and disagreements explored between the partnership. In particular, concerns were identified on the difference in knowledge on the sport of tennis between the city-elected employees at the Tennis Complex and coaches of the university's tennis program. As I selected specific individuals (e.g. student-athletes, public members, coaches, etc.) for the semi-structured interviews process, my interview questions continued to develop, following the direction of what most people would highlight in their responses. This evolving process shaped both the research question and the findings for this manuscript. My advice for future ethnographers who find themselves in a similar research context would be to consider selecting specific participants for focus groups rather than one-on-one interviews, not only to obtain answers that build on each other in a faster way but also to see where people have different points of view on aspects regarding the partnership and the Tennis Complex. While this study took into consideration all the messiness of the entities intertwined in the tennis community, future researchers should explore specific areas more in depth (e.g. the partnership between the City and university or the relationship between the university's tennis program and the community). As sport organizations and community continue to evolve and transform along with external changes in society and internal changes in organizations, more studies should pursue research to explore how power is exercised structurally and relationally within the organization, its community, and its partners in response to collaborations. This is important not only for those sport organizations who are already partnered up with other public/private entities, but also for those one who may be looking into understanding the benefits and issues of starting a partnership. Specifically,

scholars should continue to emphasize research on communities and power relations in the context of university athletics. While the number of college athletics programs outweigh the number of major professional sport leagues in the U.S., most of the research that explores power dynamics and community in the literature has focused on non-profit sport organizations or national sport leagues. Furthermore, scholars should explore the perspective of community members just as much as the perspectives of leaders, staff members and volunteers in sport organizations.

CHAPTER VI: DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this dissertation was to discover the subjective understanding and interpretations of participants on the concept of community in the context of a university tennis program. Specifically, the study primarily used the site of a semi-public facility, known as the Tennis Complex. In doing so, the research also explored any sources of power and power relations between the city, the university, and the tennis community. During the course of my fieldwork and interviews, I started to realize that this research was going to be an evolving and learning process. The making of this dissertation has not just been important for the contribution to the body of knowledge on these topics, but it has also been critical in its methodological and scholastic lessons learned as a first-time researcher. The two manuscripts for this study will certainly contribute to the literature of sport management and the understanding of sport and community in society. The research questions for the manuscripts presented were molded through the course of the research process, as the collection and analysis of the data shaped the direction of the manuscripts. The following chapter sums up personal observations, interpretations, lessons learned throughout the study, practical implications, and next steps and recommendations for future studies.

Manuscripts' Results and Connection with the Literature

Chapter Four identified the factors in which the participants identified a sense of identity at the Tennis Complex. Community members' identification with the Tennis Complex was found in its design, meanings and symbols that represented the university, events held at facility, regular interactions, and feelings of home and family. As such, this Chapter described the nature of the Tennis Complex as a place in which the tennis community constructed its meaning of identity.

In *Rethink Place Identities*, Kerr & Oliver (2014) wrote that place identity is “1) pluralistic, as it involves multiple identities like individuals, organizations, and places; 2) fluid and subject to change and 3) co-produced, as its meaning-making process happens between individuals and the place” (p. 66-67). The findings provided ways to interpret how different groups in the community associated different meanings with the Tennis Complex. Place identity at the Complex included several different groups of people (fans, donors, supporters, employees, coaches) and two organizations (Parks and Rec and the university). As presented in the stories of the participants interviewed, place identity has been subject to change based on the several different tennis facilities that existed in the city prior to the Tennis Complex. More importantly, place identity was co-produced by both the existence of the Tennis Complex and the individuals taking part in activities at the site. Without one of the two, the concept of place identity could have not been produced in the way that it did in this particular context.

Chapter Four also showed the process of place identity formation for this specific community as a reflection of Paasi’s (2003) process of place identity formation. Learning the history behind the construction of the Tennis Complex and what this facility meant to the tennis community was crucial to uncover how the process of identification occurred. The Complex’s presence in the city was not only important to provide an indoor structure for both recreational players and local student-athletes to play tennis, but as the facility gained social consciousness and became a spatial structure of society, participants developed feelings of “home” and “family” in which they identified with the Complex.

I considered Chapter Five to be a continuation of the findings laid out in Chapter Four. While the first manuscript mainly focused on place identity of the tennis community in relation to the Tennis Complex, the second manuscript showed how sources of power were created in this context and how they were exercised by the city and the university

at the site of the Tennis Complex. Findings showed that sources of power were identified through community members' affiliation with the university, working and joining together, but also through establishing personal relationships and connections between organizational leaders and others in the community.

