AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Erika L. Hanna for the degree of Master of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies in Speech Communication, Speech Communication, and Anthropology presented on November 30, 2012
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Abstract approved:

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The purpose of this study is to examine how members of the Oregon State University polo team negotiate aspects of their social identity. Over the course of the 2011-2012 school year, 15 interviews and 30 hours of observations were conducted. From the data, five overarching themes were identified: inclusion as a motivation to join the club, perceived stereotypes associated with polo, levels of self-presentation when discussing identity, hierarchy within the club structure, and the perceived future connection with the social identity as an OSU polo club member. Discussion of the themes include applications to Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation theory and Picket and Brewer's ingroup inclusion and exclusion concepts. This study also provides recommendations based on the findings in order to promote competent identity negotiation amongst the members.

Negotiating Social Identity within the Oregon State University Polo Club

by
Erika L. Hanna

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Chapter 1: Introduction

As of September 2012, the United States Polo Association (2012) reports polo is actively played in 52 colleges across the nation including Oregon State University. At the collegiate level, all polo is played in a walled indoor arena with a ball that is comparable to a mini-soccer ball. Playing indoors allows college students to continue practicing throughout the winter months, which makes up their competition season. During a game, two teams of three horse and rider pairs match up and battle to get or maintain possession of the ball and attempt to hit it into a ten-foot-wide goal mouth at their designated end of the arena. The ball is controlled with long mallets similar to that of croquet, although the ball is hit along the long side of the head. The sport of polo requires discipline, guts, and health insurance. Being a member of a collegiate polo club as well as a polo player requires all of the above including dedication and hard work. The purpose of this study is to take a deeper look into the world of polo at the collegiate level, specifically at Oregon State University (OSU), in order to answer the question: How do members of the OSU polo team negotiate aspects of their social identity. This section will first discuss the current stereotypes of polo in the media, followed by my interest in this particular topic, and finally how polo will be examined in terms of social identity.

The common misconception about polo is that it is exclusively played by the elite, the royal, and the wealthy. The notoriously exorbitant fees to join and or play at an established polo club, media coverage of the Princes of Wales playing, and movies

like *Pretty Woman* all combine to support this conception. Polo is also often referred to as the "Sport of Kings" in literature and media. Most recently, a segment titled "The Sport of Kings: Polo," aired on the show *60 Minutes* describing professional polo as a game that "has always belonged to the rich, the famous, and the privileged few" ("The sport of kings: Polo," 2012). Fortunately for college students, there are cheaper and more realistic ways to indulge in this sport that are far from the stereotype. One may wonder how people end up playing something like polo and it turns out that many lifetime players get their start in college programs. Students do not need celebrity status and wealth to play; they simply need an interest and plenty of time to devote to learning the sport.

My interest in the sport of polo began in high school. I had been riding since I was a young girl and competing in various disciplines such as eventing and dressage, but I began to feel isolated in the individual style of competition and sought out something more team-oriented. During my junior year I came across a polo player at a horse conference and was invited to come join a practice. With the encouragement of my parents (and their car) I drove from Portland, Oregon to the Tacoma Polo Club in Washington to see what all the excitement was about. I was not sure what to expect but I figured it might be similar to what I had seen on TV. Instead, I drove up to a large, older-looking building that I was told was an old converted airplane hangar. When I stepped inside the temperature dropped about 20 degrees from the warm spring air outside and I watched half a dozen people walk up and down the arena throwing rocks over the walls. It turned out that the polo club had to share the arena

with a dirt biking club that built large jumps bringing hundreds of rocks to the surface.

In order to keep the horses safe, the larger rocks had to be removed by hand before

playing. The ages of the 15 or so people who showed up to play ranged from 20 to 60

years. They were not snooty, and they did not appear to be overtly wealthy, either.

They seemed like normal people with day jobs that loved coming out and playing polo

on weekends.

My invitation to play came with the promise of borrowed horses so I set about

to find them. The woman loaning me horses from her personal string greeted me

warmly and pointed to a horse among many tied to her trailer as she loaded my arms

with a saddle, bridle, and various boots and wraps. She then rushed off to prepare the

other five horses waiting patiently. I brushed my horse and slowly placed the saddle

on his back before turning my attention to his bridle, the leather piece that slips over

the horse's head and secures the metal bit in its mouth. I have always been nervous

about putting bridles on strange horses because they are essentially loose for a split

second while you remove the halter and slip on the bridle. After carefully securing the

bridle I looked at the myriad of boots and wraps in my hands and slowly began

wrapping the long white felt wraps around the horse's lower legs. I had done this sort

of wrap before, but I felt intimidated, so I took my time. As I stood back to look at my

work, I realized that the woman had already finished "tacking up" the other horses and

was putting her boots on. After examining my work for what seemed like two seconds

she stood up and whipped off the wraps I had just done and re-did them to her

satisfaction. She explained that correctly done wraps would save a horse from career-ending injuries.

Before actually getting on a horse, I sat and watched the players scrimmage. Three horse and rider pairs galloped back and forth smacking the ball towards the goals on either side of the lengthwise arena occasionally crashing into each other and hitting mallets to mallets instead of the ball which I quickly learned was known as "hooking," a common tactic when someone is trying to steal the ball. After each goal the players would race back to the center of the arena, into a lineup of two parallel lines by team facing the umpire, and wait for the ball to be thrown back in. Even though it looked brutal, there was a certain fluidity to the game. The horses mostly remained parallel to each other while smooth, quick circles, never abrupt stops or dangerous crossing of paths, served to change the direction of the play. At times the seventh horse and rider pair who were not playing in the scrimmage would blow a whistle and the players would quickly line up in a complicated pattern to hit a penalty shot. As the scrimmage went on, the horses steamed with sweat and the players began to peel off layers of clothes. After about 10 minutes one player called out that his horse was tired and without a word everyone lowered their mallets and let their horses walk to cool down. As they dismounted, the players first addressed their horse with a pat on the neck and a few kind words. Then they either shook hands with their opponents and teammates or joked about something that had happened during the play. As they led their tired horses out of the arena, a new batch of riders entered and began warming up.

I drove away that day after making a promise to join the Interscholastic team which gathered high school students from around the Oregon and Washington area to play with other high school teams. I did not know it at the time but some of those people at that first practice would eventually became my coaches, mentors and supporters that I still call upon. After getting to know more people, I always had an offer for a couch to sleep on and a horse to ride as long as I helped out those who were helping me in any way I could. People gave me advice on how to play as well as advice on whose advice to take. Occasionally, when it was sunny, practices were held on a large flat outdoor field. The feeling of flying down that field for the first time was something I will never forget. I should mention why that memory sticks with me;when I sat back and pulled on the reigns after an exhilarating run down the field I realized that my horse did not share my desire to quit running. Six years and a stronger understanding of the term "runaway" later, I found myself still enamored with not only the thrilling sport of polo but also the culture that surrounded it. These experiences with polo opened my eyes to a community of people who center their lives around polo.

As a sub-culture of outdoor or professional polo, collegiate polo creates a unique community. Students can relatively easily go from curious spectators to official paid members and competitors. They are expected to work, learn, and contribute to the whole. Each member becomes an asset and a representative of the group. This grouping of people can be seen as a "culture" who share a common set of norms and rules (Collier & Thomas, 1998, p. 103). The OSU polo club is nothing short of a

unique culture whose norms and rules mean a world of difference when complex animals such as horses are involved. The people who become members of the OSU polo clubs and other collegiate clubs alike share a common understanding of the norms, rules, and behaviors that are crucial to the safety of the horse and rider. This bond creates the culture of a polo club which people either choose to join or choose not to join. Those who become members can then add "polo player" to their social identity. Social identity is described as the reflective self-view based on our memberships in groups (Bar-Tal, 1998). Membership in a collegiate polo club is a social identity, which can shape perceptions of self and others.

No previous academic studies have been attempted on the collegiate polo culture. By examining how members of the OSU polo club negotiate aspects of their social identity, a unique insight of culture may be added to academia and also shed light on an often forgotten and underrepresented sport. The way in which members talk about their identity in regards to polo can give insight into the factors that support or diminish the relationship between member and group. If people stop finding the OSU polo club worthy of membership then the club may simply cease to exist. Like any sport, youth eventually becomes the next generation to play the game. Polo is different than many sports because the opportunities to learn and play decrease after college. Suddenly it becomes significantly more expensive to play polo. Without a healthy number of youth committing to joining the sport and paying dues to outdoor polo clubs, the sport could suffer in the surrounding Northwest region.

This research positions the OSU polo club, and polo in general, in a valid area of academic study. Through examination of previous literature it will be shown that polo has been largely under-represented, specifically the social identity of polo players, in academic studies Within the collegiate context, the most popular and visible sports are football and basketball, among others. Many college students and faculty may not even be aware less-visible university sports clubs, such as the polo club, exist. By examining this particularly underrepresented and commonly misunderstood sport, this study also attempts to build a foundation for further studies in how these types of athletes communicate their social identity to others.

My experiences as a player have pointed me in the direction of polo as an area of study. My experiences as a researcher and student of communication and anthropology have encouraged my desire to explore the sport as an area in which people form their social identity. The nature of the sport as elite on the top level and virtually invisible at the lower level poses unique challenges to those who choose to enter into the community. Looking at the OSU polo club, as a representative of intercollegiate polo, through the lens of social identity negotiation, can help to identify facets of this sport that have a large impact on the health of the sport and the experiences of the individual.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The following literature review will give an in-depth background as to how sport in general has become a popular area of study within the academic fields of communication and anthropology. It will then give a detailed background on the history of polo followed by a review of current theories regarding social identity and give a foundation from which to study the OSU polo club.

The anthropology of sport

The study of sport, leisure, and games is not necessarily a new concept, but it has only recently grown into a legitimate area of study amongst social scientists. This section will review the origins of the anthropological study of sport as well as recent interpretations of the importance of sport to culture and identity.

The book *The Anthropology of Sport: an Introduction* by Anthropologist Kendall Blanchard (1995) is credited with giving public recognition to the importance of sport to anthropology. Blanchard (1995) argues that sport in America is one of the most permeating factors in our lives. Sports are played, watched, analyzed, and cherished. Blanchard (1995) begins by discussing prominent studies in history that played a part in making the anthropology of sport what it is today. According to Blanchard (1995), traditionally, sport or games were briefly recorded as a "vehicle for the analysis of broader cultural processes" (p.11). She also references an article entitled, "The History of Games" (1879) by Sir Edward Burnett Tylor. In this article, Tylor describes the history of classic sports such as hurling, croquet and even polo. He studied games as "evidence of diffusion and contact between cultural centers in

different parts of the world" (as cited in Blanchard, 1995, p. 10). Tylor noticed and carefully recorded every facet of games that he saw, including equipment, rules, and playing grounds in order to analyze the actual origins of the game. Thus, he could posit theories about how different cultures came into contact with each other in history. Along with being considered the father of Anthropology, Tylor is credited with being one of the first social scientists to recognize games were worthy of their own scholarly investigation. Despite his large amounts of information and recording of games, Tylor never established a theoretical framework to inform and guide future anthropological studies of sport (Blanchard, 1995).

Further significant studies in the discipline in the nineteenth century noted by Blanchard came from the extensive work by Stewart Culin (1907). His most important work was titled *Games of the North American Indians* in which he listed and meticulously described dozens of games and sport activities of over 225 North American tribes (as cited in Blanchard, 1995). As a researcher, Culin was well travelled and made games the focus of his anthropological studies.

