

Communities of Practice: Language, Gender, and Identity of Women Athletes

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ABSTRACT

Language is intertwined into every part of our lives. We learn and grow using language to learn from the communities we belong to. The theory of 'communities of practice' is influential across multiple disciplines including sociolinguistics, sociology, gender studies, linguistic anthropology, and more. A community of practice is defined in many ways, but sociolinguist Penelope Eckert defines it best as simply a group of people that come together to learn an activity. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992) The following study focuses on a local community of practice of women athletes (N=16) at the University of Wisconsin- La Crosse. This is a qualitative, ethnographic approach to analyzing how a community of women uses language to explain hierarchical structures and how this community relates to their identity. The result of this study suggests that women athletes prioritize the value of relationships and use them to push each other to have a higher level of competence during competition. **Keywords:** Community of Practice, Gender, Identity, Discourse Analysis, Sociolinguistics

INTRODUCTION

The 'community' in 'community of practice' encapsulates the members of the group. The 'practice' in 'community of practice' is the learning aspect of the group which allows for the formation of identity and values. Community of practice was brought into the field of sociolinguistics by Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet in 1992 with their piece *Communities of Practice: Where language, gender, and power all live*. Their intent was to connect language and gender to social groups and their linguistic practices (Eckert, 2006). This theory allows the analyst to look locally at social communities and ethnographically analyze what lies beneath the spoken conversation. Which reveals hidden values the group members will take with them. This leads to outside-of-the-group correspondence; the members of the community learn from each other and find values that are brought with them to other groups they fulfill in daily life.

Communities of practice are great for understanding communications' correlation to social hierarchy, gender dynamics, and personal identity. A community of practice is defined as "...an aggregate of people who come together around mutual engagement in some common endeavor." (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992) The connection between group members is created through a common interest and activity that allows members to learn from each other in a safe environment. This environment can be anywhere whether it is in a school, gym, workplace, etc. These shared activities find their way into how the participants identify. Due to this they are more connected to the community itself and create shared values that are represented during conversations and interactions.

Differences between Men and Women's language

Communications vary based on a variety of variables including age, race, demographics, and geographical location. Gender is another big variable that changes the way that people communicate to one another. Women are stereotyped to have communication that "...reflects their (our) conservatism, prestige consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nurturance, emotional expressivity, connectedness, sensitivity to others, solidarity. And men's language is heard as evincing their toughness, lack of effect, competitiveness, independence, competence, hierarchy control." (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992). Women are known for the mother's coo and the soft delicate language that is considered ladylike. On the opposite end of the spectrum men are taught to assert their dominance at the top of a

social hierarchy, and it branches all the way down to the basis of their communication. There are many groups that go against these norms, and athletics is one of them. Men are often known to be part of the athletics programs, and women are more likely to be in more submissive or dainty activities (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992). A 'woman athlete' may not possess such qualities, and therefore contradict these stereotypical communication patterns.

In this research I will talk about women athletes as a group, but there is a reason that I need to make this distinction. When someone talks about athletics the listener automatically thinks of men playing instead of women. As an example, the mental visualization of a basketball athlete is one of Michael Jordan or another popular male athlete. The visualization of a woman basketball athlete is when the listener knows to change the gender of the athlete to a woman. This is in part why I feel like this group needs to be studied. General populations of people hear athlete and think men, which further reinforces my point that women athletes are not known for tougher, high impact sports like basketball, football, or boxing. This translates into how the group is stereotyped to communicate. Another high impact sport that is under examination in this study is volleyball.

In general, women are not socially characterized to have the toughness, competitiveness, and the want for hierarchical control that is needed to be an athlete. In opposition men are normally thought to be the ideal representation of athletic prowess. The creation of women's athletics allows women to be in women-dominated spaces where their characterizable nurturance, connectedness, and emotional expressivity are expanded upon. Such aspects of women's language allow them to be good athletes, good teammates, and good leaders. There is also a divergence from stereotypical language patterns in athletics. They are competitive, tough and find a sense of independence through a tenacity to be better. The drive to learn and compete is connected to a sense of leadership experienced by the members of the community.

Along with deviating from stereotypical feminine roles, there is a deviation in hierarchical controls. Members of women's athletics want to be a leader for their teams. Men's language shows how men are known to be competitive and want to be on top of a specific group including in communities of practice. Therefore, hierarchical control and a leadership position is known as a man's position. Women-dominated spaces create a shift that allows the participant to become leaders and gain that necessary experience. The stereotypical submissiveness feminine communication subsides from these communities because they are allowed to be more confident and can lean on teammates to learn how to be better leaders. Women communities of practice show how "...observable action and interaction do the work of producing, reproducing, and resisting the organization of power in society, and societal discourses of gender, age, race etc. (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992). Language is a vehicle for change, and it is ever constant. Society is always changing the way it communicates whether it is through slang or simply the way people talk about a certain subject. Women are using this vehicle to constantly push the boundaries and are changing how the concepts of femininity, masculinity and gender are analyzed and dissected.

