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Soccer Spectatorship and Identity Discourses Among Latino Immigrants

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This study examined the role of soccer spectatorship in identity development and community-building processes among Latino immigrants. Transnationalism and social identity theory were used as a theoretical foundation of this study. Twelve interviews with immigrants from Mexico, Honduras, and Argentina were conducted between June 2009 and January 2010. Interviews took place in two sports bars following the soccer games between the U.S. men's National Team and that of Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. The findings showed that the interviewees developed three types of identities: national, pan-ethnic (Latino), and transnational. Common interest in soccer led to forging bonds with other Latinos and in creating a community feeling and allegiances. Reinforcing identities and displaying togetherness and, at the same time, difference from others, was often achieved through symbolic means. The findings are analyzed in the context of the literature on (new) nationalism, identity politics, and imagined communities.

Keywords ethnic identity, leisure diversity, race

Introduction

Despite calls for more cross-over and cross-fertilization between the disciplines of leisure and sport studies (Chalip, 2006), examination of sport spectatorship has been mainly the domain of sport management and sport psychology (e.g., James & Funk, 2001; Wann, Grieve, Zapalec, & Pease, 2008) and, with few exceptions (Gibson, Willming, & Holdnak, 2002), has been conspicuously absent from the leisure literature. Research that would investigate sport spectatorship as a leisure activity among ethnic minority members and immigrants is particularly lacking. Studies of immigrants in the context of sport have mainly focused on sport participation (e.g., Pescador, 2004), history of sport in immigrant communities (Innis-Jiménez, 2009), sporting nationalisms (Hassan, 2002), and immigrant sport clubs and associations (Moniz, 2007; Pescador, 2004). Less emphasis has been placed on the consumption of televised sport as a leisure activity (Blecking, 2008) and, in particular, on the negotiation of identities through sport spectatorship. This apparent lack of interest in the subject is surprising given the amount of time and discretionary income people spend on this leisure pursuit, as well as the importance of sport spectatorship in the lives of

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ethnic minorities and most Americans. Similarly, the examinations of the role of sport in the operation of transnational fields have been rarely a part of the transnational discourse. However, according to Al-Ali, Black, and Koser (2001), sport spectatorship is one of the forms of linkages or bonds that immigrants form with their countries of origin.

We argue that sport spectatorship can play important roles in the lives of immigrant communities, lead to the construction and display of identities, and facilitate the process of immigrant community formation. The purpose of this study was to examine the roles of televised soccer spectatorship as a leisure activity in identity discourses and adaptive cultural processes among Latino immigrants. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to examine the role of soccer spectatorship in the development and maintenance of national, transnational, and ethnic identities and allegiances and the community building processes at the local and transnational levels. Transnationalism (Basch, Glick-Schiller, & Szanton-Blanc, 1994) and social identity theory (Tajfel, 1972; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) served as a theoretical foundation of this study. By exploring these subjects, this study was intended to help build bridges between leisure and sport studies and to contribute to the discourse on the roles of leisure in identity development among immigrants and in the construction and maintenance of transnational social fields.

Literature Review

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel (1972) defined social identity as “the individual’s knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups together with some emotional and value significance to him [or her] of this group membership” (p. 31). Turner (1982) noted that social identity can be distinguished from personal identity, which is based on the individual’s self-knowledge derived from his or her personal attributes. Haslam, Ellmets, Reicher, Reynolds, and Schmitt (2010) argued that individuals’ selves are associated with the group and that group characteristics are seen by them as self-defining. Social identity theory claims that:

after being categorized in terms of a group membership, and having defined themselves in terms of that social categorization, individuals seek to achieve or maintain positive self-esteem by positively differentiating their ingroup from a comparison outgroup on some valued dimension. This quest for positive distinctiveness means that when people’s sense of who they are is defined in terms of “we” rather than “I”, they want to see “us” as different from and better than “them” in order to feel good about who they are and what they do. (Haslam et al., 2010, p. 343, after Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

Individuals may pursue positive social identity through a variety of means, including by introducing different means of comparison or by emphasizing the importance of typical ingroup traits (Haslam et al., 2010). Members of “low status groups” may adopt strategies of self-enhancement depending on their perception of how permeable group boundaries are and how secure social relations are. Those strategies may include individual mobility by attempting to leave the group, social competition or, when the boundaries appear impermeable (it is impossible to leave the group) and social relations secure—trying to redefine elements of the comparative context by using social creativity (e.g., by embracing belief that they have some positive traits) (Haslam et al., 2010). Social identity development has been examined in a number of studies in the leisure field, including the ones on people with

disabilities (Lundberg, Taniguchi, McCormick, & Tibbs, 2011), older women (Kerstetter, Yarnal, & Son, 2008), and women experiencing infertility (Glover & Parry, 2008).

Transnationalism

Transnationalism as a framework has been used to study immigration phenomena since the early 1990s (e.g., Basch et al., 1994; Portes, Guarnizo, & Landolt, 1999) and introduced to the study of leisure by Li and Stodolska (2006) and Stodolska and Santos (2006). Transnationalism is based on a premise that in the last 20 years we have witnessed new types of behaviors and dynamics among immigrant communities. Immigrants no longer focus on assimilation to life in the host country but rather continue maintaining strong links with their communities of origin, frequently travel back home, and maintain residence, social networks, and economic activities both in the sending and receiving countries (Basch et al., 1994; Nagel, 2002). The existence of those ties is not only tolerated but also promoted by the governments of the sending countries that consider transmigrants as a source of remittances, political votes, and investment capital (Nagel, 2002).