Blanchard (1995) stressed the idea that sport cannot be fully studied without a comprehensive understanding of culture. Although there is no single definition of culture agreed upon by all theorists in Anthropology or the social sciences, there are several statements that offer some unity, which the book outlines in detail. In short, "culture is defined as learned, shared symbolic behavior that functions as an adaptive mechanism as well as a guide for collective and individual human action," in addition, "culture is also an integrated whole made up of many interrelated components, each of

which is ultimately subject to the same basic laws and general analytic technique" (Blanchard, 1995, p. 31). The main theme throughout Blanchard's (1995) work is that sport is a massive component of culture that cannot easily be compartmentalized without considering the consequences of a broader cultural context. Thus far, the anthropology of sport is surmised by Blanchard (1995) as a "systematic study of sport from a cross-cultural perspective" (p. 23).

Karen McGarry (2010) gives further validation to the anthropological study of sport in the journal titled "Sport in Transition: Emerging Trends on Culture Change in the Anthropology of Sport." McGarry (2010) points to the "massive transformations in communications technology, the growth of mass media, and the resultant corporatization of sport" as reasons why sport should not be academically dismissed (p. 153). Sport, particularly elite sport or sports largely followed by media such as football, soccer, or basketball, have become massive productions on a global scale. McGarry (2010) and Blanchard (1995) agree that sport is an example of cultural change and cross-cultural interactions. Identity arises as a key area of anthropological study in all types of sport. McGarry (2010) suggests that the study of sport should be expanded to include the players, the spectators, the managers, the coaches and all the people who form identities within sport. According to McGarry (2010), "Sport thus acts as a key site for struggles over power and agency at all levels of socio-political organization, ranging from small-scale kin groups to the production of national identities as international spectacles like the Olympics" (p. 153). Therefore, to locate and understand the socio-political struggle for power within the polo club, the basic

structure of authority, which encompasses all members, must be taken into consideration.

Recent anthropologists have recognized the importance of the study of sport and discovered implications for identity issues of race or gender. Anne Bolin and Jane Granskog's (2003) work showcases several ethnographies that focus on sports and women, specifically the struggles women have encountered participating in sports and exercise. The first ethnography, written by Jane Granskog (2003), studies women in various stages of their lives who compete in triathlons and the impact it has on their social identity. One of the things she focuses on is the self-definition of athlete. According to Granskog (2003), women tend to identify themselves in relation to others, particularly men, as they take on several different important roles in other people's lives. Identification as an athlete in addition to several identities for women proves to be self- fulfilling and empowering. Granskog (2003) and the women in her studies carried their identification as "Ironwomen" throughout their lives.

This concept of identity of athlete is also an interesting facet to the identities of polo players. Virginia Merlini (2004) surveyed dozens of polo players in a dissertation titled, "A case study of the equestrian sport of polo: An integrative approach to issues of structure, function, and interaction." Her research found that some were hesitant to claim the title of "athlete" because they believe that an athlete should be the one doing all of the hard physical work (Merlini, 2004). In polo, according to Merlini (2004), it is quite possible to have a fat, lazy, old man play at the same level as a young, fit player.

Although the current study only focuses on collegiate polo club members, it may still be possible for these young players to experience similar hesitation to identify themselves as athletes. At the university level it is not uncommon to ascribe a certain hierarchy to NCAA athletes. According to the OSU Academics for Student Athletes website (2012), student athletes are provided with an array of support including priority registration, tutoring, athlete-specific learning centers, laptops for travel, etc. These lines of academic support are coupled with ample media coverage and an interactive website listing schedules, scores, and highlights, making NCAA sports such as football, baseball, and other traditional sports largely more visible to the public. NCAA athletes are encouraged and supported in not only their athletic endeavors, but their academic goals as well. Merlini (2004), highlights the hesitation for polo players to identify as an athlete, but this issue could be magnified in the context of collegiate polo which is not recognized as a NCAA sport. Therefore, it is important to consider the placement of the polo club in the hierarchy of collegiate sports as less supported than NCAA sports, and relatively invisible to the public.

Although the polo club, and other recreational sports clubs are not recognized or supported by the NCAA, studies show that participation in recreational clubs or sports can still have a positive effect on the individual despite. In a study by Stacey Hall, Forrester Scott, and Melissa Borsz (2008), the importance of recreational sports programs at the collegiate level were highlighted. It also provides information to justify the need for administration to support recreational sports teams in addition to the NCAA division sports. According to the study, participation in recreational sports

programs had an impact on the individual in seven areas: "organizing, planning, and delegating; balancing academic, personal, and professional roles; motivating/influencing others and being a mentor/role model; problem solving and decision making; communication skills; working with others/diversity; and giving and receiving feedback" (Hall, 2008, p. 130). The participants of the study spoke about how these personal developments, gained through participating in recreational sports, enhanced the degrees they received from their university by making them a more rounded person. The OSU polo club functions similarly as the recreational sports discussed in this study.

In addition to the possibility of experiencing positive personal developments, participation in recreational sports may have an impact on the moral development of athletes. However, Robert Bonfiglio (2011) suggests that the students can only morally benefit from participation in sports if the program is set up to facilitate character development. He suggests that competitive sports at any level can actually lead athletes to have decreased ethics in an effort to win. Bonfiglio (2011) cites Edward Shea who gives the following requirements of an athletic program that could promote the development of moral reasoning within participants:

> 1) The program must function under a sound educational philosophy, that is, competitive sports must exist as a means to an end, not as an end itself.
> 2) The program must function under competent educational leadership.
> 3) The program must be properly directed and controlled.
> 4) A high level of expectancy related to character development should permeate all phases of a structure which includes competitive sports (p. 32).

These two works regarding the positive impact on character due to an involvement in collegiate sports are examples of how the study of sport has permeated several academic disciplines.

To summarize, review of the works of Tylor (1879) and Culin (1907) demonstrate the initial interest in sport as a means of anthropological study. The focus began on the rules, the players and the equipment as an explanation for how cultures initially came into contact with one another. More recent works by Blanchard (1995) and Bolin and Granskog (2003) demonstrate the important connection between sport and culture and identity. McGarry (2001) gives further validation to the study of identity in all actors in a sport including the spectators, coaches, players, etc. Finally, the study on leadership development in campus recreational sports points to research in sport that directly relates to the identity of the individual and the connection between personal growth and satisfaction in higher education.

The history of polo

Polo is richly engrained into the history of sport in general. Unlike many other field sports, polo is an original game. Some say it is similar to 'hockey on horseback' but in reality, hockey should be considered horseless polo. In addition to it being rich in history, polo also constitutes a way of life. Having access to horses to play on is not a simple task for a non-horse owner. It requires membership in a club and/or a strong set of networks in the game. Collegiate polo is similar to this way of life, but access to horses, equipment, instruction, and a competitive environment is much simpler. A student can just decide for any reason that they would like to try this sport and join a

practice where they will be provided a horse and ample instruction from experienced members. Some members leave college, and polo becomes only a memory of their college days. Others leave and start making phone calls to players they have met and start figuring out how they can become involved in the outdoor polo community. Either way the experiences that that people have in the sport of polo are unique and in many cases become a part of one's social identity. It is for this reason that understanding the history of polo as it made its way to Oregon State and other colleges alike, is worthy of review.

The origins of the ancient sport can be traced back as early as the era of Emperor Babar of Persia in 1495-1503 (Bent, 1929). According to ancient Persian literature, including drawings and poems, being able to play polo was considered a skill comparable to those learned in war. Polo taught Persian armies how to live in the saddle and master the technique of riding a horse while wielding a tool. At that point, the sport was played with rules, specialized equipment and organized matches reserved for the king's high court. Eventually, due to political unrest, the game was abandoned and continued only by people who fled to the hills, thus reverting back to a less civilized form of the game in Persia. Despite this setback, polo had already found its way to Central Asia and India. In 1863, the game was then introduced to European cavalry officers for the first time in Calcutta, which spurred the introduction of polo to England. This resulted in the re-introduction of the game as a "well-ordered and scientific game" (Dale, 1905, p. 13). In 1873, the Hurlingham Club in Fulham, UK

picked up polo and established standardized rules. From there, interest quickly spread to New York by way of the American publisher, James Gordon Bennet (Dale, 1905).

In 1876, Bennet returned from England with polo balls and mallets. The first American polo match was thus played in the winter of 1886 in an indoor riding arena. Within three months the Westchester Polo Club was established, marking the first polo club in America, followed by the Meadowbrook Club of Long Island in 1879. Several more groups followed suit and formed clubs and in 1890 the United States Polo Association (USPA) was formed (Dale, 1905). The sport continued to grow especially among cavalry officers until the start of the Great Depression. At that time and continuing through World War II, membership drastically declined and by 1950 there were a mere 614 playing members. This was down from a flourishing 2,889 playing members 20 years prior (Dale, 1905).

As a sport, polo managed to survive World War II but did not receive resurgence in interest until the USPA began to focus efforts on recruitment in the 1960s. High school and collegiate teams were formed and two leagues were structured to allow for tournament play. Arena polo was created to allow the game to be played indoors year-round. The rules were similar but the playing field was significantly smaller. From there, membership and interest gradually increased and the USPA now governs 250 member clubs and approximately 3,500 playing members (uspolo.org).

Growth is still at the forefront of initiatives for the USPA. Chuck Weaver, the current chairman of the organization, has proposed a comprehensive plan titled "Polo 2020" to allocate funds in a way that supports the growth of the polo community. This

plan lists four main objectives including membership services, brand and sport promotion, umpire services, and issues related to corporate structure (Weaver and Meyer, 2011).

The polo club at OSU has been active for a current stretch of 17 years and supports approximately 20 members and 8 horses. Polo at OSU is relatively small in comparison to other collegiate polo clubs around the nation. For example, the club at the University of Virginia (UVA) supports 30-40 members per term and a 35-stall facility for horses (vapolo.org). Likewise, their men and women's teams have won several national titles in the intercollegiate league. UVA also operates at a facility established exclusively for arena and outdoor polo. Like most sports clubs, polo clubs rely heavily on funds from outside the university, and many clubs are fortunate to benefit from donations from wealthy alumni. For example, in a recent article in the *Hurlingham Polo Magazine*, it was reported that actor and fellow horse enthusiast, Tommy Lee Jones, is a large benefactor of the Harvard polo team (Burns, 2012). Those programs advanced by outside financial sources often times attract experienced players who have grown up in polo families. These levels of financial support are not often seen in the Northwest region thus creating what Harvard senior, Diego Nunez refers to as the "two tiers" (Burns, 2012, p.65). He explains it as the difference between schools that can recruit players to make a competitive team and the players who simply learn as much as they can in four years. Without donors and more support, the teams in the Northwest remain more focused on bringing in large numbers of interested people to learn the sport in order to keep it alive through player dues and

less focused on winning a national championship. The reason for a lack of donors in the Northwest is unknown, but until the clubs have the freedom to turn their attention to receiving more advanced instruction, their growth and success will remain limited.

The connection between the history of polo and the emergence of the sport into college is clear, but it is equally important to understand how polo fits into the athletic system of OSU. According to the OSU athletic webpage, all sports are broken down into three categories; National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) sports, club sports, and intermural sports. The NCAA is an organization meant to protect student athletes and provide a fair environment for collegiate programs to offer scholarships (NCAA.org). NCAA sports compete against other universities in their respective divisions and are supervised and trained by a professional staff. Intermural sports are designed to offer students an opportunity to form teams in various sports and compete against other student formed teams. Games are held between OSU students only. The Polo club falls into the club sports category along with 38 other groups. According to the 2011-2012 Sports Club handbook,

> Sports clubs are recognized as sponsored student organizations at Oregon State University which establish their own leadership, structure, membership requirements, competition schedules, dues, and fundraising events. The clubs provide social, competitive, instructional, and safe environments based on the common interests of the participating members (Department of Recreational Sports, 2011-2012, p.13).

These clubs are formed by interested students and further maintained by the voluntary hard work of others like them who have developed a similar passion.

Although each sport club is different, they are all encouraged to form a team of officers. The traditional formation includes a President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. Members of the polo club fill those rolls as well as a Barn Manager, Public Relations Officer, Fundraiser, and Scheduler. Each of these positions is vital to the everyday maintenance of the polo club. These are the faces that students see as running the club and making every single decision from when the equipment needs to be cleaned to the purchase or sale of a horse. Many students take on these roles with little to no previous experience with horse care or team management.

