STREET SOCCER IN VANCOUVER: PLAYER ACCOUNTS OF HOMELESSNESS,

SPORT, AND SOCIAL IDENTITY

by

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The following individuals certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled:

Street soccer in Vancouver: Player accounts of homelessness, sport, and social identity

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Abstract

Background: The social and economic inequalities derived from homelessness have consistently been found to be related to depleted physical and psychological health (Stafford & Wood, 2017). Social connectivity and social identity (i.e., a sense of 'us') are increasingly recognized for their capacities to help people address a range of health challenges (e.g., addiction, social isolation, chronic mental health challenges; Beauchamp & Rhodes, 2020; C. Haslam et al., 2018). Street soccer programs represent a potential avenue for fostering social connectivity, social identity, and quality of life among people who have experienced homelessness. The focus of this study was the Vancouver Street Soccer League (VSSL), which provides a weekly soccer program for people experiencing homelessness, marginalization, and addiction in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside neighbourhood.

Objectives: The overall goals of my thesis research were to (1) understand the experiences of homeless and unstably housed players in the VSSL; and (2) understand how players felt the VSSL contributed to their sense of social connection, social identity, and well-being.

Methods: Ten participants' experiences (in their own words) were examined using two complementary approaches, namely Social Identity Mapping, combined with semi-structured interviews, in addition to over 50 hours of fieldwork that included playing at the VSSL's weekly practices.

Results: Four themes (and 11 sub-themes) were developed through reflexive thematic analysis. These included: (1) Coming together through soccer, (2) Dynamics motivating continued involvement in the VSSL, (3) Leaders and leadership: Social influence in the VSSL, and (4) The VSSL and health outcomes.

Conclusions: Participants described being a VSSL player as like being part of a supportive family, where one can feel included and authentic. Participants also indicated that the VSSL represents an inclusive program with valued norms of social connectivity and friendly competition, and described notable experiences related to psychological safety, stigma, recovery (from illness or substance use), and shared leadership. Opportunities for practical application, future research directions, and the study's limitations are discussed.

Lay Summary

Membership in social groups, such as leisure and sporting groups, has the potential to help people with a range of physical and mental health challenges, such as those related to socioeconomic inequality. In this study, I interviewed ten soccer players who had experienced homelessness about their experiences playing in the Vancouver Street Soccer League (VSSL). Participants created a map of various social groups in their lives (VSSL along with other salient groups) to guide and inform these discussions. Participants played in the VSSL for many different reasons, such as being able to feel authentic and valued in an inclusive environment. Participants described being a VSSL player as like being part of a supportive family, and described noteworthy experiences related to psychological safety, stigma, recovery (from illness and substance use), and leadership.

Preface

This research was approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H20-02421). I conceptualized, designed, and carried out this research with the support of my supervisor, Dr. Mark Beauchamp. I was responsible for developing the research questions, participant recruitment, data collection/interviews, transcription, analysis, and thesis preparation. Dr Mark Beauchamp, Dr Andrea Bundon, and Dr Guy Faulkner provided guidance, comments, and feedback on the study design and final thesis preparation. A version of this work will be submitted for publication.

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List of Abbreviations

ALP	Andy Livingstone Park
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease of 2019
DTES	Downtown Eastside
EPL	English Premier League
HWC	Homeless World Cup
RCT	Randomized Control Trial
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SCT	Self-categorization theory
SIM	Social Identity Map(ping)
SIT	Social identity theory
VSSL	Vancouver Street Soccer League

of scholars who are motivated, open-minded, and most importantly, kind. Nik and Jesse, many words fail to express my deep gratitude for your friendship, but HMSM and our regular catch ups have been cornerstones of my experience at UBC, so thank you. Alyssa, Colin, Danni, Dev, Geri, Jeanette, Jess, Katie, Katrina, Kelly, Krista, Libbie, Lisa, Liv, Maddi, Madison, Milly, Myriam, Natalie, Negin, Ryan, Shawn, Smidge, Staci, Thalia, Tim, and many others, I am immensely thankful for the laughter, support, and companionship we've shared, even during a devastating pandemic.