Competence, Experience, and Leadership

Part of what goes into the hierarchy of athletics is the athlete's performance and ability to learn new skills. These skills and the ability to perform can be correlated to the athlete's competence. "To be competent is to understand the enterprise well enough to be able to contribute to it." (Wenger, 2000). The community observed in this study is a collegiate sports team, so collegiate athletes are deemed competent when they are recruited to play for the university. After their original recruitment, the athletes are expected to continue to prove themselves and progress their abilities. This need to constantly progress and expand on new skills creates a level of tension and competitiveness that is not stereotypical of women socially or linguistically. Competition has a large effect on the linguistic patterns of different hierarchical members of a team. A hierarchy is defined as "...stratified structure that conjures power according to positions..." (Eckert and Wenger, 2005). Having a high competence level creates power for that individual and allows the athlete to gain more experience in competitions. There are many factors that influence the hierarchical standing of a player, the most common are the athlete's competence and experience.

Every community of practice has an internal hierarchy that is constantly maintained to keep the community together (Eckert and Wenger, 2005). One part of athletics that differs from other communities is there may be leaders that do not always play during competition. This is due to the fluid hierarchy of athletics. Due to the fluctuations, leaders are created through a mixture of competence and experience within the community itself. "... leadership may be concentrated on one or two members or widely distributed, and this will change over time" (Wenger, 2000). The hierarchy within women's athletics is filled with many competent competitors that could lead. This creates a widespread sense of leadership which allows for a minimal hierarchy. An increased competence level helps an athlete lead which in turn creates value in learning. "Learning so defined is an interplay between social competence and personal experience" (Wenger, 2000). The core value of learning is shown through the way the members of the community communicate in and out of competition. Steady leaders are often those who use their linguistic skills, knowledge of the unifying factors, competence, and experience to create a sense of community for all.

Identity

A community of practice can be central to the identity of the participant. This identity construction allows for the development of diverse linguistic construction and style (Eckert, 2006). Members of the community of practice learn from their teammates to create a combined style of communication to best convey their information. This communication style is also what holds the hidden values of the community. Beyond linguistic construction, the identity of a community member uses a combination of competence and experience gained from the community of practice. (Wenger, 2000). People experience the world through these communities, and therefore the underlying values ingrain themselves in the participant's identity. These values can be carried to other communities and so "... the power structure of a community of practice and its regime of competence are embodied in a collection of identities, not a uniform structure" (Eckert and Wenger, 2005). The hierarchical values of a team as well as what is deemed competent are carried by each of the participants to other communities.

As an example, Mary Bucholtz (1999) applied the theory to a group of teen girls that all identified as nerds. Bucholtz was able to use discourse analysis and an ethnographic perspective to identify the core value of the group; intelligence. The group of girls would often backpedal when they said something incorrect or change the subject when they did not have an intelligent remark to add to the conversation. They would also reject 'cool girl' or modern slang and ways of dressing which to them would indicate that a group member was less intelligent than the others. These dialectal differences show the values of the group as a whole. This is what I am hoping to apply to a community of collegiate athletes. This community has ways that they want to appear just as any other community, so this would yield their values that are held within their conversation and actions.

Joanne McDowell (2015) studied gendered language by analyzing the way that men's language shifted to fit a women-dominated workforce. The subjects of study were male nurses, and they were analyzed for how they were adapting similar communication tactics as their women coworkers to blend into the community. This study was an interesting perspective on how men can conform to feminine communication instead of vice versa. This is applicable to the study at hand because women athletes are playing in a male-dominated industry, leading to communication changes. Although the women are in a male dominated industry, they are still in a women-dominated space and are changing their tactics of communication. This change is influenced by a women-dominated space that holds similar values as male dominated athletics. The values may also be different to accommodate the specific community at hand. There is an interesting comparison of the group being studied because they are able to identify with their gender, but also the community of practice at play.

Language and gender cannot be separated for the purpose of the study because the variable of identity is partially the gender of the participant. As discussed previously there are components of language that are stereotypically feminine so by taking away the component of gender, I would also be taking away pertinent information for examination. If there were to be this separation it could lead to "...obscure and sometimes distort[ed]...ways [variables] connect and how those connections are implicated in power relations, in social conflict, in the production and reproduction of values and plans."

(Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 1992) Identity is not built on one variable whether it be gender, age, race, etc. Identity is a complex relation of everything the person has gone through, so taking out the component of gender would lead to incorrect data interpretation.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Women athletes are a community that do not correspond to predetermined feminine language use, and yet they are still in a women-dominated space. The characteristics of men in women's workplaces adopt a feminine communication style and vice versa for women in a men dominant workplace. There is a lot of research done in other studies about how the characteristics of feminine communication are used and bent and how it contributes to specific communities. Women athletes are a group that not only bends gendered communication but do so in a way that claims both feminine and masculine characteristics. This in turn can change what it means to communicate with gender stereotypes.