Although clubs are organized, maintained, and largely funded by the students themselves, they still must adhere to the policies and requirements of the Department of Recreational Sports. In order to remain an official student organization of OSU, clubs must fill out request forms to travel, hold events, purchase items, sell items, etc. All of the equipment, including horses, are bought with money from the club's accounts and are considered property of OSU (oregonstate/recsports.edu). Any clubs involving animals such as the polo club have the added responsibility of answering to the Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), which "performs semiannual inspections of all animal facilities associated with the university and provides reports of these inspections to federal agencies" (oregonstate.edu/research). This means the horses must be well taken care of and maintain a healthy weight at all times and any deviation may result in criminal charges.

In addition to being governed by the university and IACUC, in order for collegiate polo clubs to be eligible to compete against other universities and

participate in sanctioned events, they must also adhere to the guidelines and strict rules of the USPA. The organization requires each player that expects to compete in their regional tournament to purchase a membership into the USPA. Currently, a collegiate membership costs $50 per year (uspolo.org). This membership is necessary if players want to be recognized as official participants in the USPA sanctioned intercollegiate tournament. In return, the USPA offers several avenues of support. One is through financial means. Clubs can apply for funds to support growth and maintenance. Another avenue of support is through teaching and coaching. The USPA helps to provide skilled polo players to run clinics and help teach new members. This is especially important for those clubs lacking a coach figure such as OSU.

Because of the pull from multiple organizations, the OSU polo club often finds itself in a unique position amidst a sea of bureaucracy. In order to be successful, members must manage paperwork, fees, and horse care all while learning how to play an intense sport that is completely foreign to many new members. The pressure is immense, especially for those who take on a leadership role. Regardless of responsibility and commitment to various organizations, the members of the OSU polo club still devote countless hours to the sport and the club. Collegiate polo has been described as one of the most democratic facets of a sport riddled with an elite reputation (Burns, 2012). After taking a more in-depth look at the overall situation, it can be established that the clubs in the Northwest region are in a different situation than those with more financial and instructional support. Because of this, the polo clubs in the region have struggled to survive. A healthy collegiate system supports the

local outdoor polo community, which in turn, supports the local collegiate system. By studying the impact that OSU polo club has on the lives and the social identity of its members, we can begin to understand how important it is to keep this club to the community and possibly bring more attention to its perils and successes.

Social identity theory

The specific context of polo has been discussed in regards to legitimate anthropological study and its history has been discussed in this literature review. In order to understand how polo can be studied in the context of identity, key theories in communication of social identities will be introduced. This section will begin by discussing social identity theory (SIT) as originally proposed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner (1979). It will then discuss relevant studies that further link social identity theory (SIT) with group membership.

Tajfel and Turner (1979), the founders of SIT, refer to "the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance" (p.7). The concept of 'group' is thus defined as

> a collection of individuals who perceive themselves to be members of the
> same social category, share some emotional involvement in this common
> definition of themselves, and achieve some degree of social consensus
> about the evaluation of their group and of their membership to it (Tajfel
> and Turner, 1979, p. 40).

Individuals within these "collections" will then derive a self-image based on the social categories to which they perceive belongingness, which in turn makes up their social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p.40). The social identity of a person therefore acts as an internalized lens by which to view themselves and the world (as cited in Bar-Tal,

1998). Three important theoretical assumptions arose from Tajfel and Turner's

explanation of the theory:

1. Individuals strive to achieve or to maintain positive social identity.
2. Positive social identity is based on a large extent on favorable comparisons that can be made between the in-group and some relevant out-groups: the in-group must be perceived as positively differentiated or distinct from the relevant out-groups.
3. When social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals will strive either to leave their existing group and join some more positively distinct group and/or to make their existing group more positively distinct (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p. 40).

These assumptions place the most importance on the way an individual values

themselves in relation to others through the means of a group membership. This value

is judged based on a social reality instead of a physical reality. People have the need to

evaluate themselves in society and the different aspects of their social identity hold

value-laden measurements that play into that self-evaluation. 'Positive' aspects of

social identity are recognized through the shared beliefs as to what is positive. In other

words, people want to evaluate themselves in a positive way, but what they deem

positive is judged through which others deem positive. Membership in a social group

comes with a shared set of values, and the only way one will remain a member of that

group is if those aspects are valued and sought.

In a paper titled, "Social Comparison and Social Identity: Some Prospects for

Intergroup Behavior," Turner (1975) helps to clarify previous theories on social

categorization and the link with social identity. He is concerned with aspects of

intergroup competition. Controlled lab studies have shown that even without any

emphasis on group competition, people will favor an ingroup bias. Turner points to a

study by Ferguson and Kelly (1964), that required 23 ad hoc groups to complete three different tasks (as cited in Tuner, 1975). The results showed that the groups had the tendency to overvalue their own work and have a competitive attitude even though there was no real reason to do so. Turner then makes the distinction between competition for a material object like money or a token of value that can only be achieved by one group, and competition of social comparison between groups. The latter is less clearly defined. In regards to the polo club, the 'outgroup' could be defined as two different groups in order to clearly see both types of competition that tends to arise. Other similar polo clubs are all competing for the same thing, a national title. This is the token of most value in the traditional competitive sense. The second 'outgroup' would be all those who are unfamiliar with polo as they would not recognize the positive social aspects of being a member of such a group. In order to analyze this level of competition in the polo club, the shared values of the club members would have to be more clearly defined.

The concept of ingroup vs. outgroup behavior is also reflected in work by Cynthia Pickett and Marilynn Brewer (2005). The focus of their book titled, *The Social Psychology of Inclusion and Exclusion* remains centered around individual exclusionary and inclusionary factors within social groups. Pickett and Brewer reiterate the argument that people naturally strive for inclusion and that "rejection and exclusion from social relationships takes a toll on its targets and can lead to anxiety" (Pickett and Brewer, 2005, p. 90). It also makes the distinction between marginal group members and core members of any given group. Marginal members may be

those who are new and not as familiar with the norms of a group and therefore are not considered core members. Within the polo club, the marginal members can be easily distinguished by their knowledge of the sport and skills of the game, not necessarily the length of time one has been a member. This information regarding marginal members is helpful when considering that the club functions as a group but the individuals experience feelings of inclusion and exclusion within that group.

Similar to research done by Turner (1975), Pickett and Brewer (2005) conducted research in a laboratory with controlled variables to support their claims. One such demonstration showed that when an individual feels threatened by becoming a member of the out-group they tend to engage in increased levels of self-stereotyping. Basically this means that they will adopt traits that are seen as stereotypical of the group and adopt them as their own in order to align with the group. As an example from my own experiences, a stereotype of the polo club might be that all of the members are "horse people" or horse lovers, so that a newcomer who is seeking a higher level of inclusion into the group may explicitly engage in more "horse" activities like choosing a 'favorite' horse or posting Facebook statuses about horses. Additionally, a framework is provided for looking at how a group is structured and how much emphasis it puts on the inclusion or exclusion of its members.

In a paper linking SIT and organization in general, Blake Ashforth and Fred Mael (1989), expand on the connection between social identification and group identification by asserting that there is still a degree of individuality when one identifies with a social group. However, they argue that, "organizational identification

is a specific form of social identification" (Ashforth and Mael, 1989, p. 22). Firstly, identification is viewed as a "perceptual cognitive construct" (p. 22). Identification is not necessarily linked with the behaviors or actions of a group. Group members may have little to nothing to do with the way in which a group meets their goals but they are psychologically invested in the outcome. Secondly, identification with a group includes personally experiencing the success and the failures whether they were foreseen or not. Lastly, one may not necessarily agree with the values or attitudes of the group but still define themselves in regard to the group (Ashforth and Mael, 1979, p. 21). It is important to note that people are not necessarily simply products of the organization or group to which they subscribe but that their memberships are a large aspect of how they view themselves.

The works of Tajfel (1979), Turner (1975, 1975), Bar-Tal (1998), Ashforth and Mael (1989) as well as various other theorists give a solid support for the study of social identity in relation to a membership in a group. The polo club can clearly be defined as a group with members that come together for a variety of reasons, but the actions and goals support the common activity of the sport of polo. The club must act as a unit to survive but it does so with the participation of individuals from different backgrounds and experience levels. The following section helps to understand how people go about not only expressing aspects of their identity in relation to their group membership but also how they may validate or invalidate the social identities of others.

Identity negotiation theory

Theorists have made several expansions to Social Identity Theory, one of note and importance to this study is Stella Ting-Toomey's (2005) identity negotiation t theory. This theory assumes the theoretical assumptions outlined in social identity theory and subsequently concerns itself with considering "how we can enhance identity understanding, respect, and mutual affirmative value of the other" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 217). Ting- Toomey (2005) defines negotiation as "a transactional interaction process whereby individuals in an intercultural situation attempt to assert, define, modify, challenge, and/or support their own and others' desired self-images" (p. 217). As previously discussed, we place ourselves into groups depending on our membership in different cultural groups. This theory helps to explain how people negotiate these aspects of their identity in order to satiate those basic needs for inclusion and acceptance into a positively valued group. In addition, it brings to light that our ability to "go about establishing security, inclusion, trust, and connection in ourselves and others depends heavily on culture-sensitive knowledge and competent identity-based communication skills" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 218). Although this theory deals mostly with aspects of race, gender, ethnicity and other aspects of identity that are involuntary, the concepts can be applied to the polo club.

Ting-Toomey (2005) presents a set of 10 theoretical assumptions to help explain the following five identity dialectics or boundary crossing themes;

-security/vulnerability
- inclusion/differentiation
- predictability/unpredictability
- connection/autonomy

-consistency/change (p. 219)

Assumptions 1-3 of the theory posit that in order to understand the person with whom you are communicating, you must understand the identity domains she/he deems salient. If we have a positive experience regarding our cultural identity we are likely to feel safe and comfortable in that environment. Assumptions 4 and 5 outline the themes of outgroup/ingroup-based boundary maintenance issues. "To the extent that one's salient ingroup compares favorably with other relevant social/cultural groups, one may consider one's membership positively" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 220). Assumptions 7 and 8 discuss the rituals and consistency within cultural groups through acculturation and finally, situational variability influence meaning.

Identity negotiation theory as a whole allows one to analyze the aspects of identity that are omnipresent and fluid. Depending on the context of a situation, one may feel secure or vulnerable in their identity. Although these dialectics may seem like a scale or a continuum, the two elements are truly held together in tension. For example, the feeling of inclusion is only possible considering the opposite feeling of differentiation in a situation.

Another theory of importance to this study is Cultural Identity theory by Collier and Thomas (1988), which helps to further define the OSU polo club as a culture. According to Collier and Thomas, "culture can refer to ethnicity, gender, profession, or any other symbol system that is bounded and salient to individuals" (p.103). Being a member of the polo club means going to practice, learning new terms, communicating with teammates, etc. The only people who actively and consistently

participate in these aspects of the club are those members. Through careful

examination, it will be shown that the unique symbols, meanings, and norms of the

OSU polo club are not only imperative to learn but can take time to learn as well. One

cannot simply walk into the club without having to learn a few things from the current

members. Some norms are taught through explicit instruction but it is assumed that

others, such as knowing how to talk about the horses in a negative or positive way, are

generally learned through experience and take a varied amount of time to become

proficient.

According to Collier and Thomas (1988), cultural identity places emphasis on

discourse as a means to negotiate multiple identities. They define interpersonal

communication as, "contact in which the distinctiveness or uniqueness is emphasized,

especially person-specific qualities" (Collier and Thomas, 1988, p. 100). This type of

interpersonal communication occurs when members of the club converse with

outsiders. Communicating details of a membership into the polo club, such as horse

care, or complicated rules of the game are often limited to things which an outsider

can comprehend.