To my friends and family at home in Australia and the U.K., I am eternally grateful to know you are always there. You remind me to never forget family, and why it's important to dream. I appreciate each of you. To my best friend, Ritica, you have loved, supported, and laughed with me since before this project began and been my comfort every time I've worried, stressed, fretted, or felt overwhelmed. Your infallible moral compass, wit, intellect, and honesty were essential to getting me to this point. Thank you for being there every step of the way.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Homelessness is influenced by various structural, socioeconomic, and individual factors (Lee et al., 2010). Structural factors include lack of affordable housing or rates of poverty (Fazel et al., 2014). Socioeconomic factors include difficulty securing employment or poor-quality living environments, while individual factors include illness, suicidality, or low life expectancy (Fazel et al., 2014). Various structural, socioeconomic, and individual-level interventions have sought to address these health disparities and the "so called tri-morbidity of physical and mental illness, and addiction" (Luchenski et al., 2018, p. 267) that are exacerbated by homelessness. Recovery from homelessness refers to the process of regaining one's individuality and personhood (i.e., status as a human being) following a period of homelessness, through building relationships that foster self-direction, choice, empowerment, and connection to community (Gillis et al., 2010). Interventions that support recovery include housing provision, case management, multimodal or integrated care, as well as well-being interventions focused on fostering social participation (Luchenski et al., 2018).

Sport and physical activity have been recognized for their capacity to improve social capital and well-being among people experiencing homelessness. Unhoused participants in sport and physical activity interventions report positive influences of those programs on self-esteem, physical and mental health, daily structure, health-promoting behaviours (e.g., diet) as well as reduced substance use, alcohol use, and social isolation (Curran et al., 2016; Malden et al., 2019; Sherry & Strybosch, 2012). Of note, participants in community soccer[1] programs have been found to establish external support networks with social service providers to address their various housing- and health-related needs (Sherry, 2010). A sense of connection and shared

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[1] Following Jarvie and Ahrens (2019), the term soccer is used throughout when referring to the sport of Association Football, except where the term football is used in a direct quotation or in the names of other soccer programs.

social identity, derived though such programs and through sport participation, have the potential to improve individual health through fostering a positive orientation to others, self-worth, and agency (C. Haslam et al., 2018). Parenthetically, having a strong connection with staff at a temporary housing shelter was shown to predict well-being among people experiencing homelessness (Johnstone et al., 2016). However, few studies have examined the ways in which identifying with social groups can foster well-being among people experiencing homelessness (Johnstone et al, 2016).

A focal issue within much homelessness research concerns how people living unhoused are represented within the literature. For example, *homeless people* are often framed as a homogenous group, whereby diverse participants are grouped under simplistic categories such as being *at risk* and/or *vulnerable* (Lister, 2015). Being *homeless* cannot be grouped under one uniform identity because it is characterized by a variety of experiences (Walter et al., 2015). Indeed, people experiencing homelessness are affected by a range of socially determined health inequalities such as stigma and social isolation. In the Vancouver Homeless Count (2019), over 80% of respondents reported having one or more physical or mental health issue.