The community under inspection during this study is the University of Wisconsin – La Crosse Women's volleyball team. The slogan for 'community of practice' is "Think practically and look locally." (Eckert and Mcconnel-Ginet, 1992) so as a member of the UWL volleyball team there was no question about which community I wanted to work with. The initial hypothesis for this study was if people identify with a specific community, the values of that community will be ingrained within the member. There are many variables that contribute to this including experience level, level of competence, and where the member falls in the hierarchy. The way that a group communicates with one another shows what the group values, so through discourse analysis a researcher should be able to dissect the core values of the group. The questions that were driving this study include:

- How do women athletes go against studied feminine communication characteristics?
- How do Communities of Practice within volleyball create a fluid hierarchy while creating a strong sense of identity?
- What is the central value of the hierarchy within the UWL women's volleyball team?

ABOUT THE RESEARCHER

I am a junior at the University of Wisconsin- La Crosse. I adore being a woman who is a collegiate athlete. I started partaking in sports at a young age, so athletics has been ingrained in my identity for as long as I can remember. Due to growing up in athletic communities; whether it was watching or playing, I have been able to learn valuable lessons from a variety of teams. Athletics has always been a part of my every day, and so has the use of language. As I have gotten older, I have become more interested in everything from how players talk to each other, how coaches talk to players, and how all this fits into what it means to be a team. This was an enlightening research process for me because in a sense I was looking at myself and my experiences through an ethnographic lens. Going into this study I could not have foreseen how much athletics has ingrained itself into my identity. This research is for coaches and players that want to understand how to incorporate not only a sense of community into the team, but a positive environment players want to be a part of, learn from, and identify with.

METHODS

After receiving IRB approval from our University, I gathered data during the 2023 spring season from a total of 16 women athletes on the UWL volleyball team. After each of the participants agreed to the study, they were vocally and visually recorded using microphones and visual recording devices during intersquad competitions. Each participant was also interviewed regarding what they feel the team's values are and their thoughts on the motivating factors of the team.

Communities of practice are often studied in an ethnographic context. "The construct *community* of practice is a way of locating language use ethnographically so as to create an accountable link between local practice and membership in extra-local and broad categories." (Eckert, 2006) Using this research methodology I was able to step back from a community that I am very familiar with and dissect it for the research questions at hand.

Participants

The participants that were selected were between the ages of 18-22 and all of them on the women's volleyball team at the University of Wisconsin- La Crosse. Each participant has upward of six years of experience playing volleyball at various levels, and all of them at least one season at UWL. Volleyball is just one of the communities that the athletes are a part of. There is an assortment of clubs, study groups, and jobs that are other outlets for the participants consenting to the study. As the primary researcher, I would have liked to expand the studies to other women's university teams, but due to the limited time constraints, it was only feasible to study one team. In the future, if there is the opportunity to expand my study this would be the first place, I would go to gather more data.

Procedure

I wanted to have multiple points of evidence to check the data against, so the participants were asked to be visually recorded, audio recorded, and interviewed. This allowed me to triangulate the data to make sure that the data matched up during each point of data collection. This also allowed me to make sure that each of the research questions was answered. The audio component was collected using microphones that the participant could clip on the collar of their shirt and have a blue tooth device on their hip that was connected to an iPad facing the participant. The iPad was also the video recording device used. When the discourse is presented the names of the participants have been changed. After the intrasquad scrimmage, the audio was transcribed using the methodology approved for Mary Bucholtz's study. The key for the transcriptions will be provided in Appendix A. Each of the interviews was conducted using the same questions and procedure to make sure there was no alternate variable that would make the participant provide swayed answers. The questions are provided in the interview section below.

Interview

During this portion of the research process, the participants were asked to answer a series of questions that pertained to their team. The questions consisted of themes regarding the team's core values, personal identification within the team, and what other groups they are a part of that would lend to the way they feel during their interactions with the specific community of practice that is in question. The research questions and responses are used to correlate with the observations and the vocal component to see if there is a difference when the three variables are compared. If there is a difference between what they answer in the interview and what is observed, then there is a disconnect between the spoken and actual values learned in the community. Each of the questions will be used to address each of the research questions to make sure that each question gets answered thoroughly. The interview questions were as follows:

RQ1:(How do women athletes go against studied feminine communication characteristics?)

Questions:

What roles do you go by in your day-to-day life? (sister, teammate, friend, etc.)

What groups are you involved in outside of volleyball?

RQ2: (How do Communities of Practice within volleyball create a fluid hierarchy while creating a strong sense of identity?)

Questions:

How many seasons have you competed at UWL?

What distinguishes you as a part of the team?

How does your ability/skill to play volleyball impact your experience as a member of the team?

How do your relationships on the team impact your experience?

RQ3: (What is the central value of the hierarchy within the UWL women's volleyball team?)

Questions:

What is the core value of the team?

What characteristics do you value most in a teammate?

How many hours a week do you currently contribute to volleyball?

What skills have volleyball taught you outside of the gym?

How will you incorporate those skills into other communities you are a part of?