Aspects of identity ascription and avowal are important topics within this

theory. Collier and Thomas (1988) refer to "intercultural competence," as "contact in

which one's ascriptions of cultural identity appropriately and effectively match those

that are avowed" (p. 101). Identity ascription refers to the identity that has been given

to you by others and avowal refers to the identity that you give yourself. The polo club

is a wonderful venue for examining differing perceptions of one's roles within a group

or a culture as people take on many different roles within the club such as official leadership positions or competitive team positions. Identity ascription also serves to examine how a group might perceive themselves as a unit in relation to "outsiders" or other polo clubs. For example, as Merlini (2004) pointed out in her study, polo players are in a state of disagreement about whether they should be considered "athletes." Their set or rules and norms may be different from that of an "athlete" in the more acceptable context like a professional soccer player or an Olympian. In order for a polo player to feel valued as an "athlete," their identity must be positively valued by the other. This approach to understanding cultural identity suggests that "people who are highly competent in intercultural encounters are those who can mutually agree upon and follow rules for appropriate conduct, and who experience positive outcomes, the most important of which is confirmation of the preferred identity" (Collier, 1988, p. 108). This information is directly relevant to this study on OSU polo club members because it can help give a framework to identifying first how they perceive themselves and second, if that identity matches up with how others perceive them. If ascribed and avowed identities do not match, potential identity issues may arise.

In a psychological team-building case study, Gordon Bloom and Diane Stevens (2002) conducted interviews with an equestrian team and found that the general themes that affected team functioning were: "lack of athlete leadership; unclear team norms; little accountability for one's actions; weak coach-athlete communication; and limited member social interaction" (p. 6). Bloom and Stevens (2002) suggest specific ways for more competent communication strategies such as a better delegation of

tasks and a team covenant or "a set of norms or guidelines on how to act (i.e. team spirit, respect, positive attitude) towards each other and in public" (p. 6). This study is an example of the recognition of identity issues within equestrian teams. Although it is conducted through the lens of psychology, it is important to understand that these same identity issues may occur within the polo club as well. The study concludes by calling for more research to be done on equestrian teams at the collegiate level in order to further understand and propose competent communication strategies. The OSU polo club is also considered an equestrian team, but the dynamics are different. In the equestrian clubs referred to by Bloom and Steven (2002), the members compete for individual scores that make up a larger group score. It is both individual and collective. Members of polo players do not compete for individual scores and the team competes together as a unit. This possibly presents a more cohesive group membership in which to study social identity.

Literature review conclusion

To outsiders, the idea of a collegiate polo team may sound like a far-fetched scenario but for those who decide to give it a try and develop a passion, it can become anything but far-fetched. The polo club is a group, a culture formed by dedicated student members. It takes far more than just a love for horses and interest in polo to keep a club running and functioning. It takes teamwork, physical labor, patience, knowledge, and drive but perhaps most importantly; it takes money to keep a club going.

Previous literature suggests that more research is needed in the field and less in the lab focusing on social identity. The OSU polo club not only exhibits a unique ground for observing behaviors and aspects of social identity but the current state of polo in the area is also in need of academic attention. The reviewed literature gives context to polo as a sport with an extensive history that is worthy of academic study. In addition, relevant theories on social identity assist with giving this study the framework to look at how members of the OSU polo club negotiate aspects of their social identity.

The study of the social identity of the OSU polo club should be considered an addition to the previous studies of sport. Polo does not yet hold a significant position in academic study despite its history and culture. In order to look at polo as an indication of the larger culture of the people who play it, a foundation must first be set. Collegiate polo programs are a means in which people discover the sport and proceed to form their social identity as a member of those groups. Thus, the OSU polo club is a valid starting point for the inclusion of polo into the anthropology of sport and the study of social identity. Similarly to other recreational sports clubs, the individual growth that occurs as a result of the responsibility of being a member of the OSU polo club should also not go unnoticed by university administration. The importance of this study can be recognized in a number of ways: as an addition to the growing area of the anthropology of sport; the understanding of the various ways in which social identity must be negotiated; the growth of the sport at OSU; and the personal growth of the individuals.

Chapter 3: Methods

The aim of this study is to discover how members of the OSU polo team negotiate aspects of their social identity. Although Merlini (2004) began her dissertation as a study of a collegiate polo team at a New England university, she eventually concluded that her population consisting strictly of collegiate players was not an adequate representation of the larger population of polo people that she sought to study. Merlini (2004) wanted to explore three related things; "both the formal and relational structure of polo as a team sport and an equestrian sport," as well as "the place and functions in those structures of the actors who affiliate themselves with polo in various capacities as players, spectators, and nonparticipating supporters," and finally "the interactions between participants, primarily, the negotiation and competition for actual playing resources, and for resources in the form of status as athletes, players, and polo affiliates" (p. 1). In order to fully answer her research questions, Merlini (2004) needed a broader participant base. She sought to study polo with a broader approach.

I argue the collegiate population I have chosen is appropriate for the focus of my particular study and equally important to the larger picture of the sport in polo. Collegiate polo players are generally compromised of beginners to the sport and to the culture. Many have only recently adopted the status as a polo player into their social identity. They are fresh and represent the people who may go on to continue playing polo after college. Merlini's (2004) work uncovered several important points regarding gender and polo but she does not pay adequate attention to the young

generation of people learning the sport and eventually carrying the reins, so to speak. Collegiate polo not only allows us to study what it is like to become a member of this community but also what that could mean for the future of polo locally. This chapter will explain the choice to use qualitative methods of research, further justification of the chosen population, and an overview of the collection and interpretation of data as well as certain variables that may have impact on the research.

Qualitative research justification

Not everyone follows the same path to polo or even to sports in general. Everyone's motivation differs depending on his or her personality or environment, etc. The fact, however, that they all chose to subscribe to the same group makes it possible and interesting to study how they communicate this undeniable aspect of social identity. In order to study how people negotiate this membership, or this aspect of their social identity, it is important to use qualitative methods of research. There are many different actors that have inimitable narratives to tell, and it is because of these differences that a simple survey will not suffice. Observations and interviews are the best way to study communicative behaviors of this particular group of people. Ethnography requires that the researcher be in the moment in order to analyze the communication between members. At a practice, there are generally at least 12 members and 8 horses. Members are playing polo, some are caring for the horses, some are chatting, and some are watching, but each of them is communicating in some way or another. This study will focus on those times when the members are communicating their social identity.

Bolin and Graskog (2003) refer to the need for the use of reflexive ethnography in anthropological studies involving sports. Reflexive ethnography refers to the method of becoming a participant observer in the field of study. Ethnographers often become full participants in their field of study and reflect on their relations with those studied. When studying sport, especially team sport, it can prove to be beneficial to 'be' or 'become' a member of said team in order to understand the experiences that the team naturally shares. This also places the researcher as neither above nor below the subjects while conducting research but as an equal. Bolin and Graskog (2003) refer to this commitment and involvement to a sport or exercise as "extreme ethnography" (p. 13). The difference between extreme ethnography and what Pierre Bourdieu (2003) defines as "participant observation" is the need for the researcher to be an equal link in the failure or success of a team. In this case, I will not be conducting extreme ethnography in the sense that Bolin and Graskog (2003) outline. I am not a member of the current Varsity team, and I have little to no influence in the failure or success of the team. However, as a former member of the club and a competitive player, I am empathetic to the struggles and overwhelming feelings of victory or loss.

Participants

The participants of this study are limited to OSU students who have paid membership dues to the club. The decision to only include OSU students who have paid their dues helps to ensure accuracy of the data. Occasionally friends or family are invited to join a practice but information from this set of people would not help to

answer the proposed research question because they are not considered members of the OSU polo community. It is assumed that they do not share the same experiences as those who have become members. The OSU Office of Recsports keeps a list of all members who are currently paid up for the term and considered official members by OSU. Each participant was verified using this list. Overall, there were approximately seven male participants and 15 female participants. Although all 22 members participated in the study and were subject to observations, six males and nine females agreed to participate in interviews. Of the participants who were interviewed, three were within their first year in the club, three were in their second year, five were in their third year, and four were in their fourth year.

The OSU polo club naturally divides itself into groups. For the purpose of this study, these group distinctions will be recognized. Members are divided into two basic groups: those who are within their first year on the team and returning members who are in their second or beyond years. Another distinction that is made among members is between Varsity and Junior Varsity (JV). The club selects the top talent to be on the Varsity men and women's teams, and they are the only ones who officially compete in the USPA sanctioned tournament annually. The rest are considered to be part of the co-ed JV team and compete with other JV teams in unofficial matches. During the 2011-2012 school year there were approximately 10 Varsity members and 10-12 JV members. Of the interview participants, 6 were considered Varsity and 9 were considered JV. These numbers varied as members joined, dropped, or moved through the ranks.

All of the participants were informed of the nature of the study and my role as a researcher through emails and announcements. An initial email was sent to the officers of the club describing my intention and desire to observe the club followed by a series of verbal announcements made to the club during practices. I chose to make this information known because although I have not been active in the club for over a year, some of the participants know me from alumni events or were new members when I was finishing my final years with the club. Because of this, I wanted it to be clear that I was not attending practices to teach, critique, or give information to the officers or Varsity members regarding playing ability of the members.

Interviews and Observations

In order to gather information I conducted 15 semi-structured interviews (see Appendix) with the participants and recorded 30 hours of observations. This section will first outline the procedure for conducting observations followed by the procedure for conducting interviews.

The OSU polo team practices at a small private barn in the neighboring town of Albany (approximately 30 miles from the OSU campus), three nights a week. Each practice lasts for approximately four hours in the evening, and the majority of the club carpools from an OSU campus parking lot. Observations took place during designated practice times. Although the team gathers in other locations for meetings and various things, practices serve as the center of communication for the club. According to the rules set by the OSU Recsports Department, there can be no exclusion of members at official practice sessions (Department of Recreational Sports, 2011). Officers, Varsity

and JV are all encouraged to attend each practice. This allows for the opportunity to gather information from the largest potential sample size.

From experience, I know that each practice is generally formatted the same with the exception of having varying themes of riding instruction. The first half of the practice time involves barn chores like cleaning stalls, tacking horses (putting on the equipment), and general horse care. The second half involves three periods of riding lasting approximately a half hour each. There are 8 horses and about twice as many people, so ride times are split up to ensure that everyone gets on a horse. Observations were recorded by hand from a viewing deck that overlooks the arena and the stalls where members do chores and work with the horses. From this vantage point I was able to see and hear large amounts of communication.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted to record directed answers and narratives from the participants. An interview guide was compiled and used to assist in covering all of the desired topics. The questions were organized into categories of decision-making and leadership, riding, teamwork, and aspects of inclusion and exclusion. A semi-structured form of interviewing is most appropriate for this study, because as Bernard (2011) states, "It shows that you are in fully in control of what you want but leaves both you and your respondent to follow new leads" (p. 158). Being open to "new leads" is especially important when the researcher has a background in the community of study, as is the case in this project. The opportunity to divert from a formal list also helps to reduce bias in the formulation of questions. The selected questions were developed to be open-ended and create a dialogue between the

researcher and the participant; "the idea is to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms, and at their own pace" (Bernard, 2011).

All interviews were conducted one-on-one at a coffee shop or an appropriate location of the participant's choice. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. In many cases, selected probes were used to encourage the participants to elaborate on areas pertinent to their social identity.

Method of analysis

After conducting an appropriate amount of interviews and field observations, I read back through my data and began to code the information. I highlighted anything that stood out as aspects of social identity negotiation. From there I organized this data into appropriate categories. These categories were informed by the preliminary literature review. These categories also led to common themes from which to analyze and attempt to answer the proposed research question.