Recent initiatives have sought to enhance social connection and positive aspects of identity among people experiencing homelessness, with a view to fostering well-being (Johnstone et al., 2016). One example of a sport program designed to support social inclusion and connection for people experiencing homelessness and marginalization in Vancouver (Canada) is the Vancouver Street Soccer League (VSSL). Over 2000 people experience homelessness in Vancouver, 60% of whom live in the Downtown Eastside neighbourhood, where the VSSL operates (Vancouver Homeless Count, 2019). In this thesis project I sought to understand the ways in which participation in the VSSL contributes to social connection, social

identity (i.e., a sense of 'us'), and well-being among a sample of players who were previously or currently homeless (at the time of conducting the research). The study built on previous work which suggests that social connectivity and social identity can help people address a range of health challenges (e.g., chronic mental health conditions, social isolation; Beauchamp & Rhodes, 2020; C. Haslam et al., 2018). Moreover, this study was designed to substantively add to the literature at a time of heightened social isolation (due to the COVID-19 pandemic) for an already marginalized group in a geographic setting characterized by social, economic, and health disparities (i.e., Vancouver's Downtown Eastside).

The project is discussed in detail throughout the four main sections of this thesis. The first section includes a literature review that discusses (a) the consequences of homelessness on psychological and physical health, (b) the prevailing structural and community-level approaches that have been used to address homelessness and its health consequences, (c) the ways that group-based sport and physical activity programs can contribute to the health and well-being of people experiencing homelessness, and (d) relevant gaps in the literature. I then outline the research questions that guided this study. In the second section, I discuss the theoretical framework that underpinned this study – the Social Identity Approach – and situate it within a paradigmatic lens of epistemological constructionism and ontological relativism. In the third section, I contextualize my study in relation to Vancouver's Downtown Eastside and the VSSL organization, then, discuss how my methods combined a novel Social Identity Mapping activity with semi-structured interviews I also outline my approach to data analysis and the ethical considerations related to working with people who were previously or currently homeless (at the time of conducting interviews) in a geographic setting where homelessness and substance use are common. Finally, I discuss my results in relation to the extant literature.

Literature Review

Homelessness

Homelessness, not having a place of one's own where individuals "could expect to stay for more than 30 days" (Vancouver Homeless Count, 2019, p. 3), encompasses a range of physical living situations. The Canadian Observatory on Homelessness provides a typology that encompasses four types. These include (1) unsheltered (e.g., living in public spaces without consent or contract); (2) emergency sheltered (e.g., living overnight in a shelter); (3) provisionally accommodated (e.g., living in temporary accommodation); and (4) being at risk of homelessness (e.g., those living in housing that does not meet public safety standards; Gaetz et al., 2012). Homelessness in the broader literature is categorized as transitional (or temporary), episodic (repeatedly moving in and out of homelessness), or chronic (permanently homeless; Lee et al., 2010). Although useful for purposes such as surveying various needs among people experiencing homelessness, these categories risk creating binaries of in/out of homelessness that can limit understanding of more complex housing situations. For example, such categories would not reflect the experiences of women and children living in hidden homelessness (i.e., living with family, friends, or abusive partners) and as a result they may not qualify for, or access, certain health or legal supports even though their place of residence may be unsafe (Martin & Walia, 2019).

Homelessness, broadly construed, is experienced across the globe (Bhugra, 2017; Johnstone et al., 2016; Ul Hassan et al., 2019). Undoubtedly, there are innumerable barriers faced by people seeking to exit homelessness (e.g., challenges finding employment). However, *a priori* assumptions of much research that homeless people are a certain way (e.g., mentally ill) not only perpetuate stigmatizing attitudes but preclude truly grounded understanding of the

intricacies of what people's lives are like during, or because of, their experience of homelessness (Meanwell, 2012; Piat et al., 2015). Without more nuanced depictions of the daily realities of people experiencing homelessness in the literature, researchers and practitioners (such as physicians) risk downplaying the complex challenges associated with being unhoused, developing negative attitudes toward people who are homeless, and leaving their needs unmet.

Homelessness and Health Consequences

Living unhoused substantively impacts people's physical and mental health (Cambioli et al., 2016; Stafford & Wood, 2017). People who experience homelessness show a high rate of one or more medical, psychological, or physical health issue (Cambioli et al., 2016; Vancouver Homeless Count, 2019). Existing literature gives minimal attention to the connection between diverse types of homelessness (e.g., episodic) and health outcomes (e.g., psychological distress). Furthermore, although homelessness is associated with a range of deleterious physical and psychological health outcomes, including serious mental illness (Cambioli et al., 2016), it is often difficult to ascertain causal directionality. For example, it is conceivable that mental illness both contributes to, and derives from, homelessness.