Discourse analysis

This part of my research was the audio variable gathered from using microphones that were clipped on the collar of the shirt of the participant. The recording sessions were 20-30 minutes in length and transcribed after the fact. The primary variable that I am looking for during the discourse analysis is how what they say corresponds to what the group values. Using discourse analysis as a method of interpretation allows me to analyze the structure and linguistic patterns of the participants. After analyzing the discourse, I can connect the information to the cultural significance of what is being said. This is what allows me to connect the vocal and physical commentary to the values of the community.

Observations

Language is not always spoken in conversation. In women's athletics, there are often symbolic systems at play to have a conversation. Such unspoken systems are represented in society as "...dress, body adornment, ways of moving, gaze, touch, handwriting style, locales for hanging out, and so on." (Eckert and McConnel-Ginet, 1992) This is why I included a visual element to the study that would be able to capture how a team distinguishes themselves as individuals, but also as a team. These variables show other unspoken language such as hand signals and other body language that can be analyzed and show the unification of a team through a language that only the team understands. The observations were gathered via video recording. Unspoken communication is as important as vocal communication. In athletics, there are often times hand signals, high fives, and similar uniforms/ equipment that can give the people watching signals as to what position they are in, where subgroups are forming, and simple modes of communicating what plays to run.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results are broken up into categories based upon the research questions. There are different segmented discourse analysis transcriptions, so there may be different segments of the same person's microphone transcriptions in different parts of this study. The segments of discourse are often taking place over one or two plays, so they are not in sequential order. Appendix A includes the discourse transcription key and Appendix B includes different volleyball terminology that appears in the discourse.

Communication Characteristics

As discussed in Eckert and McConnel-Ginnets' (1992) research women's language is characterized for their connectedness, emotional expressivity, conservatism and other characteristics while men are characterized to have their language reflect competitiveness, toughness, competence, etc.

These characteristics of masculine language has found their way into the language of women athletes. Competitiveness, toughness, and competence are all aspects of athletics, and successful leaders of communities of practice. The sense of competitiveness will come across in yelling, banter between the two opposing sides, or teammates calling each other out to do better.

The following example shows how teammates are using their competitive nature to call out two other members of their team for a miscommunication.

82. <ball served by opposing team>
83. Harmony: out
84. Brenda: out
85. <ball lands in, giving the other team a point>
86. Kim: I am so over you two h. h.
87. Get your shit together
88. H .h

Harmony and Brenda are watching the incoming serve with the impression that the ball is going to go out of bounds and give them a point. As the ball lands in neither of the players follow the ball to the lines of play, so when the ball lands in neither of the players have the opportunity to make a play. After the play Harmony and Brenda both look at each other knowing what they did wrong. The third player in this dialogue is Kim, a front-row player. The abrasive nature of Kim's comment to the two shows the value on winning and the diversion of language to show competitiveness and toughness while expressing that the other two players have a higher competence level than the mistake made. The comment from Kim is also lacking the conservative and deference associated with feminine language.

The next example includes another passing comment from teammates. In this situation, the opposing team's attacker hits the ball into the block of Hailey, and it goes out of bounds, giving the opposing team a point.

89. <Kim serves the ball>
90. <ball is passed and set to the right side>
91. <the ball is hit off of Hailey's block and out of bounds>
92. Hailey: Dang it
93. Monica: you reacher
94. Hailey: yeah, yeah
95. Monica: nah im just kidding
96. You got that sh*

This example shows the competitive nature of the team, but this time there is additional commentary made by Monica that shows Hailey that she is still competent. Hailey verbally expresses her competitive disappointment and her acknowledgment of where she knows she made a mistake. Monica gives Hailey a quick comment about how she made a mistake, but then back tracks to give a reassuring moment to aid in how Monica trusts Hailey to not make the same mistake again. This was backed up in interviews through the question of what characteristics the women value most in a teammate; 41.7% of the participants said that trust and honesty are two of the most important characteristics a teammate can have. The masculine and feminine characteristics of language mesh in this example because there is the show of competitiveness, competence and a leadership comment on how Hailey can do better, but there is also the solidarity, connectedness and sensitivity to others that is typical of feminine language.

The competitive banter does not stop at comments to teammates, there are also comments made from one opposing team to another. In this example Monica and Tiffany are on different teams. In the play prior Monica passed a ball that Tiffany hit over the net which led to Monica's team getting a point.

16. Monica: Tiffany I got you
17. Tiffany: [really?]
18. Monica: read to filth Tiffany
19. Read
20. To

21. Filth

Monica is using the slang term, “read to filth” to describe how she could tell what Tiffany was going to do based on what her body language showed while she was hitting the ball. This is used as a taunting method to create banter back and forth between opposing players. This show of toughness and high competence could also be a jab between two players with high hierarchical control due to their high level of competence and experience. The two players at hand are veterans on the team and have high levels of leadership during play, so the commentary back and forth shows how the athletes are using the feminine emotional expressivity to assert the hierarchical control they hold on their respective sides of the court.