Chapter 4: Analysis of data

The following information retrieved from observation and interviews with the participants is arranged to display the common themes that arose as a result of analysis. It will be shown that the members of the OSU polo club face identity negotiation issues that are unique to their culture and can be challenging to navigate. Five overarching themes regarding social identity will be presented in this section. These themes will help to answer the intended research question: How do members of the OSU polo club negotiate aspects of their social identity? Two further questions are answered as a result of discovering unique aspects of the social identity of OSU polo club members: What stereotypes are associated with polo? And, how does competent social identity negotiation vary depending on the context of communication?

First, the desire to be included is looked at as a motivation to join the polo club. Members expressed the desire to feel included by making social connections with other members and to feel included by becoming a valued member through avenues of leadership. The second theme explains the many levels of stereotypes that are associated with polo. The third theme outlines the levels of self-presentation that members negotiate when discussing their social identity. The fourth theme discusses how the official structure of the club forms levels of hierarchy. The final theme touches on the perceived length of time that people will consider their membership to the OSU polo club as part of their identity.

All of the mentioned themes that arose from the data provide an insight into aspects of the social identity of those who become members of the OSU polo club.

The analysis will show that the complexities of being a dedicated member of a collegiate polo club can lead to social identity issues that people must learn to negotiate appropriately in order to achieve "both positive group-based and positive person-based identities" as posited by the identity negotiation theory of Ting-Toomey (p. 217). The themes highlighted in this study are salient to the members of the polo club, but this is not an exhaustive list of possible aspects of social identity. Following the analysis will be a discussion of the data as it applies to relevant theory.

Inclusion as a motivation to join the OSU polo club

Members of the polo club expressed the desire to feel included in two significant ways: through social connections, and through leadership opportunities. These become important factors in what individuals may come to expect from the OSU polo club. In some way or another, members were given the impression that positive social connections within the club were not only possible but quickly obtainable. For many, this led them to pledge their membership to the polo club. Once a member, some sought to feel included in other ways beyond friendship and camaraderie and desired a leadership position in order to feel like a valued asset to the club. This section addresses the motivations for people to join the club and how the club recognizes and adapts to those needs.

      The desire to make social connections.

Participants spoke about the desire to make connections as one that initially led them to join the OSU polo club. They desired to make social connections and to be accepted in regards to their social identity. Before they were members of the club, they

were students looking to be a part of *something* but they were unsure of what exactly.

Michelle (2),[1] found what she was looking for when she came to the annual pizza

feed, [2] "I noticed that everyone in the polo club was so friendly. I could tell that these

were people that wanted to be my friend." Michelle (2)'s sentiments were echoed by

many of her teammates. Erin (2), said, "Polo is more people-oriented. We love our

team and everyone is my friend. I compare it to being involved in the Greek system."

Members that ended up joining were looking for personal connections with people.

They were encouraged when the club matched their desire for inclusion, not only at

recruiting events but at practices as well. Data from observations of practices showed

a generally friendly atmosphere. Members often shared inside jokes and talked with

each other like they would a friend. Occasionally the members playing and riding

needed to ask the members on the sidelines to quiet down in order to hear the

instructions. This was always met with compliance and banter generally lulled to a

murmur but never ceased.

Michelle (2) spoke about how she truly appreciated that Alanna (3) and Anne

(3) made an effort to reach out to her during her first practice with the club, "They

asked me where I came from and questions about my major and dorm; it felt like they

really wanted to get to know me." In one instance, Stephanie (1), who played polo in

high school at a professional indoor and outdoor facility in Santa Barbara CA,

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[1] The number following each pseudonym denotes length of membership in years.
[2] The pizza feed occurs after the first couple weeks of school every year and is intended to help all of the equestrian teams recruit new members, not specifically polo. Each team is allowed a few minutes to make a presentation about their club and give the appropriate contact information in front of a large audience of interested students.

admitted that the facilities and horses at OSU were at a lower level then what she was used to but the club's friendly attitude was the deciding factor in becoming a member.

Kyle (3) alluded to the club's awareness of the importance of making positive social connections in order to gain or maintain interest in the club. He stated,

> It's more important to make connections because people don't know if they like polo right away. You have to give them a reason and many times that is simply social connections. Having friends keeps them around long enough to realize how fun of a sport polo is.

The club seemed aware that very few people come to the OSU polo club already knowing how to play. For more traditional sports like soccer, softball/baseball, basketball, etc., it is more likely that a student has some prior experience before joining a club. They may already know that they enjoy the sport. Kyle (3) points out that sports like polo must sometimes go that extra mile to ensure potential members have a good enough reason to stick around in lieu of experience with the sport. Based on interviews with the club from new members and seasoned members, it seemed like the club recognizes the desire of students to be included in something larger than simply the sport of polo. Students want to make positive social connections and feel that people want to make similar positive social connections with them.

Another way members explained their desire to feel connected was through the horses. Many students come to OSU knowing they want to join a horse club because of their prior experiences with horses but are unsure which club to choose. Not only are the horses essentially the lifeblood of the sport of polo, as well as all other equestrian disciplines, many members described them as they would a friend or a teammate. Alanna (3), spoke about her connection with Gypsy Rose, one of the horses

owned by the club, "GR and I have a thing; not everyone can ride her like I can and I love her for that." While observing the club at practices, it was very apparent that several members chose favorite horses that they gave special attention to. During observations, Alanna (3) in particular, always could be found grooming GR before the riding portion of the practice even if she was not signed up to ride her. Similarly, Jessica (2) often saved carrots from the dining hall and gave them to her two favorite horses after riding. When creating the riding list which matched riders up with horses for that evening's practice, Dan (3) sometimes called out to ask members which horse they wanted and other times he did not even have to ask and just wrote down a name based on experience with preferences.

The desire to feel valued through leadership.

In addition to the desire to feel included through social connections with fellow members and horses, the desire to feel valued in the club turned out to be a large motivator to remain a member of the club. This value most often was described in terms of official leadership positions or actions that are seen as helpful to the club. In the past, the club has always operated under a structured system of 5-6 officers voted on by the club. Surprisingly, each of the members is now involved in either an officer position or is serving on a committee created to help an officer with their duties. "I am on the PR committee so we help out Mark (2) who is in charge," said Jessica (2) about her current position. Several other members in their second year spoke about being on a similar committee. This appears to be the club's answer to this desire for members to feel valued in their social identities as members of the polo club. When asked what is

the most important thing to convey to new members, Kyle (3) made some insightful

comments,

> I think we need to make them feel appreciated and part of the club. I
> guess the biggest thing was becoming an officer because it's up to us to
> make the club function. People also need to feel like they are needed in
> the club, like if they walk away the whole club will feel it.

This form of inclusion and acceptance appears to be felt strongly throughout the club.

Michelle (2), who very recently joined the public relations committee, talked about

making dinner plates with a painting of a polo pony to give as gifts to people in the

community who have helped the club. She explained how members of the club have

started asking to buy a plate from her and how she felt like her presence was being felt

in a good way. When speaking about his role as the club's Treasurer, Kyle (3) said,

> It's tough knowing that that I am completely in charge of the budget.
> It's not like when I was a treasurer in high school and the teacher
> would ultimately check over my work then make a bunch of changes.
> No one is checking my work.

As the treasurer, Kyle (3) is responsible for making sure that the barn gets paid every

month for keeping the horses. He also makes sure that horse feed is bought on time

and any other team expenses like tournament fees, arena rentals, van rentals, uniforms,

replacement equipment, vet bills etc., are taken care of. He feels like people trust him

and respect his decisions regarding the budget because "they would probably rather

not be the one making those types of decisions."

Leslie (1) spoke about how she preferred to be the one supporting someone

else rather than be the one needing support from others, "I am on the fundraising

committee and I'll do anything Mike needs. I would rather he be in charge and I help

out when needed. I am always willing to help." Leslie (1) may not desire to be the one in charge but she still felt that her supportive role helped to fulfill her desire to be valued.

The desire to feel included through social connections and leadership arose through the data as characteristic of social identity that new members felt was important. These desires seemed to be recognized by the club and supported in various ways.

Perceived stereotypes associated with polo

This section discusses the four levels of stereotypes that members of the OSU polo club described. These stereotypes help to understand identity as far as it is ascribed and avowed. The first section focuses on the general stereotypes of polo as perceived by the current members of the club. The second section is context-specific to the OSU collegiate environment. The third section is context specific to stereotypes amongst equestrians, and the final section discusses how the participants of this study perceive accurate descriptions of polo players based on their now insider knowledge.

Mainstream stereotype of polo.

When asked what the stereotype of polo may be to outsiders, the answers were similar amongst all participants. The stereotype was described as rich, snooty, high-class, fancy, and whether or not the participants were aware, they only made reference to the male gender as a stereotypical polo player. This level of stereotyping is the most general or mainstream. It is what the participants assumed people thought of the typical polo player in no specific context. Their perceptions came from their previous

expectations of polo as well as what they see and hear in media. Michelle (2) described the stereotype as a "rich man's sport," and Jessica (2) talked about how it is usually associated with "fancy hats, champagne, and divot stomping."[3] When asked where the participants thought people attained their perceptions of polo, many cited movies, media, and the Ralph Lauren clothing line, which sports a polo player as its logo and features polo players in many of its ads. Many participants mentioned that they had seen or heard of Princes William, Harry, and Charles playing in polo matches.

Another element of stereotyping that the club members face is the general confusion with water polo. This is considered mainstream because before even getting to the typical stereotype of a wealthy polo player, members felt they first had to clarify which sport they were referring to. "The first thing they ask is how I can swim for so long after I tell them I play polo," joked Becky (4) in response to the question. Jessica (2) put it more bluntly, "if you say 'polo' they say 'water'." Becky (4) said that she tries to take the time to explain that if someone ever talks about 'polo' they should mean horse polo because it is the original sport. Water polo requires the preface of 'water.' That being said, OSU continues to list polo as 'horse polo' on the sports club website ("Oregon State University," 2012).

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[3] Divot stomping is a common ritual at professional polo matches. The spectators are offered a glass of champagne and invited onto the field to mingle and step down the chunks of grass that have been dug up by the horses' hooves. In collegiate polo, the game is played indoors on a much smaller dirt arena. Divot stomping is not a ritual in this setting.

Stereotypes in-context (OSU).

As mentioned, all of the participants were aware of the mainstream stereotype, however, none of the participants felt as though they emulated that "rich, snobby, old man" perception of polo players. Most felt one reason for the lack of connection with such an identity was due to their identity as young college students. Many participants offered the explanation of appearance, citing they knew they did not look like a typical polo player. When asked if she had ever felt stereotyped due to her identity as a polo player, Jessica (2) replied, "Probably not because everyone who sees me play is in college and I look like a grooming scrub."[4] When asked the same question, Leslie (1) looked down at herself and said, "I really don't think so because I wear this every day." She was dressed in a plain, grey, hooded sweatshirt and a pair of jeans.

In addition to appearances not matching up to a stereotypical wealthy polo player, participants felt that the mutual association with OSU prevented them from feeling stereotyped. When asked if he ever felt stereotyped, Kyle (3) said "I tend to start with the fact that I play for OSU and people understand that I could not possibly be a stereotypical polo player." Kari (4) also pointed out, "people often play off-the-wall sports like underwater hockey or join juggling clubs. I assume that when I say I play polo at OSU they don't think I am hobnobbing with Prince Harry." Many members attested to making sure to mention the OSU connection when

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[4] Jessica (2) is referring to someone who prepares the horses for the player which includes brushing, putting on the saddle and bridle, and making sure everything looks nice for the person about to play.

communicating their identity to friends or peers on campus. This seems to be a way

members head off a stereotype before it becomes assigned to them.

Stereotypes in-context (equestrian).

There are general stereotypes in all disciplines of horse sports amongst insiders

of those particular communities. Many people claim that one breed of horse is superior

to another or that the type of saddle they ride in is superior to another. These

stereotypes tend to be more informed and specific than can be found in stereotypes

ascribed by non-horse people to horse people. Polo is subject to the same insider

stereotyping and many members of the OSU polo club have backgrounds in different

disciplines.