The distinguishing characteristic of contemporary migration is “dual anchoredness” or “dual allegiance” (Morawska, 2000). Instead of focusing on immigrants, stressing their assimilation and treating host and home countries as “bipolar landscapes,” many contemporary scholars of immigration focus on the relationships between these spaces and on the links and attachments migrants maintain to families, communities, customs, and causes outside of the boundaries of the country to which they have moved (Vertovec, 2001). Economic, social and cultural globalization processes and new, advanced forms of communication help to structure and promote the development of those transnational social networks.

There have been numerous attempts to develop categorizations and typologies of transnational activities (Al-Ali et al., 2001; Nagel, 2002; Nyíri, 2004; Portes et al., 1999). Both Al-Ali et al. and Portes et al. distinguished between the economic, political, and socio-cultural activities of transnational migrants. Portes et al. claimed that the goal of socio-cultural transnational activities is the “reinforcement of a national identity abroad or the collective enjoyment of cultural events and goods” (p. 221). This type of transnationalism includes, among others, maintaining contacts with friends and families abroad, organization of games in the national sport between immigrant teams and those from the home country, participation in cultural events such as visits of sport teams from the home country, and maintaining ties with the émigré community abroad. We can argue that social gatherings with people of the same ethnic group related to sport spectatorship and following sporting events that link migrants to their countries of origin fall under the category of socio-cultural transnational activities.

Identity Development in Transnational Context

With respect to the identities of transmigrants, Basch et al. (1994) argued that “living in a world in which discourses about identity continue to be framed in terms of loyalty to nations and nation-states, most transmigrants have neither fully conceptualized nor articulated a form of transnational identity” and that “identities of migrant populations continue to be rooted in nation-states” (p. 8). These states, however, have become deterritorialized, meaning that in contrast to traditional nation-states that were defined by people of the same or similar culture residing in a well-defined territory, citizens of the new nation states live dispersed within many countries. Vertovec (2001) believed that identities of transmigrants operating in such new environment are negotiated within social worlds that

span more than one place. He argued that people who live in those “diverse habitats of meaning” accumulate experiences that are not territorially restricted and that it leads to the development of multiple identities. Brkić (2011), on the other hand, brought up the concept of supranational identities, an example of which was European identity grounded in “European culture.”

In his classic work on identity development, Amartya Sen (2006) claimed that identities are “robustly plural” and that the importance of one identity does not need to diminish the importance of others. According to Sen, the value people place on a particular identity depends on a social context and, at times, identities related to, for example, one’s gender may take precedence above identities related to one’s occupation, social class, or national origin. Sen distinguished between contrasting and noncontrasting identities. Contrasting identities refer to the same kind of membership (e.g., citizenship) while noncontrasting identities refer to different identity categories (e.g., profession, class, gender). However, he claimed that even plural contrasting identities can co-exist (e.g., people can hold multiple citizenships and may feel allegiance to multiple countries at the same time). Sen (2006) also argued that one’s freedom to choose identity in the eyes of others can be severely constrained. Similarly, Nagel (1994) stressed that a person’s identity is a composite of the view one has of himself or herself as well as the views held by others about the person’s identity—that is, who you think you are versus who others believe you to be. Regardless of how one defines himself or herself, or how he or she is defined by others, identity is a complex and dynamic property that is acquired and earned over a person’s life (Sen, 2006).

Leisure, Sport and Identities

Much of this classic work on identity development has resonated in leisure and sport literature. Kelly (1983) proposed that not only leisure identities but also general personal and social identities can be *presented* in leisure contexts (“episodes”) and *shaped* by leisure. Styles of leisure are not “just a combinations of activities” (p. 93) but also stages on which people present and receive feedback on their identities. Kelly claimed that those learned self-definitions are multidimensional and change throughout one’s life. People are continually “learning who we are—and more, of becoming somewhat different selves in the process” (p. 94). Leisure may play a particularly important role during the times of identity shifts that accompany geographic moves, as it facilitates entry into new “communities of commonality” (p. 117) and development of social ties. Leisure has some unique characteristics that allow for expressing and developing personal and social identities. Unlike work, it is the realm of freedom that allows people to “play” with their identities rather than just respond to norms. Moreover, it is the social aspect of leisure—the ability to interact with others—that allows people to develop social identities. Although there might be some universal attributes of leisure, such as freedom and social nature, the contributions of leisure to identity development always reflect the culture (Kelly, 1983). The important role of leisure in identity development has been demonstrated in numerous empirical studies that focused on, among others, gay and lesbian youth (Kivel & Kleiber, 2000), people with disabilities (Henderson, Bedini, & Hecht, 1994), and minority adolescents (Tirone & Pedlar, 2000).