The next segment of discourse shows that while experience is a big factor on competence, there are not as clear divisions on a collegiate athletics team. This is due to the high level of competence by all of the players. Reagan and Nadia are on a team and Abbey, Charlee and Brenda are on an opposing team.

- 83. <Reagan gets an ace>
- 84. Nadia: nice serve Reagan
- 85. < Reagan returns to the service line>
- 86. Abbey: Reagan what's your problem h.
- 87. Reagan: sorry
- 88. Abbey: [that's some age discrimination]
- 89. <laughter>
- 90. Nadia: she is picking on her people
- 91. <Reagan and Abbey both play the same position>
- 92. (.)
- 93. <Reagan serves the ball>
- 94. <ball passed by Abbey, Set by Charlee to Brenda>
- 95. Charlee: Come on Brenda
- 96. <Brenda hits the ball over the net and it hits Nadia square in the chest>
- 97. <laughter>
- 98. Nadia: ow, <gasp>
- 99. Brenda said f* you
- 1. <laughter>
- 2. Reagan: [how's that for age discrimination h.]
- 3. <Brenda is two years older than Nadia>

Reagan and Brenda are both back-row players known as defensive specialists. Reagan is testing the competence of Abbey, and when Abbey unsuccessfully passes a ball, she pushes back to assert a sense of toughness. Abbey is a senior on the team leading to more experience over Reagan who is a freshman. Again there is a missing sense of conservatism and the highlighting attributes of the discourse are associated with masculine language.

The other aspect of masculine communication is the use of swear words. The athletes are not afraid to swear and lack the sense of conservatism associated with feminine characteristics. The use of taboo words is not the only outward expression of aggression. In video footage of the participants, there are instances of kicking a ball across the gym after a mistake as well as other physical actions of competitive frustration. These moments of bodily communication were often accompanied by grunts or yelling. The out spurts were only a couple of seconds and then they were back in the mindset to play. I thought this was interesting because the women seem to have short outbursts with the arisen frustration due to the competitiveness of sport. The women are competitive enough to want to show their display of competence to their teammates.

Although women athletes do not only adopt masculine forms of communication. They are also able to complement the nature of masculine communication with the delicate nature of feminine language. The participants were able to highlight their teammate's successes through compliments, emotional expressivity, and connectedness.

23. <ball served at Monica>
24. <Monica passes the ball over the net>
25. Monica: If I-
26. If I over pass-
27. Serve me again
28. I'm sick of overpassing
29. Erg
30. <indistinct chatter, lines omitted>
31. <ball is served from the opposing team>
32. <Monica passes the ball off the net>
33. Monica: I'll get you on Rachel
34. <ball goes to Kim on the outside pin>
35. < Kim hits the ball over>
36. < ball is returned>
37. <Rachel passes the ball on the net to Hailey>
38. < Hailey goes over on two and tries to hit a shot, but the ball goes out>
39. Monica: ooooo
40. I liked that
41. Kim: good idea, good idea
42. Brenda: good spot
43. Kim: saucy spot
44. Monica: [okay I am going to pass]
45. <this comment was made to herself as a moment of reassurance>
46. n.n
47. < ball is served by the opposing team into the net>

The section above is a showing of the competitive nature of how Monica is being hard on herself for making an inaccurate pass and then the resilience to yell, "serve me again" at the opposing team's server. This interaction is followed by a successful pass and an error by a teammate, but instead of getting upset at Hailey, Monica compliments the learning process behind the mistake. This type of interaction shows how important it is to have an open learning community where everyone is helping each other learn. This again shows a mix of the feminine and masculine attributes of language allowing for there to be a competitive nature and also a display of friendship which is highly valued by this team. "I would say relationships are the core value of the team, along with the balance of responsibility and friendship that goes along with having to meet a high standard of competition and play." This participant was able to capture how the core value of the team is relationships, but there is a balance between friendship and the high standards of play at the collegiate level.

One attribute of sportsmanship specific to volleyball is that each of the teams comes together after each play to complement or express their plan for the next play. Each time the teams come together they give the surrounding players high fives or give them a tap on the butt which has many different meanings such as encouragement, positivity, or congratulations. The conversation surrounding the action provides the meaning of the action. This can be seen as unprofessional looking in from the outside, but from within the group, it is a common exchange of communication. This action is often subconscious because the players are all accustomed to it being a normal interaction. This exchange shows the feminine attribute of solidarity among teammates.

Hierarchy and Identity

One example of the fluid hierarchy is when one member of the team yells "queens" which is a name of a drill that all the women know, and everyone floods the court and runs to the positions on the 'queens' side. The drill is simple, it is four versus four, and one side of the net is designated the 'queens' side or the winning side. The goal of the drill is to stay on the winning side as long as possible. All of the players running and fighting for spots on the queen's side of the net show that it doesn't matter who started the drill by simply yelling the name of it. No one stood around and looked to see if it was the

leader who said it or if it was an underclassman, everyone just knew it was time for the drill. This is backed up by responses to interview question, “what is the core value of the team?” One of the participants said, “Everyone is equal. Everyone can speak up, everyone is expected to work hard, and class hierarchy is not a thing.”