Overall, people excluded from society, such as those who experience homelessness and/or drug use, prisoners, and sex workers, incur higher rates of disease, injury, and premature mortality than the general population (Luchenski et al., 2018). Substance use, for example, is a key predictor of homelessness (Moxley et al., 2020). One Utah-based study used hospital admission and discharge records of those in publicly funded substance use treatment programs ($n = 1642$) to predict subsequent homelessness (Moxley et al., 2020). The strongest predictors of homelessness were homelessness at admission, age (being ≥ 45 years of age), and methamphetamine use, suggesting that substance use disorders can greatly affect the ability to

obtain and retain housing. Similarly, a separate Canadian study examined the effects of having concurrent disorders on health care utilization among homeless or vulnerably housed individuals using data from a four-year health and housing intervention (Hwang et al., 2011; Zhang et al., 2018). Concurrent disorders were defined as having a mental health diagnosis (e.g., depression or bipolar disorder) and problematic substance use (Zhang et al., 2018). Zhang et al. (2018) found that individuals with concurrent disorders (compared to those without) had higher odds of emergency department use, hospitalization, and primary care visits within the final 12 months of the four-year follow-up period. In a similar regard, Harris et al. (2019) found that frequent residential moves (i.e., from one type of housing to another) and having concurrent disorders were both significantly correlated with higher acute care use and unmet healthcare needs.

The consequences of homelessness on health varies across populations, such as Indigenous people, who are overrepresented among Canada's homeless population, and military veterans. One observational study reported gender differences among Indigenous people experiencing homelessness and mental illness in Vancouver and Winnipeg ($n = 439$; Bingham et al., 2019). Specifically, Bingham et al. (2019) found that Indigenous women (when compared to men) were more likely to meet criteria for high levels of suicidality (i.e., suicidal ideation, plans, and attempts), post-traumatic stress disorder, and to report experiences of sexual violence, and physical violence in the preceding 6 months. Further, these unique impacts on Indigenous communities may be under-reported. That is, due to generations of mistreatment within the healthcare system, many Indigenous people may not self-disclose Aboriginal status on surveys out of fear of discrimination (Bingham et al., 2019). Additionally, high rates of suicidality and a significant relationship between age (over >55) and mortality has been reported among veterans experiencing homelessness in the United States (Culhane et al., 2019; Schinka et al., 2016).

Although this research was conducted in the U.S., these findings are noteworthy because veterans make up 4.4% of Canada's homeless population (Employment and Social Development Canada, 2018).

Interestingly, similarities between veterans and Indigenous people converge when examining two qualitative studies which used focus groups with homeless women veterans in Los Angeles and interviews with homeless women living in Canada's northern territories (Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut; Hamilton et al., 2011; Schmidt et al., 2015). These women's experiences can be described as an interconnected 'web of vulnerability' that impacted their health and well-being. In particular, women felt low perceived safety when accessing services, a lack of resources and social support, and experienced unresolved trauma from childhood adversity (e.g., witnessing violence or substance use). Women also reported experiences of physical, financial, emotional, and sexual abuse. Interestingly, they also reported a pronounced sense of independence and pride which, on the one hand, appeared to reduce their reliance on social supports but, in turn, also further increased their sense of isolation and undermined their self-esteem. Some Indigenous women also held trauma from their time in residential schools and the impacts of forced displacement and colonization such as family dysfunction, alcohol use, and "loss–of tradition, family, language, and themselves" (Schmidt et al., 2015, p. 4). Suffice to say, the individual and population-level effects of homelessness on health are substantial and diverse.