The role of sport participation and spectatorship in development and maintenance of identities has also been discussed by sport sociologists and historians (Anderson, 2009; Jarvie, 2006; Maguire, 2001; Maguire et al., 2002). According to Maguire, Jarview, Mansfield, and Bradley (2002), “identity lies at the heart of human fascination with sport, its modern development and its continued appeal” (p. 143). Sporting events evoke memories, foster groups’ self-esteem, and promote a sense of emotional solidarity and pride. They also provide opportunities for recognizing and displaying common traits and, at the same

time, for marking boundaries and reinforcing distinctiveness from others (Maguire et al., 2002). This can be achieved through symbols such as flags, emblems, songs, and anthems at major national and international events. Maguire et al. referred to international sporting contests as “patriot games” that help to cultivate national pride, nurture emotional bonds among spectators, and help to unite people under the common cause. Sport has been also associated with universal building blocks of nationalism such as (often invented) traditions and history (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2007), nostalgia, mythology, and a sense of a common destiny (Jarvie, 2006).

Maguire et al. (2002) claimed that identities forged around sport participation and consumption are not exclusively tied to nation-states, but also to one’s ethnicity. They, as well as numerous others (e.g., Palmer, 2001; Sugden & Bairner, 1992), provided examples of how sport helps to forge ethnic consciousness among the Irish Catholics, Catalans, Basques, Afghans, as well as German, Irish, Jewish and Eastern European immigrants in the United States. Sport helps immigrants retain symbolic connection with their former ways of life and with their communities of origin, as well as shape group identity, integrate the émigré community, and maintain, revive, and sometimes invent “traditional” customs (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2007).

A number of studies specifically focused on the role of soccer in identity formation and community building processes among immigrants. For instance, Moniz’s (2007) study provided evidence of the role of soccer in the development of ethnic identity among Portuguese immigrants in New England in the context of transnational social fields. It showed how allegiances to specific Portuguese teams and players, along with following broadcasts on radio and television, linked immigrants to their homeland and bonded local transmigrant community. Through socializing in restaurants, cafés, clubs, and homes around soccer matches, immigrants marked their ethnic boundaries and developed a distinct ethnic consciousness. Pescador (2004) claimed that for Mexican immigrants in the United States, soccer created a space to “initiate political participation, contest the dominant culture, defy urban segregation, construct and display transnational ethnic loyalties and celebrate a notion of Mexicanness based on the Mexican experience in the United States” (p. 355). Mexican American immigrants in Chicago used ethnic sports associations to renew their Mexican traditions, to develop links with their places of origin, and to facilitate adjustment to life in the United States. Tiesler and Coelso (2007) argued that soccer can lead to the development of strong feelings of belonging to a collective among those who follow sport teams and those who never set foot at the stadium. Soccer spectators create imagined communities (Anderson, 1983/2006) comprising members who do not know each other personally, but who share a sense of belonging to a group characterized by certain social rules and internal stability. Price and Whitworth (2004) showed that Latino immigrants use soccer to carve out cultural space for themselves and that soccer leagues play important roles in the transnational networks of immigrants. They provide them with news from the home country and information about employment and legal issues in the destination community.

Our study is intended to contribute to this discourse by examining how soccer spectatorship as a leisure activity helps Latino immigrants to develop their identities and to build communities at local and transnational levels. By doing so, we hope to contribute to developing bridges between the leisure, sport, and transnational studies.

Methods

A qualitative approach was utilized in order to explore, describe, explain, and build an understanding of the role of sport spectatorship in identity development and maintenance

and community building processes among a group of Latino immigrants in a mid-size town in the midwestern United States. In order to collect data, 12 interviews with Latino immigrants were conducted. Interviews took place in two sports bars immediately following the soccer games between the U.S. men's national team and a national team of one of the Latin American countries. The countries against which the U.S. team played included Mexico, Honduras, Costa Rica, and El Salvador. The sports bars were frequented by many local Latino residents and offered free viewership of games of the Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) that were broadcast in the summer, fall, and early winter of 2009. Sports bars were intentionally selected as the site of the interviews as they allowed for interaction among the spectators and for spontaneous exchange of information and ideas in an emotionally charged atmosphere. Soccer was chosen due to its significant popularity among Latinos at home and abroad and the role it is believed to play in shaping national identities among people from Latino countries (Moniz, 2007; Pescador, 2004).

The interviewees came from Mexico (5), Honduras (5), and Argentina (2). Ten of them were men and two were women. The participants were young to middle-aged. The youngest was 18 years old and the oldest was 37 years old. They represented a variety of occupations, including cooks, construction workers, mechanics, waiters, people employed in the food service, students, and a veterinarian. They resided in the United States between 1.5 and 26 years. All of them were soccer fans and frequently watched soccer games in the context of sports bars. Some of the interviewees also played soccer either as part of a league or informally with their friends and family members. Most of them mentioned that soccer was their favorite sport, although there were also others who followed wrestling, boxing, tennis, and basketball.

Some of the interviewees were recruited before the games using contacts of the researchers in the community, while others were approached in the cafés before the games. The interviewees were selected based on their national origin (they had to be born in Latin America), had to be first generation immigrants, and regularly watch soccer games. Care was taken to ensure the interviewees represented different nationalities, a spectrum of occupations, both genders, and that before the interviews some of them watched the games of their national team against the United States (e.g., Hondurans watching a game between Honduras and the United States) while others watched the games of other Latin American countries against the United States (e.g., Hondurans watching a game between Costa Rica and the United States).