5. Monica: 5 v 6?
6. we need a middle
7. Kim: yeah 5 v 6
8. Monica: Rachel do you want to come over here? (.)
9. Kim: Then Brenda do you want to come right side over here
10. Then me and you can flip middle and left back
11. Monica: [yeah we need--]
12. Kim: [oh]
13. Monica: [wait we're good]
14. Two, four, five,
15. Kim: [yeah]
16. Monica: [yeah Tiffany can be on that side]
17. Kim: [then they can have an actual rotation]
18. Monica: [yeah]
19. n.n
20. Kim: do you want to block Rachel
21. Or do you want to play defense, completely your call
22. Monica: [your call]
23. Tell the people what you want
24. <indistinct chatter>
25. n.n
26. Monica: uh, you got a bic
27. You got my bic
28. Rachel: Kim, go?
29. Kim: yeah
30. Monica: am I running like a – like a- low bic or like a little time bic
31. Rachel: <indistinct response>
32. Monica: yeah
33. Like not like a pipe
34. But not like a true bic
35. Like I'll be on my like secondish step when you set it

In this dialogue the players are in the process of moving from warm ups into splitting up teams to scrimmage. The leaders of the conversation, Monica and Kim, are splitting up the teams to have them be even. No one on the team is questioning why people are going on specific sides or refusing to do as they say which shows that they trust Monica and Kim. The splitting up of the teams shows a sense of leadership and fluidity of people fulfilling the follower role in that specific instance. The interesting part is that when Monica is put on a team with Rachel, Monica gives the leadership role to Rachel so that they can call the shots. Rachel is a setter and is often known for making calls on the floor. For further clarification on what some of the terminology means, a bic is a back row set that Monica would run during play and a pipe is a different kind of step. Finally, Monica and Rachel are discussing how the set should be. They are on an even level of communication, no one is the leader, and no one is the follower.

During interviews 50% of respondents answered that it takes leadership to be identified as a part of the team. This strong sense of leadership on the team can explain why the hierarchy is so fluid and it passes so easily from one teammate to another. One respondent that captured the nature of the team said, “I think learning the ways over the years and finding whatever role needed to be filled in the gym whether that be a leader, friend for someone going through it, or practice player. It is stepping in to fill whatever spot is needed for the day and being flexible enough to do so.” The players have to be adaptable in this community because many of them have a fluctuating role in the hierarchy depending on the day, week, or season.

The fluid hierarchy allows participants in the community to focus on the values within it in order to continue to not only learn the activity at hand, but the intangible values. In an interview with a participant they said, "While the skill level is a big part of the experience as a team member, I think intangibles like communication, work ethic, and teamwork are also a big part of the experience. While we all play because we love the sport, it is more about the work we put in and the relationships that are formed than the skill level itself." The attributes of communication, work ethic, and teamwork are all taught as what it takes to be successful in athletics. These attributes are used by athletes to rise through the ranks of a hierarchy and gain playing time, but the players do not always know that they will continue to use these values later in life.

Values of the UWL women's volleyball team

1. Harmony: Hey girl, what's up?
2. Sienna: how are you?
3. <hug>
4. Harmony: I'm chillen, how are you?
5. Sienna: did I even give you a hug?
6. Harmony: uh.
7. Yeah, a little side hug you were talking to other people
8. Sienna: [(h) second times the charm.]
9. It's so overwhelming
10. Seeing everybody
11. like at once
12. Like having to say hi to everyone
13. You know what I mean?
14. Harmony: Yeah,
15. No, I get it.
16. Sienna: [(not that that is a bad thing at all)]
17. Harmony: Yeah, You could just like stiff--
18. You know, like, give us that mental stiff arm you know
19. [<laughter>]
20. <interruption, lines omitted>
21. Monica: Harmony is also miced up?
22. Harmony: Girl, you already know
23. The (h) the (h) the people want to hear what I have to say, I'm iconic.
24. Come on.
25. [<laughter>]

This excerpt shows how the teammates are actually interested in each other's lives and well-being outside of the sport. This is not a group of women that come into the gym together play a game and then leave. This is a true showing of a community and as described by all of the participants in the interviews, relationships and community is a big part of their team values. In interviews, 100% of respondents said that the friendships that they made on the team were the most important part of being on the team. There were many different interactions during the scrimmage that was there to back up this response. During play, there were often compliments, helpful directions, high fives, and so much laughter. The athletes take pride in what they do and how they play, but their priority is their teammates.