Stigmatization and Experiencing Homelessness. In British Columbia, the provincial government recently reported that homeless people experience incredible daily prejudice and indicated that some felt that "it's almost like homelessness is a crime" (Government of British Columbia, 2018, p. 23). Stigma – defined as the discreditation of certain identities (e.g.,

homeless identity) by others through negative attitudes (Meanwell, 2012) – plays a significant role in how homelessness contributes to individual health. For instance, stigmatizing attitudes from peers can negatively influence attitudes toward self-care (e.g., physical activity or sleep), leading individuals to feel there is nothing they can do to improve their health (Meanwell, 2012; Paudyal et al., 2019). These effects can negatively influence health behaviours as well. One Vancouver-based study explored differences in health-related needs and rates of primary care usage among people who experienced homelessness and mental illness (Currie, Patterson, et al., 2014). Having a higher assessed need (e.g., psychotic disorder) was significantly associated with lower rates of primary care access, compared to a higher rate of access among those with a lower assessed need (e.g., poor general health. As such, homelessness and/or mental illness-based stigma may prevent severely underserved individuals from accessing needed health care.

Homelessness and Social Exclusion. Social exclusion and perceptions of exclusion can shape people's experiences of homelessness. Given the prevalence of mental illness among people experiencing homelessness (Stafford & Wood, 2017), individuals may differ drastically in their ability to cope with feeling socially excluded. Increased feelings of isolation or (social and/or emotional) loneliness, such as those caused by disrupted friendships due to frequency of moving in/out of different housing shelters, can contribute to psychological distress (Hyland et al., 2019). More research is needed to assess whether, and how, quality of social connections may reduce negative psychological impacts of loneliness among people who experience homelessness. Interestingly, a recent review demonstrated that voluntary social connection through social networking sites can improve mental health among people experiencing homelessness, highlighting a potential avenue for future interventions aimed at reducing loneliness (Calvo & Carbonell, 2019).

Approaches and Interventions to Address Homelessness

Structural and community-level interventions have the potential to alleviate the health burdens brought by material poverty and homelessness. Not only is housing provision perceived as the most important intervention among homeless populations, it has demonstrable benefits for health (Luchenski et al., 2018). However, structural interventions do not always consider the diverse health needs and experiences that characterize being homeless (e.g., hidden vs. unsheltered homelessness, being a member of a visible minority group). Recognising this gap, those concerned with designing health interventions for people experiencing homelessness are encouraged to include clients as decision makers and consider barriers presented by structural factors and social policies (Hwang & Burns, 2014; Luchenski et al., 2018).

The relative impact of structural factors, such as lack of affordable housing, can influence the extent to which *exiting* homelessness is an attainable goal. That said, the following section includes discussions of various structural approaches and interventions aimed at addressing the health inequities of homelessness. In addition to efforts to provide housing opportunities and appropriate supports, I discuss separate community-level programs designed to enrich the health and well-being of people experiencing homelessness with a view to supporting quality of life, social participation, and social connection.

Structural Approaches. Homelessness *prevention* policy frameworks developed in recent decades in Western countries, such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, primarily operate in two ways. First, poverty is typically targeted through the provision of financial resources (e.g., welfare, minimum wage) to help consumers on low incomes afford options on the housing market, but with the expectation that those people maintain full-time work. This assumption is problematic given increasing workforce casualization and complex

individual factors that prevent access to such employment (Parsell & Marston, 2012). Second, governments have sought to increase the supply of, and access to, affordable housing. However, in recent decades such housing has declined in affordability and availability, which potentially magnifies individual vulnerabilities (e.g., landlords may exclude prospective tenants with low incomes; Parsell & Marston, 2012).