The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. They were conducted with prior permission of the establishment owners, immediately after the games were over. Quiet places in the cafés were chosen as not to disturb the interview process. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim. All of the interviews were conducted in Spanish by a graduate assistant of Argentinean background fluent in the Spanish language. They were subsequently translated to English. The English translation was verified by two individuals fluent in both languages. The two primary researchers on this study were both Caucasians of non-Latino descent, who, however, shared their interest in soccer with the interviewees.

The interviews followed a semi-structured format in which the main topics covered remained the same, but the order of questions varied. The interview topics included reasons for watching the game, interviewees' feelings about their home country and the United States, their national allegiances, and contacts they maintained with people with whom they watched soccer games. Some of the specific interview questions included: Why are you watching this game? Is it important for you that the team who is playing is from your country? How does it make you feel? How would you describe yourself? How do you feel

about your home country/about the United States? Do you have any symbols that identify you as a fan of a Latino soccer team?

The Setting

The interviewees chose to watch soccer games in bars for a number of reasons. First of all, only games involving the U.S. and Mexican national teams were transmitted on cable television and the games involving other Latin American teams could only be viewed on pay-per-view or satellite TV. The social aspect of the experience, being able to order food and drinks, and an opportunity to interact with the bar's staff were also important reasons. In that sense, it approximated the findings of Eastman and Land (1997) who argued that bars offer experience "situated between the at-home and the stadium" and allow for public consumption of mediated sports that "combines the benefits of the control characterizing home television viewing and the sociability characterizing the group experience" (p. 156).

All of the interviewees were repeat visitors to the bars. They frequented the bars not only to watch the games but also to enjoy casual dinners, drinks, and various celebrations. Many of them knew the owners and staff at the bars and socialized with them in other venues in the community. The bars seemed to be a regular meeting place for the fans and were used to exchange information and socialize with friends outside of the soccer community. They were not, however, completely "owned" by this particular group of patrons (Latino soccer fans) and were regularly visited by other members of the community.

The restaurants/bars consisted of a seating section that faced a large screen TV where the games were projected and bar sections where smaller TVs were located. Most of the people watching the games were sitting either around the tables or at the bars and a few stood chatting with others. During the game people mostly interacted with their friends, but they also engaged in conversations with others. Some of the Latinos and Anglos present in the bars were recreational soccer players themselves, often playing on the same teams. They knew each other outside of the bars, which facilitated positive interactions. Usually between 15 and 20 people visited the bars on a game night. That number was higher when the games were important for the teams' advancement in the tournament. The fans would arrive to the bars 15–30 minutes before the game and order snacks and beer, while the main dinner was usually ordered during the half-time of the game. More beers and other alcoholic beverages were often ordered during the second half of the game, but the atmosphere remained relaxed and cordial during the entire event.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the interview material began after the first interviews had been completed and lasted throughout the duration of the study. Following each interview, two sets of notes were created. The first one included all the contextual information regarding the interview in question. The second included a summary of the main themes that had surfaced during the conversation and the researchers' preliminary interpretation of the information. After all the interviews had been transcribed, the transcripts were analyzed using a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The data included in the interview transcripts were sorted, organized, and grouped into categories by comparing, contrasting, and labeling the text. Two central categories were revealed during the coding process: 1) the development of identities among the interviewees and 2) the role of soccer spectatorship in the community building processes. Under each category a number of sub-categories were identified. The interview transcripts were re-read several times by both researchers to ascertain that

the true meaning of interviews was represented in the identified categories and subcategories. Guba and Lincoln's (2005) criteria of fairness, ontological authenticity, educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity, and tactical authenticity were used to evaluate methodological rigor of the inquiry. In the research process, we had strived to represent multiple points of view among the interviewees and encourage them to voice their opinions in a non-judgmental and supportive environment. Interview questions allowed the participants to examine their own experiences and to reflect on complex aspects of their self-identities.

Findings

The findings of the study were divided into two main sections, corresponding to its objectives. They will be described in detail in the following pages of the manuscript.

Role of Soccer Spectatorship in Identity Development and Maintenance

National identities. Eleven out of 12 interviewees described themselves as Honduran, Mexican, or Argentinean. Only one described himself with a "hyphenated" identity (Mexican-American). When asked "How would you describe yourself?", Juan answered, "The truth is that I consider myself Argentinean and then there is the issue of whether I'm Latino or not Latino." Cruz added, "I consider myself 100% Mexican. The culture in here is different, but I continue with my Mexican culture." The interviewees recognized many problems troubling their homelands, but nevertheless, the pride in their home countries was clearly evident in their narratives. For example, Analia commented, "My country [Honduras] needs to get better in many things, but I'm ready to give everything for my country. I believe that being far away from Honduras had helped me appreciate and value it even more."

When it came to soccer games, all interviewed immigrants rooted for their home country team or for the team whose win would help their home country advance in the tournament. Marcelo commented about the game he just watched: "I was rooting for my home country, Mexico. I love this country [the United States], but when it comes to sports, I root for my home country." Cesar shared similar sentiments: "When Mexico is playing the United States, Mexico is my number one pick and will always be, even if I live here in the United States for more than 20 or 30 years." Watching soccer not only provided the fans with excitement and entertainment associated with a sporting competition, but also reminded them of who they were, their roots and their culture, as well as made them feel closer to home, their people, and their heritage. Daniel from Honduras mentioned,

[Watching the game] brings many memories about my country, because I always watch it with my family, my friends, and this is always an occasion to spend time together. When I watch soccer I feel good. When I'm with people from my home country, I get many memories back.