62. Hannah: hello love
63. Harmony: what's good Hannah
64. Hannah: nothing much
65. Tired.
66. Harmony: yeah girl
67. Hannah: [like I feel like I've been everyday for --]
68. Harmony: [yeah why do I feel like I'm always --]
69. Hannah: [Yeah Abbey]

70. Harmony: [-- oh my goodness that was a good up]
 71. -- why do I feel like I am always up at like the brightest of dawn
 72. <Hannah nods>
 73. Harmony: I know, crazy

Teammates use their relationships and schedules to reflect on how it makes them feel, but they are also still focused on the uniting factor that brought them together, volleyball. In this section, Harmony and Hannah are having a conversation about how they both get up for the 7 am lift, but they never take their eyes off of the court, in the middle of a drill. They are still able to complement their teammates and show respect of competence while they connect in a conversation. During an interview, an athlete explained that "Having great relationships with everyone on the team makes playing volleyball a lot more fun. Of course, I will always love this sport, but I love it a whole lot more when I'm playing it with people I enjoy being around." Volleyball is what brings everyone on the team together, but the relationships that the women create is what makes the experience better.

Other attributes valued by the team include trust, honesty, and accountability. There are other unifying values created on the team. In interviews, 58% of respondents said that they valued a hardworking teammate. This could be due to the competitive nature of athletics. Teammates want to know that their teammates are working just as hard as they are.

13. <ball served>
 14. <ball is passed way off the court>
 15. <Nadia runs to get the ball and dives for it, almost landing on another ball in the process>
 16. <Nadia gets the ball up>
 17. < no one else on the team goes for the ball>
 18. Nadia: why did no one go for the ball?
 19. Shannon: cause you almost just broke yourself
 20. Nadia: I'm okay
 21. <laughter>
 22. Shannon: I got scared because she almost hit a ball
 23. Nadia: yeah my foot hit a ball when I landed
 24. <laughter>
 25. Shannon: Yeah h.that is why I got scared h
 26. < ball is served over the net by the opposing team>

Nadia's work ethic was shown through passing the ball, but many of her teammates were more worried about her than the ball as she ran into a group of loose volleyballs laying on the ground outside of the court. This is a prime example of how while hard work is a secondary value, the team is going to fall back onto their primary value of relationships. The team's physical actions of running to Nadia instead of the live ball and Shannon's fear that Nadia would hurt herself exhibited the values at play in this community. When the players were asked in an interview what they would take with them after leaving volleyball, 58% said better communication techniques and a strong work ethic. The close second to the top two responses was How to work with others and be a good teammate at 41.7% of responses. Leadership was also a common answer for the participants at 33%. What the women are taking away from their community is what they find the most valuable. These traits of leadership, communication, a strong work ethic, and teamwork are not only beneficial on a court but later in life for other communities they walk into. One of my favorite traditions in the UWL gym is to always end on a positive note.

90. Charlee: last ball
 91. < ball served out of bounds>
 92. Reagan: nah nah we gotta end on a good one
 93. Sienna: one more
 94. Hailey: end on a good one
 95. < Charlee serves>
 96. <pass set opposing side into a scramble>
 97. <ball is free balled over the net>
 98. Reagan: mine, mine, mine

99. Nadia: bic, bic, bic
1. < ball tipped over the net and lands for a point>
 2. Reagan: yeah

The idea of ending on a high allows for the athletes to walk away from the court feeling good about themselves and their hard work. When Charlee calls “last ball” it signals the end of the scrimmage, but when she serves the ball out of bounds both her teammates and the opposing team call for a replay. This allows Charlee to opportunity to learn from her previous mistake and for many competitors they do not want to finish on a free point. This is the competitive nature of the women rising once again to allow themselves and their teammates to grow.

CONCLUSION

The community of practice under examination uses their support for one another to create a minimal power dynamic and due to this, the group yields a higher value on relationships and learning. This community allows everyone in it to create a sense of identity, develop a sense of leadership, and develop their skills to a higher competence level. There is an adaptation of masculine language that is routed in feminine characterization. The women use their competitive nature to unite themselves and create a strong sense of community. There is a high level of competence all the way around and teammates are always testing each other to get better.

There is the adaptation of masculine characteristics of language such as showing toughness, competitiveness, and competence; but the language has the feminine undertone and base of communication. The women communicate with the intent to create upward mobility within their teammate and use their emotional expressivity to create a sense of solidarity. In the interviews all of the participants were passionate about their need for good relationships and friendships on the team. This is seen through their ability to use the feminine undertone of their voice to allow for the baseline understanding that all that is said is for the good of the person they are communicating with.

The hierarchy within the team allows for there to be minimal hierarchy during play. With the base value of relationships the women have to trust each other and their teammates competence level. With the foundation of trust the hierarchy can be more fluid and not fall solely on one leader. As exhibited prior anyone and everyone can be a leader on the team, and who holds the power of leadership can change within the length of one conversation. No one is looking for the hierarchical control, but all of the women are trying to get better and become a good leader for the interest of benefiting the people around them. As competitors they are still excited for others on their team and push each other to continue to make mistakes and get better even if it means losing the point during a rally. The team has trust in their teammates that the next time that they try to hit the same shot it will result positively.