There are a number of ethnographic studies in the literature that have examined both place identity in relation to sport and power relations in the context of community sport organizations. For instance, Wise (2011) used ethnographic methods to study a Villa's sport landscape to understand the local perspective of a rural community in the Dominican Republic. While his study found sport in the Villa to create spatial awareness of the field through hazards and modifying play, the results presented in Chapter Four showed the participants' spatial awareness of the Tennis Complex through its feelings of safety and home rather than its hazards. Similar to the results showed in Chapter Four, Wise (2011) also demonstrated how sport in the context of the Villa created a sense of "shared communal socializations and social networks" (p. 218), emphasizing sport and place as a means to enhance social interactions. Furthermore, similar findings regarding the place design and layout of the facility in Chapter Four were also found in Wilson (2018)'s spatial construction of home locker room in the construction of a rugby team identity. The implications of the findings shown in Chapter Four, along with the results shown these similar past studies, can offer great value on the importance of sporting facilities or sporting spaces and their impact on both sport's teams and the surrounding community.

As far as power relations in the context of sport communities and partnerships, one of the main findings reported in Chapter Five showed the importance of shared goals for partners who share a sporting facility like the Tennis Complex. Within these goals, the research found that leaders of the university's tennis program established strategic relationships with other community members (donors, recreational players, members of the

Tennis Complex) as part of their goals related community engagement and involvement. The process of establishing these relationships was found to act as a way to provide job-security for the leaders of the organizations (both at the city and at the university's level). While the job and position of the leaders in the community could not be dismissed as a way in which they exercised power, sources of power were created in several different ways. These were the likelihood of community members to bring valued resources to the university's tennis program, the value of the local leaders and the community members who were connected, the value of people who brought change in the tennis community over the decades (e.g. through the Tennis Association), the political activism of community member and their relationships and connections which translated into decision-making. The same finding was shown in the study carried out by Fedderson et al., (2021) on power relations shaping an Olympic Sport, in which they stated that "power relations were not a possession of an individual, but power existed embedded in social relationships" (p. 19). As seen in Chapter Five, when power is ingrained in social relationships, power relations may form in the form of 'silent hierarchies' (sic, 2021), where people within the community are aware of where others fall in hierarchy based on the power and importance. Therefore, interpersonal skills of community members were critical in making changes and accomplishing new goals for the Tennis Complex and the university's tennis program. Such a finding was in line with Pfeffer's (1994, 2002) model of power. In the research context, findings showed that power dynamics were used in order to get things done in community sport organizations. Thus, researchers should take these insights to continue to explore power relations within sport organizations, partnerships and sport communities.

Moreover, a number of studies in the literature explored campus-community partnerships with an emphasis on higher education rather than sport communities.

Nonetheless, both Weerts & Sandman (2008) and Bringle & Hatcher (2002) highlighted the

importance of knowing the institution's history and the context behind such partnerships. This is something that Chapter Five revealed to be very important, as many community members discussed their history and background connection to the university (e.g. alumni, grew up playing at the university's campus courts in the 80s, former student-athletes). Such details served to understand how power relations created within the tennis community through the partnership of the Tennis Complex. This insight should also be taken in consideration by researchers who wish to investigate similar concepts.

My Experiences as a Scholar: Lessons Learned

This study was an incredible challenging and formative experience for me. Upon reflecting on this study, I realized how my thinking and writing have evolved greatly through the use of ethnographic methods. Using ethnographic methods was a lengthy process that involved writing several drafts of documents, reading and reflecting on such drafts before moving forward in the writing process. The importance of field notes and interviews was critical for the execution and unfolding of this particular research. Through the execution of this study, I learned both the great benefits, but also the drawbacks of being an active participant in the research. As I had been part of the community for many years, one of the main challenges was acting as an 'outsider' during my conversations with participants in the semi-structured interviews. Being aware of the methods of experiencing and enquiring (Wolcott, 1994) was a learning process used to practice my skills at balancing my familiarity with the participants and my role as a researcher.

Readers may argue the extent to which this study can be considered ethnographic in nature. Wolcott (1999) argued that in order for research to become ethnographic, the researcher needs to engage in the field long enough to engage in 'research play', a term used to describe the encounter of details of the research context that would not initially be viewed as relevant and important. Concerns may be as such that this study was

conducted too rapidly, lacking the time and focus needed to discover features and details of the context that would only arise when the researcher has totally immersed him/herself in the research environment. My study involved six months of intense data generation, during which I spent nearly every day at the site of the Tennis Complex and engaged in regular interactions with the community members. Prior to the six months of data generation, I spent eight years in close contact with the tennis community, getting to know its members and spending countless hours participating in tennis matches, activities and coaching at the Tennis Complex. While the research took place between October 2023 and March 2024, my own experiences in the tennis community started in January of 2016. Though I spent many years of community participation and engagement at the Tennis Complex, I was surprised to learn much relevant information about the participants' perspectives and understanding on silent hierarchies, 'behind the science' of power relations and tensions within community members that I would have not otherwise known without getting immersed into the research context.