Leonel from Honduras added, "The fact that I get together with other Hondurans makes me remember the way we speak, the words we use, the expressions, the way we celebrate a goal. These make me remember home a lot." Analia poignantly described her feelings while watching a soccer game between her country and the United States: "To be able to identify with all the Hondurans, sing the hymn, see the flag, goes farther than soccer. It is like being a part of your country again!"

Some nationalistic sentiments could also be detected in the narratives of the interviewees. Several of them commented that soccer was just one of many sports in the United

States, while it held a *special* place and meaning in their home country. Many spoke of the rivalry between the Latino countries and the United States, and of the perceived lack of *true appreciation* for soccer among people in the United States. For instance, Paula from Argentina commented,

Soccer in our countries is lived through much more [than in the United States] and I think that people in general are more fanatic about soccer. The United States has tons of sports they are good at, but soccer is *just one more sport* to them and there is not as many fans as in other countries. So, to be honest, I don't want the United States to win because I don't feel they really appreciate the sport.

Asked how she felt when her country's team, Honduras, was playing against the United States, Analia replied,

It makes me feel proud, patriotic, wanting them to go ahead and excel in what they do. I like it because there is always this rivalry against the United States. I don't know if it is for political or social reasons, but it feels good when they [the Honduran team] succeed.

She later went as far as comparing a victory against the U.S. national team on the soccer field to a victory against social injustice.

Because there is many people from Honduras here, suffering as illegals, I believe that the fact that when we play against the United States, and to be able to defeat them, is to feel a victory against all the injustices that we know many compatriots suffer here. I think it is one of the few times that we [Hondurans/Latinos] can say that "we won" . . . in an accessible way, otherwise it feels that is inaccessible to win against the United States.

Pan-ethnic (Latino) identities. Almost all of the interviewees revealed that prior to immigrating to the United States they did not identify themselves as "Latino." They became aware of the term after their arrival to the United States, as it was at that time when they began to notice their commonalities with other people from the region and realized that they were labeled as "Latinos" by the out-group members. The great majority of the interviewees, however, have willingly embraced this label. Asked if he had considered himself a "Latino" before he immigrated to the United States, Cesar from Mexico replied,

No. Definitely, that happened when I got here. Mexico is a very nationalistic country. Being Mexican one doesn't consider oneself as "Latino" until one immigrates to a country like the United States, where there is so many people speaking so many languages, with so many different customs . . . Irish, British . . . with different roots. And it is then when I have to say, "Well, I'm Latino, and Mexico is part of Latin America."

Paula described that it was the encounter with "the Other" that made her realize the common heritage she shared with people from Latin America and, at the same time, differences between the Latino cultures and the culture of people from the United States. Analia also observed that "many people hardly know where Honduras is located, but the fact of being Latino allows people [to] know more about who we are."

Interviewees also talked about archetypal Latino traits such as spontaneity in expressing their feelings and family orientation, and contrasted them with what they believed to be characteristics of “mainstream” Anglo Americans. These traits were often manifested in how people cheered during the games and even in the style of play. For instance, Cesar commented on why he preferred to watch the games in the company of other Latinos:

It is better to be surrounded by Latinos because they understand what you are feeling, your point of view about soccer. Many Americans sometimes make fun of how we celebrate a goal. In the United States, the way people celebrate a goal is very cold. I celebrate the goals in a very exciting way, so I'd rather be with someone who understands me.

Analia observed that Latino players created a “family” within a team, while she saw Americans as more “individualistic.”

I feel it [the style of soccer] is different in the sense that Latinos create a family, a community within the team. I feel there are many friendships among them [the players] while Americans are more technical, they follow the rules, they look forward to playing the way they have defined how to play in order to win. Maybe it's a bit more individualistic in the sense that every single [player] knows its role.

The interviewees also considered their general enthusiasm for soccer as one of the markers of common Latino heritage. Soccer was considered to be the most popular sport in all Latin America and a leisure activity that had a special meaning and place in the hearts of Latinos. As Arnulfo commented, “It is the most popular sport that people watch and practice in Latinoamerica. So, I will say that I identify a lot with this sport and it makes me feel Latino.” Cesar mentioned the special role of soccer when it came to forging bonds among Latinos:

I lived this experience at the Mexican restaurant once, when I met a group of Hondurans, with whom Mexico was playing that day. The game was not a decisive match, but I got to share a lot with them, for the reason that we all enjoy soccer, and I learned more about other Latinos. I live and generally get together with Americans, but now with this [the Latino experience] I feel closer to the Latino people and the way one relates to them. I feel it is that way, regardless of where they're from; it could be a Latino from the Caribbean, or from South America, *soccer speaks by itself*.

Other interviewees also commented on the special qualities of soccer that made it unique from other sports. Some explained it by the world-wide appeal of the game, while others talked about their early childhood socialization to this leisure activity. For instance, Juan remarked, “When we are born, as soon as we learn to walk, they throw us a soccer ball. Soccer is something that we carry within.”

Some of the interviewees commented that watching soccer in the context of a Latino sports bar made them forget where they were [in the United States] and feel “at home” for the time of the game. Juan, an immigrant from Argentina who had lived in the United States for 11 years, commented, “I didn't feel I was in the United States. I felt like at home. Probably it is because of the context of the place and the friends that shared [the experience]

with me.” Asked if it was important for him to watch the game in the company of other Latinos, he replied, “Of course! It’s like being with my friends, my brothers, my world.”