Some participants spoke of the stereotype of "show people." [5] Kyle (3), a

previous show person, recalls feeling relieved that the polo club was more team-

oriented, "I wasn't sure what kind of club it would be. I was so glad it wasn't all show

people." He explained how he was looking forward to being a part of something

bigger than just himself and his horse. Erinn (2) intended to join the International

Horse Showing Association (IHSA) club, but then decided against it based on the

club's alignment with her perceptions of the stereotypical show person, "I tried out for

them and they were very snooty, they were 'show people,' people who compete for

themselves." Kari (4) and Stephanie (1) also mentioned being a part of "something

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[5] The term "show people" refers to riders who have competed in disciplines such as
jumping or dressage. Generally, the horse and rider are individually evaluated and
judged against other horse and rider pairs.

bigger" in reference to the way one feels when they are competing for a team instead of for themselves.

Michelle (2) talked about a time in class where she was asked to talk about her hobbies and she brought up polo, "As soon as I mentioned that I played it I could see the girl next to me cross her arms and snicker." She explained that the next girl then made a point to say she was on a more "real" horse team. This made Michelle (2) uncomfortable. Becky (4) offered some insight into the potential competition between horse disciplines, "sometimes other equestrians do judge polo and polo players. They feel it is a rough sport where the horses are treated poorly." Members like Michelle (2) who have never participated in a different horse discipline other than polo may be unaware of this stereotype of polo by other equestrians.

Finally, the data suggests that even people with equestrian backgrounds may not be fully immune to the mainstream stereotypes depicted by the media. Erin (2) thought the club was going to be "super fancy" based on her perceptions of polo and was surprised when she arrived at the barn for her first practice, "I was relieved that it wasn't at all fancy because I wasn't sure I would fit in in a place like that." Several participants were surprised that polo at OSU was less romantic than they imagined; however, none expressed disappointment.

Avowed identity to combat mainstream and in-context stereotypes.

When talking to the participants about what polo means to them and what it meant to be a polo player as part of their identity, it is important to understand what they described as typical polo player. Members tended to describe what they thought

was a 'polo player' based on their experiences with the OSU polo club and with the larger polo community. None mentioned social class as an aspect of the identity of a polo player. In fact, the most common traits of a polo player that arose were mostly competitive in nature and remained focused on the actual sport. Erin (2) described a typical polo player as someone who is aggressive, "You need to be competitive. If you can ride a horse well but you aren't aggressive you won't be any good." Stephanie (1) simply stated, "To be a polo player means being capable of riding a horse and hitting a polo ball in a chukkar.[6] You don't have to be great at either, you just need to try."

Other perceived characteristics of a polo player involved personality and sportsmanship. Leslie (1) stated,

> If they are experienced with polo playing and have connections, they are a polo player to me. When they have the ball they have to be able to pass and effectively communicate. That's not just specific to a single position. That's everyone.

Michelle (2) felt strongly that you must be able to be "a part of a smaller team." She further explained how other sports were made up of large teams with specialized positions. With polo, according to Michelle (2), you have to be willing and able to take any of the three positions at any time. This element sets polo players apart from other athletes in her mind.

When asked how her perceptions of polo had changed due to her involvement with polo, Kari (4) gave an interesting response that seemed to summarize the sentiments of many of the other members, "You don't have to *be* somebody to play

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[6] By "chukkar," Stephanie (1) is referring to one quarter of a polo match. A chukkar can also refer to a period of time in practice when the players scrimmage.

polo." In other words, polo is not necessarily about who you are and who you know. Granted, it is helpful to network with people in the polo community for support but being a polo player is described as much more about the sport and the ability to play it effectively. As noted previously, *being* rich, *being* snobby, and *being* a man are characteristics that research participants labeled as how others perceive polo players. However, the members of the club tend to describe a typical polo player in terms of sportsmanship, experience, communication, and skill, which are characteristics that could be used to describe any typical athlete.

In review, four varying levels of stereotyping were found in in association with members of the OSU polo club. The first tended to refer to polo players in general and described the sport and the players as wealthy and elite. The second level of stereotyping occurred when people made the connection between the members of the club and OSU. In this level, the general or mainstream stereotype was lessened due to the context of OSU such as appearances. The third level of stereotyping occurred during communication with other equestrians. It was shown that people who have previous experience with horse sports, still hold to the general or mainstream stereotype of polo due to a lack of exposure to the sport. The final level of stereotyping occurred when members of the polo club described themselves. They tended to stay away from social class and focus on athletic ability. These perceptions of self are what they deem salient and yet are rarely matched by outsiders. After several hours of observations at practices, the typical OSU polo player matches up more to the avowed identity of the fourth level of stereotyping. The only indicator of

social class may have been ownership of equipment rather than borrowing; however, there were no indications this had any effect on level of skill.

Levels of self-presentation when discussing social identity

Expressing the social identity of being a member of the OSU polo club is important because in order for the club to grow there must be a healthy number of new members every year. In order for there to be new members, the current members must specifically communicate their involvement to others in order to raise awareness. During interviews, participants were asked to explain exactly how they communicate their identity to others. Levels of self-disclosure varied depending on the personto which members were speaking. The data showed that members tended to organize outsiders into categories in order to negotiate their social identity appropriately. These categories classify outsiders into people who either go to OSU or do not and people who are familiar with horses or are not. These categories are similar to the levels of stereotyping in the previous sections. The awareness of ascribed stereotypes may play a role in how members choose to interact.

The division between being excited to talk about polo and refraining to go into any significant detail about their social identity as a polo player was quite polarizing. On one side, some said they truly enjoyed taking the time to explain and inform despite the confusion surrounding the specific sport of polo. Erin (2) stated, "After I explain that it isn't water polo I usually have an enjoyable time explaining the sport." Leslie (1) also responded that she really liked to share because people always showed interest in such a unique sport.

On the other side, several members expressed that they often refrained from even mentioning that they play polo at all to outsiders. According to Eva (4),

> They constantly say they had no idea that Oregon State even had a polo team at all. I don't try to explain what polo is because it's too difficult and most people don't care. If they probe me for details I'll give a limited explanation.

Stephanie (1) gave a similar explanation, "It's so uncommon to play polo or even ride horses and sometimes I don't feel like explaining to people at all about polo. Often times I will just say I ride horses and leave it at that." Again, satisfaction in communicating about polo largely depended on the perceived category of people who were asking, based on how much knowledge the person portrayed knowing any details about polo.

Interlocutor as college student vs. non-college student

Kari (4) went further to make the distinction between polo "outsiders" who go to the college and polo "outsiders" who are family or friends of family. She said there is a difference when she talks to those two groups of people:

> My friends at school generally don't really care to ask many questions but people like my grandparents or my boyfriend's family are super interested and want to sit down and ask me questions. They think it is so neat so I enjoy explaining to them more.

Kari (4) highlights an identity issue that many polo members deal with which is a lack of interest from the college community. It seems as though some members feel like their social identity as a polo player is taken more seriously when communicating with people who are outside the community of OSU. Alanna (3) joked that her roommates knew where she went on practices nights

but the only thing they ever inquired about was whether she had a "good time"
and if she remembered to take off her muddy boots before coming in the
house. When their identity is taken more seriously, they feel more encouraged
to talk and share.

Interlocutor as 'horse person.'

Members made another distinction between horse people and non-horse
people. Eva (4) explained that it is simply easier to talk about polo to other people who
ride or are familiar with horses already. In her experience, she felt like non-horse
people tended to ask surface questions, "They ask me if I have my own horse and if
I've ever fallen off and stuff like that." She found it more enjoyable to talk about polo
to horse people, "They ask what type of horse or tack you use, and how the positions
work; it's a lot more satisfying to talk about those types of things."

Many members reported enjoying talking to horse people because of the depth
of their questions and the understanding displayed by the outsider. Kyle (3) talked
about how he felt challenged by horse people because his three years in the polo club
were his only experiences with horses. At times he felt like other horse people have
more horse knowledge than him but they generally had little experience with the sport
of polo.

These differences in how members spoke about their social identity suggest
they must negotiate complex situations when discussing their identity. Not only are
they playing an unexpected sport but also they are being introduced into a larger
community of people who understand the horse aspect of their identity.

Hierarchy within club structure

As previously discussed, the club is maintained by its members through a system of officers. A very crucial form of communicating identity occurs on a day-to-day basis amongst the club members. What needs to be emphasized is the hierarchy that has occurred as a result of this club structure. This hierarchy adds yet another layer in which members find themselves communicating and negotiating their identities. Not only are they members of the OSU polo club but they are officers, new members, Varsity players or Junior Varsity players. Their roles in the club go beyond simple membership.

When it comes to making decisions and giving orders or delegating tasks, the cabinet of officers holds the power. As with most traditional systems, the President is ultimate authority with the Vice President being second in command. The rest of the officer positions seem to share similar authority. During interviews, members were asked who they went to with club or polo-related questions and many new members simply replied, "an officer." Those in power, officers, tended to speak of their roles in terms of responsibility. Those not in a position of authority, new members, tended to speak about their roles in terms of authority. Some reactions to the hierarchy of the officer system were negative as several new members expressed frustration. "I feel disregarded completely because I am JV," Erin (4) stated to demonstrate her feelings that because she was not a Varsity member of the team she was not trusted to have a valid opinion. She mentioned how she was responsible for discovering a new horse for

the team to buy but was not included in the processes of actually purchasing it, "It's frustrating to say the least."

This hierarchical structure was also apparent during practices. Although at most times, the entire club helped with all levels of tasks, when there was a horse question, an officer or senior member would stop what they were doing and handle the situation. During one particular practice a new member approached an officer and asked if Vanessa's (a horse) legs "looked puffy." Overhearing the question, other officers walked over to the stall and both began inspecting Vanessa's legs and discussing the matter. The new member who raised notice to the issue simply began cleaning a different stall to give the officers more room. She was not included in the assessment of Vanessa despite having been the first to notice the issue.

When asked what her goals were in polo, Jessica (2) also reiterated this feeling of frustration, "I hope someday to be able to make decisions that people respect. I know that won't come until I am a better player." In their description of how they felt supported by their fellow club members, Jessica (2) and Erin (2) felt like there was a connection between length of time on the team/skill and respect given when making important decisions. Stephanie (1) represented a member who was new to the club but had previous polo experience. Although she did not hold an officer position, she was still regarded as someone whose opinion was respected and listened to. By the end of this study, Stephanie (1) had worked her way onto the women's Varsity team and became the only new member to hold a Varsity position.

Various complex factors arose through the data as means of which to gain authority and satisfy the need to feel valued and included in the club: officer standing, length of time in the club, and previous horse or polo knowledge. This was an area where members of the club felt the most frustration when attempting to negotiate their complex identity as a member of this club.

Perceived future connection with social identity as OSU polo club member

Even though membership to this specific polo community is relatively short lived, participants were asked to reflect on how deeply they felt their membership as part of their social identity. Four common themes arose. First, many responded that they did not know how they would manage to continue playing polo after college. Second, a smaller group had hopes or plans to continue. Third, the desire to give back to the club as alumni and lastly, the personal changes observed as a result of membership to the OSU polo club. Several members expressed identification with more than one of these themes.

The OSU polo club makes it possible for someone with no experience with horses to learn how to ride and play for a relatively low fee. Students do not need to own a horse or a trailer or even a helmet. Everything is provided. Beyond collegiate polo, resources are not as easy to come by. It is possible to borrow or rent the necessary items to play in an outdoor tournament but people are respectively less willing to provide extensive lessons, coaching and direction. Kyle (3) talked about not knowing if he will have the money and time to play polo after college, "I'm not even sure if I'll have a job right out of college so I really don't know if I will be able justify

spending that kind of money to play." Jessica (2) and Michelle (2) also expressed concern that they may not have the resources to keep playing. Jessica (2) worried that her future dream job would likely move her around the country thus preventing her from owning a stable of horses and spending money to join an outdoor club.