Knowing the community members prior to conducting the study made the recruiting of participants a fairly quick and easy process. In fact, I don't believe it would have been possible to conduct 23 semi-structured interviews for this study over the course of six months if I didn't already have connections with the community in the research context. As I selected specific individuals (e.g. student-athletes, public members, coaches, etc.) for the semi-structured interviews process, my interview questions continued to develop, following the direction of what most people would highlight in their responses. This evolving process shaped both the research question and the findings of Chapter Four and Five. My advice for future ethnographers, especially those ones who may experience a limited amount of time for research (e.g. conducting a master's thesis or a dissertation study) would be to consider selecting specific participants for focus groups rather than one-on-one interviews to obtain

answers that may build on each other in a quicker process. One of the greatest challenges in conducting qualitative studies such as this one is the fact that creating connections with people is the most-time consuming part of the entire research process.

Recommendations for future research

The findings presented in Chapter Four showed the conceptualization of place identity through factors such as the design, meanings, signs and of the Tennis Complex. Other factors also showed regular interactions and events taking place at the facility to contribute in the way people interacted with each other and fostered a sense of family and home. With this manuscript, I learned about the importance of place and its implications for connection and interactions. A sporting facility such as the Tennis Complex didn't just serve to create tennis courts for the recreational players in the city and the university's student-athletes, but it also provided a space where people interacted with each other in ways that create feelings of both family (with other people) and home (with the Complex).

Scholars should continue to explore the messiness of sport in community contexts, especially in regard to physical space and how to manage diverse forms of participation between diverse members of a sport community (Rich et al., 2021, p. 4). In particular, additional studies should investigate how sport communities that are conceptualized through place identity may exclude those people who may not have a chance to access and identify with the place. Chapter Four did not take in consideration the larger population in the city who may be involved with the sport of tennis but may not use the Tennis Complex for a variety of reason: living in poverty, feeling socially marginalized, lacking a knowledge of the sport and dealing with tangible obstacles (e.g. possessing tennis equipment, other logistical considerations such as transportation). More research should consider exploring these factors to find out if there are groups of people or individuals that may not feel a sense of home at the Tennis Complex. The use of survey methods may be considered in investigating the

larger tennis population in the city. Furthermore, research should also investigate how community-building and place-identity can impact people's social and mental health. Such studies may add to the literature by following the research of Maricchio et al. (2021) and Hixon's (2013).

As far as power relations within community and sport organizations, Chapter Five was conducted by taking into consideration the messiness of the actors that intertwined within the tennis community explored (city, university, community members). Future researchers should place focus on examining specific partnerships and relationships more in-depth (e.g. the partnership between the city and university or the relationship between the university's tennis program and the community). As sport organizations and community continue to evolve and transform along with external changes in society and internal changes in organizations, more studies should keep producing research to explore how power is exercised structurally and relationally within the organization, its community, and its partners in response to collaborations. Specifically, scholars should continue to emphasize research on communities and power relations in the context of university athletics. While the number of college athletics programs outweigh the number of major professional sport leagues in the U.S., most of the research on power dynamics and community that exists in the literature has been primarily focused on non-profit sport organizations or national sport leagues. Moreover, scholars should continue to explore the perspective of community members just as much as the perspectives of leaders, staff members and volunteers in sport organizations.

The dissertation study generated additional results that were not mentioned in Chapter Four and Five due to the direction that the manuscripts took in relation to the most significant results found. Nonetheless, findings not presented suggested that future studies should look into the gender differences of men versus women team's involvement in the community and the difference between their tennis success and achievements in terms of

community identification and place-identity. Furthermore, it would be interesting to conduct a study on the same tennis community using similar methods in a five-year time period from the present study. In January 2024, as the present research was on-going, a new on campus tennis facility opened up to shift practices and matches of the university's tennis team from the Tennis Complex to the campus location. Many participants interviewed, especially the leaders of the organizations, expressed their curiosity on how this shift would impact the interpretation of the community's identification with the Tennis Complex.

Furthermore, following the results presented in Chapter Five, more research should consider examining the culture within the environment where a community sport organization is established. While Putman (2000) argued participation in sports to be one of the most important ways to define cultural norms, Schinke et al. (2014) discussed how culture is infused into each sport's context in terms of how athletes and coaches' express specific cultural characteristics that contribute to performance, excellence and psychological health of the team and the fans of the sport (p. 319). Chapter Five showed the importance of the university's tennis program developing its own culture in the process of *getting things done*. More research should place more in depth focus on the impact of culture, both within the sport organization and the cultural norms related to the regional location in which the organization and the facility are located.