Transnational identities. Soccer spectatorship helped immigrants’ foster links with their countries of origin as they watched the games, followed the news, and called home to discuss sporting contests. Similar to mainstream Americans who comment on the games with their friends and families, Latinos did the same, but in their case, these conversations spanned national boundaries, and were a part of the intricate web of links they maintained with their communities of origin. When asked if he discussed soccer games with others, Cesar replied,

I call my father and we analyze the game. He normally is more negative about the game and identifies the mistakes, and I try to contradict his point of view. “No, this is better” or “This was really good” . . . so when it comes to postgame talk, my dad is the person to talk. I also talk to my friends from Mexico who follow the teams. There is a Facebook status that we share, such as “Go Mexico,” among others.

Asked with whom he discussed the games, Daniel replied, “Most of the time it’s people from Honduras, my brother, a few friends.” Other interviewees such as Arnulfo, Johan, and Analia discussed the games with their friends from Honduras over the phone or e-mail. For example, Arnulfo replied, “[I discuss the games] with all my friends and with people from my country as well. Everyone is informed of what is going on in soccer.”

Role of Soccer Spectatorship in Community Building Processes

Common interest in soccer led to forging bonds and symbolic allegiances with other Latinos and creating a community feeling.

Creating bonds. Sharing leisure time during the game contributed to forging bonds and connections with other Latinos, helped them create the “we” feeling, and to strengthen the bonds within the Latino immigrant community. For example, Paula said, “Soccer is something that makes us, the Latinos from different countries, get together a lot. It is an event in which we can organize and gather to watch television for a while.” Asked how he felt while watching the games with other Latinos, Luis replied, “I think that for those who like it and are soccer fans it does make us feel connected.” Asked what was it about soccer that forged these connections, Arnulfo replied, “Maybe it’s the emotions that we, Latinos, feel in general when watching a soccer game . . . all the expressions, all the emotions one lives . . . these are not the same emotions Americans live.” Marcelo also talked about the “connections” that watching soccer games helped him establish. “With people of my country . . . one feels excited, being able to talk about one’s childhood, to share experiences, it feels really good.”

This togetherness forged by the common passion for soccer extended to other areas of life among the Latinos. Soccer games promoted socialization among interviewees whose families spent time together and engaged in other leisure pursuits. For instance, asked if he maintained contact with people with whom he watched soccer games, Marcelo replied, “Yes, we get together, we cook barbeques, we drink.” For Juan watching a game was “an excuse to get together and have a good time.” Carlos, Cruz, and several others also played recreational soccer with people with whom they watched the games. Analia, asked about other contacts she maintained with people she watched the games with, said, “Generally,

we look for moments to cook and this always serves to remember about Honduras. We cook meals that are from our country, we also go out together a lot.”

Symbolic allegiances. Reinforcing identities and displaying togetherness and, at the same time, differentness from others, was most commonly achieved through symbolic means. Many of the interviewees displayed symbols that identified them with their favorite team, such as jerseys and caps, and most admitted that they kept symbols signifying their soccer allegiances at home, at work, on them, or in their cars. They included flags, key chains, hats, scarves, stickers, and emblems. These artifacts were associated with Latino teams and with Latino soccer players playing on other teams. For instance, Daniel revealed, “I have the Inter Milán’s jersey, because there is a Honduran that plays on that team, his name is David Suazo and that’s why I’m a fan of that team.” Asked if he watched Major League Soccer [MLS] games, Carlos replied, “I only watch MLS games when there is a player who played for my team in Mexico, such as Cuauhtémoc Blanco who plays for the Chicago Fire.” Asked if he displayed his favorite team’s affiliation outside of the sports bar, Leonel who was wearing a jersey of the Honduras national team during the interview, replied, “Always, the flag, the jersey, a key chain with the logo of the team, also a small flag on one’s car.” Luis pointed to the emblem of his favorite team on his shirt: “After this emblem, the next one has to be the one from Las Chivas [Las Chivas of Guadalajara, Mexico]. I have soccer balls . . . when there is a Chivas’ game, my dog has his own Chivas jersey.” Analia added,

I always have the jerseys of the Honduras national team, the Motagua jersey, and then in my bedroom I have a giant Honduran flag for the representation of the national team. On my car I have a bumper sticker from Honduras that says “I am from a Five Star country.”

Soccer jerseys were the most popular item that identified the interviewed Latinos with their favorite teams. Most of the sports paraphernalia represented national teams of their countries as well as their favorite, often European, clubs such as Inter Milan, FC Barcelona, or Real Madrid.

Discussion/Conclusions

The findings of this study provided evidence of how leisure events can create a social space where immigrants come together to construct, represent, maintain, and/or challenge their national, pan-ethnic, and transnational identities, and to celebrate their Latino heritage (Pescador, 2004). Moreover, they provided new examples of the roles of leisure in community building processes at the local and transnational levels (Maguire et al., 2002). Our results have also provided a unique glimpse into how the notions of nationalism can be redefined in the context of transnational migrations. As Kearney (1991) argued, we have entered into the post-national age of transnationalism, in which members of transnational communities “escape the power of the nation-state to inform their sense of collective identity” (p. 59). In contrast to this assertion, Basch et al. (1994) claimed that the current period can be conceived as the time of new nationalism. Similarly, Aguilar (2004) argued that contemporary immigrants faced with postarrival adaptation challenges and having to deal with stereotypes and discrimination learn to re-appreciate their national identity and belonging. The interviewees showed strong attachment to their home countries; they realized that they suffered from economic hardships that in most cases precipitated their emigration but wanted to help them grow and develop and even considered return migration home.