Clifford and colleagues (2019) reviewed literature on health policy in Canada, Australia, France, and the US between 1986 to 2018 and identified that policies aimed at addressing homelessness frequently frame homelessness as an individual medical issue (and therefore an issue of health service utilisation) as opposed to an issue of public health that is largely socially determined. To illustrate problems with this framing, Clifford et al. (2019) identified three reasons that local homeless services experience tensions with biomedical governance and policy paradigms. First, such paradigms ignore the complexity of health determinants among local homeless populations. Second, they ill-equip the health workforce to support people with complex health needs that are exacerbated by poverty, and third, they exclude people with lived experience of homelessness from the policy formation process (Clifford et al., 2019). Indeed, while such broad frameworks may indirectly address population-level homelessness, the unique needs of various groups and individuals experiencing homelessness (e.g., Indigenous people, people with intellectual disabilities, and/or substance use disorders) are often insufficiently considered (Clifford et al., 2019).

Housing Interventions. *Housing First*, an intervention philosophy that views housing as a human right and provides rapid rehousing and subsequent support services to people who are chronically homeless, has grown in recent years compared to earlier treatment-before-housing approaches (Evans et al., 2016). Access to housing, from a Housing First perspective, is not

contingent on accepting psychiatric treatment nor abstinence from substances. Housing First originated out of New York City's Pathways to Housing program in the 1990's and has since been adopted into Canada's housing policy frameworks (Hwang et al., 2012). It emphasises harm reduction and providing clients with choices over their health care. While several Housing First interventions have been trialled in Canada, two with the most rigorous assessment are At Home/Chez Soi and the Health and Housing in Transition study (Hwang et al., 2012; Waegemakers Schiff & Rook, 2012). Notably, these interventions focused on single adults with mental illness experiencing homelessness, which precludes insight into homelessness among families, single parents, and multi-generational households. Nevertheless, research into Housing First initiatives has shown them to be effective in the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, Ireland, and several European countries (Waegemakers Schiff & Rook, 2012).

The At Home/Chez Soi intervention compared 990 people receiving standard care to 1158 participants in the Housing First group who received programs across five Canadian cities between 2009 and 2013, with outcome measures collected over 2-years (Aubry et al., 2015). People in the Housing First group remained in stable housing 73% of the time compared to the standard care group (32% of the time) and the discrepancy was similar among those with high needs. On measures of community functioning, quality of life, and observer-rated mental health, Housing First participants improved more on average than standard care participants (O'Campo et al., 2016). Relatedly, the Health and Housing in Transition longitudinal study ($n = 1190$) found that the perceived quality (i.e., comfort, safety, spaciousness, privacy) of living spaces was consistently associated with improved (mental and physical) health-related quality of life over several years among people experiencing and at risk of homelessness (C. Magee et al., 2019). Additionally, interviews with participants in this intervention and At Home/Chez Soi

demonstrated that support for stable housing and positive and supportive social networks were key factors in having a positive future (Aubry et al., 2015).

     Multimodal Interventions. Multimodal interventions incorporate a range of components and/or harness the efforts of different service providers to address the needs of marginalized groups. As an example, Bridges to Housing is a Toronto-based Housing First project which established a partnership between fragmented health care, housing, and disability service providers to support adults with intellectual disabilities to exit homelessness (Lamanna et al., 2020). A thematic analysis of interviews with service users and providers identified that the acceptability and success of the program were attributed to its capacity to address complexity, support choice and compromise (of housing options), and effective collaboration and communication (e.g., about strengths and needs) between partners (Lamanna et al., 2020). In a separate initiative, The Banyan, a mental health organization based in Chennai (India), draws on a multimodal and user-centred framework to support people living in poverty with mental health recovery, listens to client needs through a continuous open dialogue with staff, and regularly adapts their services to suit those needs (Narasimhan et al., 2019). In sum, given the complexity and diversity of needs of people living in poverty and often with mental and physical health conditions, a multidisciplinary systems approach is often needed for designing effective interventions that provide housing and service options to address people's long-term care needs.