In both Chapter Four and Chapter Five, the importance of the community members' financial contribution to the university's tennis program could not go unnoticed. Financial contributions didn't just impact the community's association with the Tennis Complex, but it served as a means for its members to gain power within the bigger research context. More studies that want to explore the concept of community within the college environment should definitely consider investigating the impact of the community financial investment in sport

organizations, as well as sport leaders' strategies and tactics used during community building and engagement.

Final Thoughts

Whilst I wish that my educational program could have extended over the course of more years to allow for a longer research work time, I must learn to be content with what this dissertation study has accomplished. After all, I have learned that it can be fairly easy for researcher to get lost into the enormous world of scholarly literature. As it is common and appropriate for dissertation studies as a first-time researcher, this piece of work dedicated a greater portion of the writing on description rather than on analysis and interpretation. As such, this experience has made me eager to continue to explore scholarship on community and to use the many theories learned throughout this process in future studies.

As many people have become part of the tennis community and have moved away from the Tennis Complex and the local university's tennis program, I too am bound to part from it. After nearly ten years living my experiences in this sport community context, the events of my life call me to move away from it. Nonetheless, as the many participants who were not physically present within the community context anymore, I believe I will always feel part of the tennis community and will always feel at home whenever I may visit in the future. I will continue to cherish the many connections I made with others from a distance, and I will continue to support the tennis program however I can.

As described in the previous and present chapter, the study generated numerous scholarly findings in relation to the nature of community and how it manifests in our daily lives, especially in regard to sports. My experiences at the Tennis Complex and as a member of the tennis community included many moments filled with love and fun times, but also moments of occasional tension and conflict. This especially occurred as I became an active researcher in the process of this study. Such experiences reinforced the knowledge that

community is not just ingrained in positive feelings, but it is a dynamic and messy concept that needs to continue be explored. While I am soon to physically part from this tennis community, I have been inspired by all of the people associated with the Tennis Complex and the university's tennis program, and I will continue to be a part of sport communities to strive to remark society through sport participation and community engagement.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research Compliance
2269 Middle Tennessee Blvd.
Sam H. Ingram Bldg (ING) Room 010A
Box 124
Murfreesboro, TN 37132
www.mtsu.edu/irb

Date: October 16, 2023

PI: Marialuisa Zirilli

Department: Middle Tennessee State University, Health and Human Performance

Re: Initial - IRB-FY2024-26

An Exploration of Community in a Collegiate Tennis Program

The Middle Tennessee State University Institutional Review Board has reviewed and approved by Expedited Review the above referenced research study. The approval is effective starting October 16, 2023.

Decision: Approved

Category: 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of human subjects. [45 CFR 46.101\(b\)\(2\)](#) and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW GUIDE

I. Participant's Biography

□

- a. Where did you grow up?
- b. How long have you lived in the Murfreesboro?
- c. How did you get involved with the game of tennis?
- d. How long have you been playing? Do you still play? In what setting?
- e. How long have you been involved with the university tennis program? Talk to me about your background with the university's tennis teams and the tennis complex.
- f. What has made you support you the program/team?
- g. How has your relationship with the tennis program/teams changed over time?

□

II. Changes in the tennis program

□

- a. With time have you noticed changes that have occurred with the tennis program? If so, what have these changes been exactly? When did these changes occur? Who was in charge of the university tennis teams then?
- b. Are you able to identify a moment or an event in time where you realized that a significant change occurred to the program?

□

III. Community

□

If they described the tennis network as a community around:

□

- a. What makes you use the word 'community'?
- b. What does community in this setting mean to you?
- c. What makes this crowd or groups of people a community?
- d. Do you think there is a difference between a group of fans and a community?
- e. How is this community different than another community you may have been part of in the past in the tennis setting?

□

If they have not used the term 'community' yet.

□

- a. Do you think the tennis network at the tennis complex and around the university tennis teams make up a community?
- b. If so, same questions above will be asked.

□

IV. Power dynamics and their impact on community

□

- a. Do you think power in politics between the city and university in the sense of policies and resources may have had an impact on the community?
 - What do you think of the dynamics involved in tennis complex being a partnership between the city?
- b. Do you think economic power in sense of people's economical status and economical contributions to the university tennis program may have had an impact on the community as well?
- c. What about power in the cultural norms and values related to sport of the tennis and the geographic area in which this tennis community has formed?