Such feelings were particularly strong among the younger and highly educated interviewees some of whom commented that they were “ready to give everything for my country” and that watching the games made them feel “proud” and “patriotic.”

Our study has clearly showed that leisure activities such as soccer spectatorship can shape identities and evoke strong national feelings among immigrants. Being a soccer fan, for our participants, was a part of what it meant to be a Mexican, Argentinean or Latino. This finding is in line with Kelly (1983), who argued that leisure can serve as a context and mechanism through which personal and social identities can be represented and shaped. It was the social nature of leisure interactions in the context of sports bars that allowed people to present and receive feedback on their identities. As Kelly claimed, it is in such social interactions that we “really live, come to define ourselves and perhaps accept our self-definitions, and attempt to alter and expend those identities” (p. 100). Similar to Kelly’s example of spectators of motocross sports, our participants wore various insignia and clothing that identified them as soccer fans, helped them to mark their affiliation and to strengthen associations with others and, thus, boost their social identities (see also Gibson et al., 2002). Our study has shown that such strong identification with communities built around sport may foster the development or strengthen ethnic, cultural, and national identities. When leisure becomes a symbol of something bigger than the leisure itself it helps to answer the questions of “Who am I?” (not only in terms of our competence or skill learning) and “Where do I belong?” (not only in terms of fan identification), but also in terms of ethnic groups and nations.

However, based on our findings and on the existing literature, we can argue that these immigrants’ nationalistic feelings were different from the attachments to the “traditional” concept of nation states (Anderson, 1983/2006; Seton-Watson, 1977). The interviewees were exposed to select “snapshots” of their homeland’s culture and traditions that accompanied the game and that were portrayed on TV and reproduced among the spectators in the bars. National traits were distilled down to the symbols of one’s national allegiance such as flags, emblems, and jerseys, and to select memories of their homeland’s landscapes, language, and family events. Their patriotism was fostered by feelings of nostalgia and longing for home typical to transnational sojourners.

The fact that the ideas of nation states are being redefined in the contemporary world marked by increased globalization and trans-border movements has been discussed by many contemporary scholars of transnationalism. As Aguilar (2004) claimed, through the media, immigrants can “tune in” and “tune out” their homelands as they carry on with their lives in their countries of settlement. Immigrants also engage in the process of re-imagining the nation:

Some of them may be merely consuming the nation commercially as business interests market ‘nostalgia’ through local ethnic/national newspapers as well as through global television networks. Transmigrants may be no more than spectators of the nation from the other side of the ocean. (p. 103)

By using soccer games and other leisure pursuits (whether live or televised), such as celebrations of major national holidays or musical events, immigrants can selectively evoke and embrace their national identities all while living in and being part of the fabric of the host country. Nyíri (2004) used the term “secondary nationalism” to refer to nationalism that focuses less on historical memory than on essentialized character traits and patterns of behavior that are easy to relate to for ordinary people. Such essentialized traits that are evoked through soccer spectatorship and other leisure pursuits can operate at both national and pan-national levels (e.g., Honduran and Latino) and are often defined in opposition

to the traits of the “other” – in this case mainstream American. This lends credence to assertions that nations are in fact cultural constructs (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 2007), created and re-created in the age of globalization and transnationalism. Voluntary identification with the re-defined nation states may be fostered by the contemporary identity politics and multicultural policies in many Western countries, including the United States (Ang, 2004). Jarvie (2006) wrote about the rise of identity politics in sport and observed that “in essence all identity politics involve a search for community, a quest for belonging and recognition” (p. 286). Such calls for identity, he believed, were particularly common among members of marginalized groups, who struggle with questions such as “Who am I? Who is like me? Whom can I trust and where do I belong?”

Basch et al. (1994) also argued that transnational populations participate in and are shaped by the development of such hegemonic constructs as race and ethnicity. Consistently with this notion, our study showed how the concept of “Latino ethnicity” was being actively constructed in the transnational social spaces. All of the interviewees expressed that after arrival they had developed appreciation for cultural similarity among Latinos, discussed their “common understanding” and the “we feeling” they experienced when participating in leisure activities with other Latinos. The common traits characterizing Latinos that were described by the participants included strong community and family orientation, closer and more intimate relations among friends, preference for soccer, as well as spontaneity and emotional style of sport spectatorship. Some of these traits have been identified in the literature that has claimed that Latinos are collectivistic in nature, place higher value on family and community than on the individual, and that this is manifested both in their work and leisure behaviors (Stodolska & Shinew, 2014).