     Intervention Acceptability. Acceptability of interventions is critical because marginalized groups can be distrustful of others in general due to exploitation in previous research. Specifically, prior experiences with physical and structural violence (e.g., unequal access to, and discrimination within, healthcare and employment settings) influence poor attitudes toward health and social service professionals, low self-esteem, and feelings of stigmatization

(Magwood et al., 2019). Interventions that elicit trust and provide personal safety set the basis for facilitating positive self-identity, continuity of care, as well as connections with integrated support services (Magwood et al., 2019). Those leading (health) interventions should therefore ask questions such as: Who stands to benefit from this study – researchers or participants? How have we systematically ensured maximum benefit for participants? Notably, this type of forethought is critical and, of direct relevance for my thesis research, community members and researchers from Vancouver's Downtown Eastside have advocated for it specifically (Boilevin et al., 2019).

Community-Level Approaches. Case management is a commonly used approach to service provision that connects people experiencing homelessness to various (health, housing, and/or community) services. Case managers serve multiple practical functions to support clients such as by helping them with independent living skills, supporting medical or psychiatric treatment, outreach, assessment, planning, linkage, monitoring, and advocacy. In the following section, I discuss the four prevalent models of case management, namely, Standard and Intensive Case Management, Assertive Community Treatment, and Critical Time Intervention.

Case Management. Each type of case management operates in different ways (de Vet et al., 2013). Intensive Case Management involves an individual case manager and Assertive Community Treatment incorporates a multidisciplinary team, with both offering direct outreach and comprehensive service provision to homeless people with the highest need on an ongoing basis. Standard Case Management, in contrast, involves an individual case manager coordinating services for people with standard needs on a time-limited basis, placing less emphasis on the client-case manager relationship. Critical Time Interventions involve an individual case manager

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focusing on continuity of care at critical transition points in the lives of people experiencing homelessness by providing time-limited services and coordination (typically for nine months).

A prominent systematic review by de Vet et al. (2013) examined the effectiveness of the four prevalent models of case management for people experiencing homelessness, that drew from 21 randomized control trials and quasi-experimental studies comparing case management to other services. The authors found that (1) Standard Case Management improved housing stability, reduced substance use, and removed employment barriers for adults with concurrent substance use, (2) Assertive Community Treatment also improved housing stability and was cost-effective for people with mental illness experiencing homelessness, and (3) there was little evidence for the effectiveness of Intensive Case Management (de Vet et al., 2013).

Despite those findings, there is mixed evidence and a dearth of literature on how to effectively implement holistic support roles (such as those fulfilled by case managers) into the community for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness (de Vet et al., 2013; Goeman et al., 2019). Recent community interventions have instead focused on supporting the autonomy of people experiencing homelessness, such as via direct cash transfers of $7500 CAD which helped recipients move faster into stable housing, improved food security, and reduced their reliance on social services (Foundations for Social Change, 2020).

Critical Time Interventions. The systematic review by de Vet and colleagues (2013) showed that Critical Time Interventions had the most pronounced improvements on housing stability compared to the other three case management models. Critical Time Interventions were also cost-effective and reduced psychiatric symptoms and substance use among people with mental illness experiencing homelessness (de Vet et al., 2013). In a subsequent multicentre parallel group randomized control trial (RCT), de Vet and colleagues (2017) compared the

effectiveness of a nine month Critical Time Intervention to usual care with 183 adults moving

out of Dutch homeless shelters to supported or independent housing. While Critical Time

Interventions differ from usual care in a number of ways, they primarily involve gradually

passing responsibility to community services for ongoing support after the intervention ends,

with the goal of reducing future risk of homelessness. This involves spending more time with

clients when they most need support, such as immediately after they transition into housing,

unlike usual services which are often unavailable once clients are housed (de Vet et al., 2017).