In the end the values and explanations of why the women talk, act, or play a certain way comes back to the relationships that they have built with their teammates. Players are leaving the program with high communication skills that lead to a better ability to lead in other groups of their life. It is also important to note that the women are maintaining their competitive edge while pushing their teammates to do better. The true value of relationships has kept many of the players in the program for the duration of their career and has allowed many of them to carry those relationships with them post-graduation. These women are strong and independent with the ability to be emotionally expressive because they value the women they compete with and against.

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Appendix A

Transcription conventions are as follows:

-	End of intonation unit; falling intonation
,	End of intonation unit; fall-rise intonation
?	End of intonation unit; rising intonation
--	Self interruption
:	length
<u>underline</u>	Emphatic stress or increased amplitude
(.)	Pause of 0.5 seconds or less
(n.n)	Pause of greater than 0.5 seconds, measured by stopwatch
h	Exhalation (e.g. laughter, sigh); each token marks one pulse
()	Uncertain transcription
< >	Transcriber comment; nonverbal noise
{ }	Stretch of talk over which a transcriber comment applies
[]	Overlap beginning and end
/	Latching (no pause between speaker turns)
=	No pause between intonation units

Appendix B

Volleyball Terminology

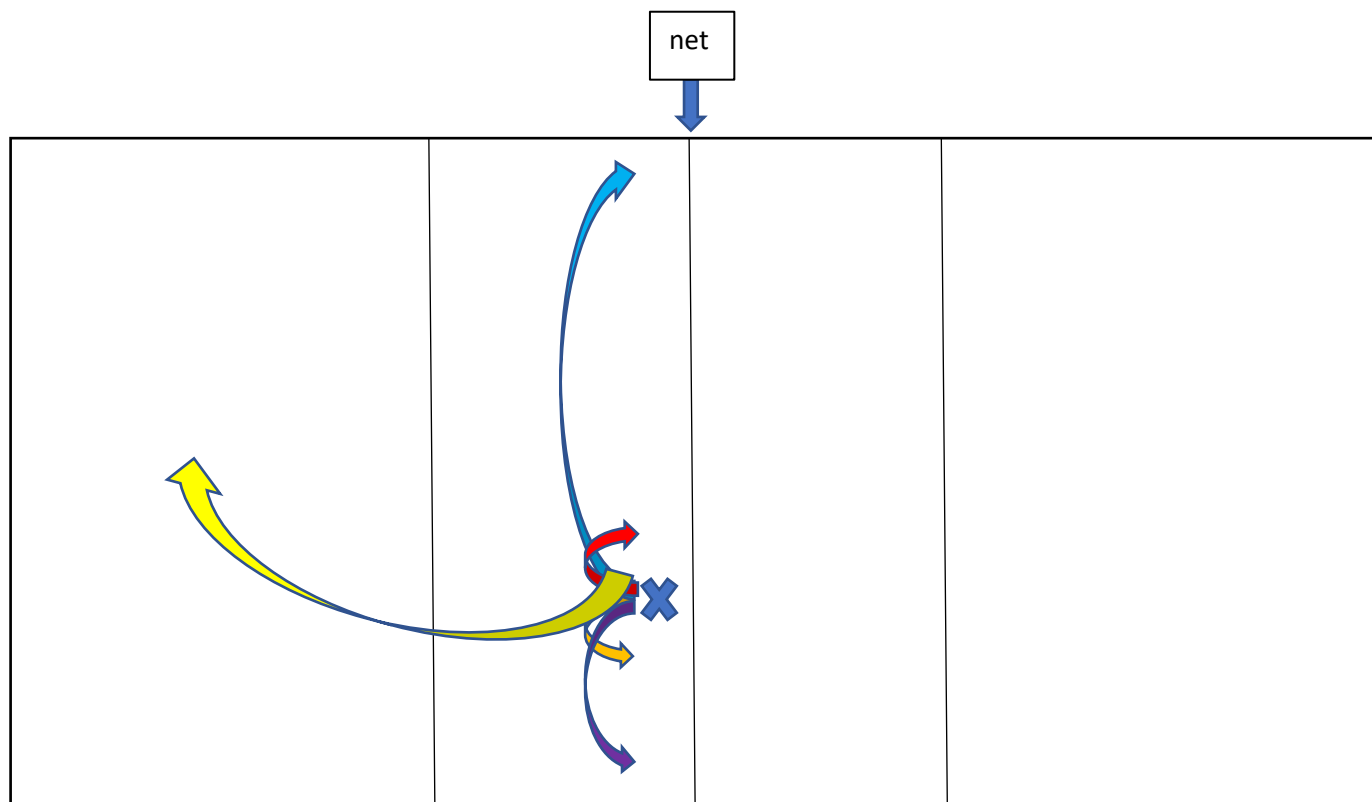


Diagram key:

Symbol	Position and Call
Blue X	The setter
Blue arrow	Set for the Outside Hitter, called a 'Go'
Red arrow	Set for the middle hitter, called an 'a'
Yellow arrow	Set for a back row player, called a 'bic'
Orange arrow	Set for the middle or right-side hitter, called a 'b'
Purple arrow	Set for the right-side hitter, called a '10'