A slightly smaller amount of participants seemed more confident in their future with polo. Although none expressed a desire to play as a profession, many spoke about their hopes to continue to play as a hobby. Kari (4) and Becky (4) both said that they would love to continue playing after college especially if they could play with their fellow OSU polo members. Erin (2) said, "I think it will still be a major deal for me. I want to help grow polo in the Northwest. I want to come and help and teach and play in tournaments."

Those who verbalized reservations about playing in the future still talked about wanting to give back to the club in some way as an alumnus. Jessica (2) spoke about wanting to give back to the club financially when she started making money. Kyle (3) also suggested wanting to be a part of a more supportive alumni group. He talked about beginning to make those connections for the club while he was still a member. As the treasurer, Kyle (3) understood firsthand how difficult it is to grow a club that struggles to make ends meet each month,

> I see no reason why we aren't as supported as other organizations. When I was in FFA [Future Farmers of America], we were always receiving money from donors and the community. We need to do a better job keeping in contact with old members and their families.

Many members also expressed how their membership with the polo club has changed them or provided valuable lessons that they feel will have a lasting effect.

Becky (4) enjoys talking about all of the social experiences that she hopes to

remember forever, "I've met so many people through travelling and I learned that

networking isn't just something you do for a job, I have made friends all around the

Northwest who I can call on to help me out or give me advice. I think those

connections are very valuable." Michelle (2) talked about her transformation from

being an incredibly shy person with one or two close friends to someone who can say

they have 20 good friends, "and I still have four more years to go!" Leslie (1) tied her

experiences in with future job skills, "Polo has helped me to develop relationships that

might be similar to ones I would find in the workplace. I have learned more about

listening to others' opinions and just making decisions."

This data shows that members are aware that their identity as a member of the

OSU polo club will eventually come to an end. However, as the data showed, many

expressed the desire to remain connected both to polo and also to polo at OSU in some

way. They also understand that being a member of this club has given them skills

beyond the ability to play polo that they will use later in life.

Conclusion of analysis

In review, the analysis of the data retrieved from interviews and observations

supported five themes regarding aspects of the social identity of a member of the OSU

polo club. The first was the desire to feel included through means of social

connections with other members and horses as well as the desire to feel included

through leadership. The second theme was presented in the form of four levels of

stereotypes that are associated with the members. These stereotypes vary depending

on the context in which the individual is interacting. The third theme explained

different factors that lead members to either disclose information about their social

identity as a polo player or withhold that information. The fourth theme focused more

on insider communication and how the current structure of the club forms a hierarchy.

The final theme explored how members of the OSU polo club perceive their future

connections with the OSU polo club. The following chapter will discuss how these

themes relate to relevant academic theory and combine to answer the proposed

research question of this study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This study examined how members of the OSU polo club negotiate their social identity on a daily basis. This section will first reiterate the themes discovered through qualitative methods of research and presented in the previous section. This section will then explain how those themes relate to theory and the importance of those relations. A discussion of limitations associated directly with this study, and of future recommendations based on the findings will follow.

Reminder of Themes

The following themes shown by the data support answers to the overall research question: How do members of the OSU polo club negotiate aspects of their social identity? In doing so, the data also provides answers to two further questions of interest regarding social identity: What stereotypes are associated with polo? And, how does competent social identity negotiation vary depending on the context of communication?

Five overarching themes were presented in the analysis and will be further broken down in this discussion section. The first theme showed the desire for people to be included through means of social connections with peers and horses as well as value through leadership positions. Students were found to react positively to characteristics including friendly behavior and holding some form of responsibility. The data also showed that the club strongly recognizes and satisfies the desire for social connections and that it has made efforts to satisfy the desire for inclusion through leadership by implementing a structure that requires committees.

The next set of themes is related to stereotypes of polo. It was found that there are four levels of stereotypes that members of the club must negotiate their way around. The first is an overall mainstream stereotype of polo in general which mostly relates to professional polo. The next two are more context specific. It was found that the perceived stereotype was different depending on the environment; college or non-college, and equestrian or non-equestrian. The final category regarding stereotypes has to do with the way club members describe themselves as polo players. They tended to create their own description that remains distinct from common stereotypes and focuses on competitive aspects and skill.

It can be concluded based on the data that the members of the club are at least aware of the stereotypes ascribed to them that they mentioned. This most likely has an impact on the way they communicate their social identity to others. As social identity is a reflection of one's identity as a member of a larger group, the perceptions of others are included in those reflections and have an impact on one's perception of their own social identity. Keeping this in mind, the levels of self-presentation varied depending on with whom they were speaking. This set of themes was broken down to self-presentation aimed at college or non-college students, and horse or non-horse people. It was found that the members were more encouraged and satisfied to share details about their identities as club members to non-college people like family members, and to people who have experience with horses. They were less satisfied when talking to people who were heavily associated with OSU such as friends or fellow students, and to people who had no experience with horses.

While the aforementioned themes are concentrated on identity issues of club members interacting with outsiders, there is still a significant amount of social identity negotiation within the club itself. The fourth set of themes gives light to the structure of the club as well as some things that lead members to feel included or excluded as insider members of the club. It was found that the three factors that lead to respect and positions of authority are not always easily achieved; length of time in the club, horse knowledge and polo skill, and an officer position. New members expressed frustration that the length of time within the club earned members and undue level of seniority.

The final theme that arose through the data showed how club members perceive the future of their identification with the OSU polo club. Most members expressed a strong desire to stay connected to the club as a form of support through coaching and financial means. Interestingly, many addressed the strong possibility of not being able to afford to play, which supports the mainstream stereotype of polo as being a rich person's sport. One of the most important assertions from the analysis of this set of data is that members understand that their identity as a polo player may not last forever, but the life skills they learned along the way certainly will.

The following discussion section will combine the above themes with relevant theoretical framework in order to further explore the question of how members of the OSU polo club negotiate aspects of their social identity.

The desire to feel included

Stella Ting Toomey's (2005) identity negotiation theory assumes that "human beings in all cultures desire both positive group-based and positive person-based

identities in any communicative situation" (p. 217). While the human desire for

positive group-based or person-based identities may seem like a simple assumption, it

is valuable to pinpoint what particular aspect of communication is viewed as positive

in a unique situation such as choosing what club to join.

As demonstrated in the data, the participants desired positive social

connections with other members and horses as well as feeling valued through

leadership opportunities. The participants were not explicitly asked to describe the

attitude of the club, rather to discuss what attracted them to the club and what kept

them coming back in subsequent years. As explained in the analysis section of this

study, many members pointed to the characteristics of the current members as a whole

including personality traits such as kindness and acceptance that suggest the

opportunity for positive social connections. Some spoke about specific instances of

kindness that remained in their memory. According to the identity negotiation theory

(Ting-Toomey, 2005), "while the efforts of both communicators are needed to ensure

competent identity negotiation, the effort of one individual can set competent

communication in motion" (p. 218). I argue that the club can be considered one

individual, in this instance, which sets the communicative tone for potential members

in order to satisfy the need for positive group-based identities.

Kyle, a returning member and officer in the club, seemed to address the club's

awareness of the importance of a positive attitude to newcomers. He spoke about how

people are often unfamiliar with the sport of polo and the need to augment their

sparked interest with social connections. Assumption 6 of the identity negotiation

theory explains that "meaningful intercultural-interpersonal relationships can create additional emotional security and trust in the cultural stranger" (p. 218). Again, the club can be considered the "cultural stranger" in this scenario. According to the identity connection and autonomy dialectic of the theory, when the club makes an effort to reach out to interested or new members on a personal level they may feel more connected to the club as a whole. If the club were to ignore the personal connections of those individuals, potential or new members may experience more identity autonomy (Ting-Toomey, 2005). The positive communicative tone of the club as a whole thus becomes a vital aspect when it comes to recruiting new members because it helps to form trust and emotional security.

Overall, the data showed that the desire for inclusion through social connections and leadership was a salient characteristic to the participants of this study and their decisions to subscribe to the community of OSU polo. A positive attitude seemed to help fill the gap that some felt when considering a sport that they knew relatively little about. This characteristic of the OSU polo team shows how the club, as a unit, negotiates a part of its identity to outsiders, and how outsiders, albeit interested ones, respond.

Negotiating ascribed identities derived from stereotypes

In order to further understand how polo players negotiate aspects of their social identity, it is important to address the concept of ascription and avowal. Identity ascription refers to the identity that has been given to you by others and avowal refers to the identity that you give yourself (Collier and Thomas, 1988). This concept

appears in two themes described in the analysis; stereotypes and self-presentation. As was shown in the data, polo holds a certain stereotype that is portrayed through various media outlets. Participants explained that the polo players are often associated with wealth, and an elitist attitude. However, the data showed that none of the members felt like they emulated these ascriptions of identity. Instead, members referred to competitive and athletic characteristics of the sport of polo that they felt better described their social identity.

The identity that was ascribed to them in the first three categories of stereotyping (mainstream and in the context of OSU and the equestrian community) did not match their avowed identity as described in the fourth category (created stereotypes). This poses an identity negotiation issue. The fourth core assumption of Ting Toomey's (2005) identity negotiation theory posits "Individuals tend to feel included when their desired group membership identities are positively endorsed and experience identity differentiation when their desired group membership identities are stigmatized" (p. 218). If we refer to the second identity dialectic of Ting Toomey's theory (inclusion-differentiation), it can be seen how members may feel more identity differentiation when it comes to being associated with the typical stereotype of polo as well as stereotypes in the context of the university and in the eyes of those engaged in other equestrian disciplines. Members may also feel a stronger sense of inclusion when their avowed and ascribed identities match, such as during ingroup communication as described the fourth level of stereotyping.

According to the data pertaining to self-disclosure, club members experienced more identity differentiation when speaking to outsiders who were associated with OSU, and those who have no experience with horses. The way club members choose to negotiate this identity issue can be predicted by Ting Toomey's (2005) dialectic that suggests individuals experience identity emotional security in a "culturally familiar environment" and identity emotional vulnerability in a "culturally unfamiliar environment" (p. 218). Considering that some members feel discouraged from communicating their social identity to others suggests a differentiation, or "a degree of remoteness" with outsiders and also a sense of emotional vulnerability, or "the degree of anxiousness or ambivalence" (Ting-Toomey, 2005, p. 220). If members do not feel a sense of trust that they are going to be perceived positively by the interlocutor, they may refrain from communicating further about their identity. It is important to keep in mind that no two individuals are the same and although some member expressed concern when communicating with certain groups of people, for others it seemed that they felt such a strong connection to polo that they rarely experienced identity differentiation or vulnerability when communicating.

Although members strongly identified with competitive or athletic skills as marks of being a polo player, with further research, it could be shown that some members could also experience identity differentiation if they do not view themselves positively in this way. For instance, one may feel like they are not fully included in the category as polo player, which is integral to being on the polo club, if they do not meet the athletic requirements. As a reminder, the polo club supports the inclusion of all

students, athletic or not. However, the data also showed the importance of social

connections as a characteristic of the club and the role this takes in the absence of full

commitment to the sport. It can be argued that the club itself facilitates the learning of

the sport through social connections and close interpersonal relationships.

The evidence of the data regarding identity negotiation amidst various levels of

stereotypes suggests ascribed and avowed identities are not always aligned when

communicating with outsiders, leading to feelings of differentiation. The differences

in levels of self-disclosure depending on the interlocutor support the existence of this

identity negotiation.

Identity marginality as a result of hierarchical structure of authority

As the analysis of the data showed, most members hold an officer position or

an apprentice-type position within the club. They also are responsible for contributions

made to their prospective teams (Varsity or JV) in the form of competition and skill

level. These various roles that all members hold add to the complexities of the identity

issues that they face as members of this particular club or culture.