The process of development of a Latino identity in immigrants—a perception that they belong to a group characterized by a set of common unique traits, perceiving them as self-defining, and at the same time, different than the traits of “the other” (i.e., mainstream Americans)—is clearly in line with the tenets of the social identity theory (Haslam et al., 2010; Tajfel, 1972; Turner, 1982). Embracing Latino characteristics that were seen as positive (e.g., spontaneity, family orientation, warmth of interpersonal relationships) might have been one of the social identity enhancement strategies adopted by people who are forced to deal with feelings of exclusion, dislocation and loss among unfamiliar cultural norms and practices (Aguilar, 2004). Since, due to outside labeling, the participants likely perceived the group boundaries as impermeable (it was impossible to “leave” the group once Latino label has been assigned by the outsiders) and social relations as secure, they tried to redefine elements of the comparative context by using “social creativity” (Haslam et al., 2010, p. 345). This social creativity involved embracing traits that were considered advantageous and highly valued. Soccer helped to identify those common traits, provided a context in which Latino immigrants could compare themselves with others and build up a supportive community. In that sense, our findings parallel those of Price and Whitworth (2004) who wrote that for many Latino immigrants soccer was a “cultural necessity” and talked about “symbolic battle(s) over home turf and identity” (p. 167). In Pescador’s (2004) study, soccer also provided opportunity for competition with the mainstream Americans on equal terms and for symbolic wins that fostered ethnic pride. He claimed that “Soccer fields and boxing arenas in the United States have become much more than recreational areas. [They] have emerged as crucial spaces where issues of ethnic identity, social organization, community awareness, and cultural transmission are thought out, displayed, negotiated, and enacted” (p. 354). Similarly, in our study, soccer spectatorship in the context of a sports bar not only helped to establish and nurture connections among immigrant Latinos, but fostered their sense of national and pan-ethnic identity and pride.

The sports bars served as more of *places* in Tuan's (1979) sense than spaces where those feelings were developed and nurtured. They were places where the important milestones in the lives of the interviewees, such as birthdays and graduations, were celebrated and where friends and family members got together to socialize and exchange news about the community both in the United States and abroad. We believe that the role played by the bars was *not* as unique as that of some of the historical stadia that become etched in fans' memory as awe-inspiring places where formative memories are made (Ulrich & Benkenstein, 2010), nor do they offer the possibility of bottom-up power experienced by stadium spectators (Melnick, 1993). The bars' uniqueness, multifunctional nature, and relative stability in time and space, made them, however, far more important to identity development among fans than "fan zones" where people occasionally get together to watch sporting events.

Latino interviewees' group consciousness was also stimulated by a sense of belonging to real and imagined communities (Anderson, 1983/2006) that were not territorially restricted, but comprised of people who were joined by passion for a common leisure pursuit. In his analysis of the Chinese diaspora, Ang (2004) claimed that many contemporary immigrants are eager to affiliate themselves with such imagined communities, as membership in groups that are larger and more encompassing than any territorially bounded nation helps them to instill pride in their identity. We observed similar mechanisms among the interviewed Latinos, who discovered and celebrated their "common Latino heritage" that carried beyond legacies of their individual nation states. The passion for soccer served as a thread that tied the Latino community together and helped it maintain value in face of adversity brought by hard work, discrimination, alienation in the new environment, and longing for home.

The findings of our study that examined identity development among immigrants from one large geographic region (Latin America) and from a range of different countries showed some similarities and differences from Pries' (2013) seven "ideal" types of collective identities. Our category of national identities was an amalgam of Pries' types of national identities and micro-regional ethnic identities. At the same time, our pan-ethnic (Latino) identity subsumed Pries' categories of macro- and micro-regional identities, as they were based on historical empires and/or religions *and* on language, beliefs, and kinship. The findings of our study suggest that ethnic identities can operate at the level of a country and macro-level structures such as continents or large geographic regions. We can talk about "Mexican ethnic identity" and "Latino ethnic identity;" which one of them becomes salient depends on where an individual resides, with whom he or she interacts and who is defined as an out-group. Lastly, our study showed transnational identity to be somewhat different from the transnational identity as defined by Pries (2013), and more akin to his concept of diaspora identity. Regardless of definitional differences, however, our findings provide clear support to Pries' assertion that "coexistence and interaction of different types of collective identities at multiple geospatial levels" (p. 27) is likely to characterize our future.

Although this study generated some valuable results, it also had several limitations that need to be acknowledged. First, the study focused on sport spectatorship in one type of setting and it is possible that additional information could have been obtained if the interviews were conducted with people who watched live sporting events. It would also be desirable if more aspects of involvement in this leisure pursuit, besides consumption of televised games, were examined in-depth. For instance, most of the interviewees indicated that they played soccer recreationally and some were also members of ethnic sports clubs and leagues. An investigation of recreational participation in soccer as well as the involvement in ethnic soccer clubs and associations could provide insights into immigrants' leisure lives, networks they established with the émigré community, and contacts they maintain with their communities of origin. Several authors have also pondered the roles of ethnic

sports in the adaptation of immigrants to life in the host society. Both pro-assimilationist (Hofmann, 2008) and pro-ethnicity retention (Blecking, 2008; Moniz, 2007) arguments have been made. Our study made us question the broader and more-long term consequences of involvement in sport for the adaptation of ethnic minorities in the American society. This constitutes a fertile area of future research and a possibility for joint projects to be conducted by researchers from the sport and leisure disciplines. After all, recreational sport participation and spectatorship were, are, and are likely to remain an inseparable part of leisure repertoires of millions of Americans and it would be regrettable if traditional disciplinary boundaries and institutional silos stood in the way of joint investigations of this important phenomena.

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