It was shown that the current structure of authority both satisfies the desire to

be included for some and simultaneously prevents the feelings of ingroup inclusion for

others. Although all members are a part of the ingroup and considered members of the

OSU polo club, the positions they hold within the hierarchy vary. According to Picket

and Brewer (2005), "Although individuals may be acknowledged as being members of

a particular social group, these individuals can vary greatly in their prototypicality" (p.

92). Members can be anywhere from the prototypical member, or one who exemplifies

what it means to be a part of that group, to a marginal member, or one who feels threatened in their position. The marginal group in the polo club is the newer members of the club who do not hold an officer position or play on a Varsity team. Marginal members do not exemplify the prototypical member of this club because they have not had a chance to fully grasp all of the norms, rules, language, and skills that are learned through membership and experience. Marginality is unavoidable in most cases, with few exceptions such as Stephanie (1), who climbed the ranks quickly due to her previous polo experience. These marginal members are not a prominent voice in either the decision-making or the competitive aspect of the club's dynamics and it was shown to be frustrating. Marginality became visible through observations as well. As referenced in the analysis, newer members tended to do more physical labor while more experienced members handled questions, planning, and less laborious tasks.

Picket and Brewer (2005) explain this form of ingroup exclusion as an imbalance of obligation to the group and reliance on support from the group. Members generally feel some sort of connection to the group and feel the obligation to do what is needed to fulfill their role as a member. However, according to attachment theorists, that member should also feel the ability to rely on fellow members for support in their roles (Picket & Brewer, 2005). The data retrieved from marginal members of the polo club suggests that they may be feeling frustrated with this aspect of their social identity because their obligation to remain a member with a diminished voice, as appears to be the norm, is not meeting their perceptions of being supported. This appears to be an area where marginal members have difficulties negotiating a

particular aspect of their social identity. The implications of this type of identity issue can lead to "distress, as it implies a lack of self-ingroup attachment and the potential loss of the ingroup as a source of support" (Picket & Brewer, 2005, p. 91). In other words, this anxiety of not feeling valued as a new member can lead to members feeling like they may not be as included as they would like. It is not the intention of this study to assume that this marginality is a positive or negative aspect of the polo club, but that it exists as a facet of social identity negotiation.

Limitations and further areas of research

There are certain limitations that I, as a researcher had to be aware of while conducting this study. Perhaps the most obvious is the fact that I was a former member of this polo club community. To combat this limitation, I chose to make my intentions clear to the participants throughout the study. In doing so, I created a gap between myself as a former player and a researcher by politely turning down offers to participate in practices and keeping people informed of the reasons for my presence at practices. I felt that it was important to be considered an academic figure and not someone who imposes the threat of judgment. Often times those who are not playing in the current chukkar discuss the skills or choices of the players just as with any other sport. I made a conscious effort not to make remarks directly pertaining to anyone's playing ability in order to maintain trust that I was not there to assess playing ability in any sense.

Another limitation of my particular study is within my chosen participant population. Due to the scope of this study, I chose to exclude former players who have

graduated from club polo and moved on to either continue the sport or go in different directions. As mentioned, the study done by Merlini (2004) focuses on these players but mostly ignores the experiences of collegiate players. For future studies, it may be beneficial to do a comparative study between these two groups of people related to polo.

Another avenue for future studies on this topic is to research more collegiate clubs especially from different regions. Each club is different, but they are all essentially trying to achieve the same goals of winning the national title and maintaining or growing their club. The higher structure of the United States Polo Association should be examined to explore how social identity is negotiated when both officials and players compare clubs. Finally, demographics of members of collegiate polo clubs could also be examined such as ethnicity and gender to explore further aspects of social identity. These demographics could be compared to official members of the USPA to see if gender and race determine future association with polo after college.

Recommendations based on findings

One advantage to studying this community of people is the opportunity to use the findings to offer suggestions for an improved system based on the findings. This section is meant to put the above findings from the discussion section into operational information for the club in the hopes of building not only a stronger club identity but also a stronger polo community in the area. These are merely suggestions based on

this particular study and it should be reiterated that there are both limitations associated with this study and further areas of research that can be conducted.

Daniel Bar-Tal (1998) provides a framework for understanding how groups of people such as the polo club define themselves and engage in more ingroup inclusion. Bar-Tal (1998) defines this concept as "groupness" or "group beliefs" which reflects those characteristics that members are aware are shared (p. 95). Group beliefs can be expressed through norms, values, goals and ideology (Bar-Tal, 1998). It has been shown that members of the OSU polo club value positive social connections with people and horses as well as feelings of value within their roles. The polo club has responded to these desires by interpersonally communicating the potential for such connections and amending the officer structure to include new members through apprentice positions. However, there are still important identity issues that prevent satisfactory feelings of inclusions in many cases including feeling undervalued as a new member.

It is the intention of this study to offer the following recommendations in order to promote a club environment that is more inclusive to those who may be experiencing identity differentiation or vulnerability. These suggestions stem from a combination of Bar-Tal's (1998) group beliefs as well as Ting-Toomey's (2005) competent identity negotiation strategies through "accurate knowledge of the identity domains of the self and others in the intercultural encounter" (p. 217). First, a stronger or more formal club identity should be created in a format that can be accessed and acknowledged by all members. This should include more explicit written rules or

norms and behaviors expected of all members. Second, there needs to be more emphasis placed on balancing a positive social environment with more valued roles for newcomers. Both of these suggestions will have a significant impact on alumni and those members about to exit the OSU polo club and shift their identity to "former member."

Explicit written rules for expected norms and behaviors.

Learning how to successfully complete the many tasks that come along with being a productive member of this club must be learned, especially by those with no previous horse experience. Attending a practice requires hard work and assertiveness by everyone. By more formally communicating instructions for completing required tasks such as cleaning stalls, tacking up, storing or cleaning tack, etc., the club can help make the new member feel more knowledgeable and therefore, more valued. This can be done through a written set of directions or more formal and exhaustive training sessions given to new members.

In addition, a group ideology could be determined to further increase feelings of inclusion. Bar-Tal (1998) explains group ideology as "a set of ideas that characterize the ways in which a group posits, explains and justifies the ends and means of its organized social actions" (p.100). A group ideology can also be what sets groups apart from others. The polo club interacts with several levels of people that must be kept in mind when determining a group ideology. There are people associated with OSU, people who have horse experience, people who are members of other equestrian groups, and people from other polo clubs. Each of these communities are

also important to the club. People associated with OSU could be potential members or supporters. People with horse experience or members of other equestrian groups may be resources to the club. Other polo clubs are the main competition. The OSU polo club must determine how they want to be perceived to all the different groups of people and make it clear to their members in order to create a more cohesive, inclusive club that also stands out from others like it.

   More emphasis on a balance of values.

   Determining the values of the club can help to give a focus to new members. Values "reflect the ideals to which individuals and groups aspire" (Bar-Tal, 1998, p. 97). Based on months of time spent with the club, it seems that different people aspire to different values or a combination of values. Varsity players tend to value skills and playing time. Officers tend to value finances, recruitment, successful planning etc. New members tend to value instruction and acceptance. By establishing a set of group values that encompasses all of these values, members may begin to understand how others value their roles and areas where they need to work harder to validate the roles of others. The first step in accomplishing this recommendation is to determine the values of the members. This could be done by simply asking members how they feel but it is important to understand the hierarchical roles that have been established through the officer system. A new member may not feel secure in revealing concerns to an officer even though these concerns can be very helpful such as the need for more instruction. The less vulnerable members feel in expressing their opinions, the more

they are likely to engage in that form of communication. This trust can be formed by acknowledging and acting on concerns raised by new members.

As the final assumption of Identity negotiation theory states, "satisfactory identity negotiation outcomes include the feelings of being understood, respected, and affirmatively valued" (Ting-Toomey 2005, p. 218). By creating a more cohesive and satisfied group of people, we can assume that ties with former members will be stronger as well. It was shown through the analysis that most of the members expressed a desire to stay connected in a supporting role to the club. If money is what the club needs to grow, then connections with those who have the means to provide financial support are required. If resources by means of knowledge and instruction are needed for the club to flourish, then connections with members of the community possessing those resources are required.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The goals of this project were to determine how members of the OSU polo club negotiate aspects of their social identity. Due to the nature of this research question, this study called for qualitative research methods using observations and mostly interviews. As the researcher, I attended 30 hours of scheduled practices and conducted 15 hour-long semi-structured interviews with members of the club. I then gathered my findings and analyzed the data to determine themes related to social identity. What I found was that the members of the OSU polo club deal with a variety of identity issues when joining this club, while being a member, and when exiting the club. They negotiate their social identity to several different levels of outsiders and to the various tiers of hierarchy within the club. By applying Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation theory (2005) it was found that members often negotiate aspects of identity differentiation with outsiders as well as insiders in their quest for inclusion. As a result, suggestions were offered to assist the club in taking the information from this study about their own social identity and using it to improve their understanding of the issues that many members face.

There are very few research studies or academic literature surrounding polo and even fewer surrounding polo clubs. Polo does not yet hold a significant position in academic study despite its history and culture. In order to look at polo as an indication of the larger culture of the people who play it, a foundation must first be set. As a former member, I know that these polo clubs can propel people into the world of polo by bypassing the stigma that comes with the stereotype of polo being a high-class,

exclusive, rich man's sport. By researching and understanding the complexities of being a member of these polo clubs, we can begin to explore yet another unique community that is present in our society, often closer and more accessible than we may think. The importance of this study can be recognized in a number of ways: as an addition to the growing area of the anthropology of sport; the understanding of the various ways in which members of underrepresented sports work to combat stereotypes and communicate their social identity to others; and the recognition of personal growth of the individuals as a result of memberships in these groups. If this method of study can be successfully used to study the social identity of this underrepresented sport at the collegiate level, it can also be used to study other intercollegiate sports that are striving to grow and become more recognized within their communities.

As this study and previous literature have shown, membership in these groups can provide benefits beyond simply learning how to play an enjoyable sport. They can foster personal growth and a sense of belonging and acceptance. This particular study has shown that individuals experience difficult or challenging identity negotiation when identity is linked to a little known or heavily stereotyped sport such as polo and that identity negotiation strategies are created such as combating negative stereotypes. It is assumed that this aspect of identity negotiation and stereotyping happens differently than the interactions of athletes who play more widely recognized and supported sports. It is the intention of this study to highlight those individuals who are under-represented in sport and academia.

For myself, as a researcher and polo enthusiast, I understand that more time needs to be spent in the field, and the research question needs to be expanded to encompass collegiate and intercollegiate polo clubs and teams in general. It is my hope that this study has provided a framework that serves to expand this study to a larger participant base that includes the organizational structure of the USPA in order to more holistically explore the unique social identity of the polo player and the impact on the community.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

General information- These questions are to help us understand how and when you became a member of the OSU polo club.

1) What is your age and year in school?
2) How did you become involved in the OSU polo club?
3) What keeps you coming back to polo?

Identity within the club- These questions are to help us understand more about how you communicate your social identity when you are interacting with other members of the club.

4) What is your role or title in the club? Ex. Officer, Varsity, JV…
5) *Do you feel like other members of the club support your role or position?*

Identity in relation to outsiders- Similarly, these next questions are to help us understand how you communicate your social identity, except when you are interacting with people who are not members of the club or sport.
6) How do people who are unfamiliar with polo or the club react when you tell them you are a member/player?
7) Has your own opinion of polo players changed as a result of your membership in the polo club?
8) What would you say is the general stereotype of polo?
9) Have you ever been stereotyped because of your identity as a polo player?
10) Have you ever refrained from mentioning your identity as a polo player?

Overall- These questions can help us gauge how you perceive your identity as a member of the club.
11) What does it mean to be a polo player?
12) When you graduate from college will you still consider your involvement with the OSU polo club as part of your social identity?
13) What do you normally say to interested students?
14) What is the most important aspect about polo to you personally?