In their RCT, de Vet and colleagues (2017) showed that the Critical Time Intervention

significantly increased family support and, for those with less social support, reduced

psychological distress. Groups did not differ on the secondary variables of social support,

fulfillment of care needs, excessive alcohol use, cannabis use, self-esteem, or quality of life. It

should also be noted, however, that in relation to the trial's primary outcome (number of days

rehoused) no differences were found between the experimental and usual care group at nine-

months (de Vet et al., 2017). Over an 18-month follow-up period, a separate RCT found that

when usual care is combined with a Critical Time Intervention after discharge from psychiatric

hospitalization, risk of homelessness was significantly reduced (compared to a usual care only

group; Herman et al., 2011). Given the discrepancy in housing outcomes, it is still unclear to

what extent Critical Time Interventions play a causal role in reducing homelessness.

Parenthetically, Currie and colleagues (2018) examined whether usual outpatient services

offered within seven days of hospital discharge were associated with a reduced likelihood of re-

hospitalization among a sample of people experiencing homelessness and mental illness in

Vancouver. Within one-year, 53% of their sample ($n = 128$) were re-hospitalized, demonstrating

that typical outpatient services (aimed at preventing re-hospitalization) are not effective for

people experiencing homelessness, in contrast to positive effects in samples of non-homeless people (Currie et al., 2018). When taken together, the above findings support the importance of interventions specifically targeted to supporting homeless people during key transition points in the lives (i.e., Critical Time Interventions) compared to usual care. When applied at critical transition points (e.g., discharge from hospital), Critical Time Interventions may reduce homelessness and enhance the effectiveness of long-term supports among people with mental illness living in the community when compared to usual care (de Vet et al., 2017; Herman et al., 2011).

Social Participation and Well-being. Social participation reflects an involvement in interpersonal interactions with close friends, family, within the community, or society-at-large. This can include participation in various activities, such as through employment, recreation, education, or social service providers. For example, homeless shelters may offer group activities like gardening to provide people experiencing homelessness with opportunities for social interaction and to develop their social skills (Rutenfrans-Stupar, et al., 2019a). Social participation is particularly relevant to homeless populations because not only do they experience severe social exclusion, but their well-being is enhanced when they feel connected to other members of a social group (Johnstone et al., 2016).

Two studies by Rutenfrans-Stupar et al. (2019a; 2019b) explored predictors of enhancing, and the relationship between, social participation and subjective well-being (defined as quality of life, self-esteem, and absence of psychological distress) among clients of a Dutch homeless shelter facility. These studies examined how social participation (defined as engaging in relationships with family and friends) was affected by engagement with several supervised activities, categorised as educational (e.g., computer course), recreational (e.g., sports), and

labour (e.g., gardening). Irrespective of age, participation in group activities was found to directly predict well-being (mediated by social participation; Rutenfrans-Stupar et al. (2019a). In a subsequent qualitative study, Rutenfrans-Stupar and colleagues (2019b) reported that after participating in the supervised activities mentioned above, clients strengthened their social support network, made new friends, and reported improved (mental and physical) health, communication skills, self-esteem, and personal growth. Taken together, these findings demonstrate how voluntary participation in various supervised activities benefits the well-being and social participation of clients who experience homelessness. However, more research is needed to explore the effectiveness of such programs for facilitating social participation within society-at-large.

Group Membership, Well-Being, and Homelessness. In addition to the provision of opportunities for social participation and redressing housing, additional work has sought to foster a sense of connectivity among people experiencing homelessness via membership in various social groups as a means of promoting well-being. A body of work has recently emerged which demonstrates how feeling connected to members of a group via shared social identity (i.e., a sense of 'us') can enhance health and well-being (S. A. Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2017). This research has important implications for people who experience homelessness because discrimination can inhibit them from connecting with groups in their extended network that could otherwise be an important source of social support (Johnstone, Jetten, et al., 2015). Further, although self-identifying as homeless can exacerbate feelings of stigma and discrimination, it can be essential for accessing various services (Walter et al., 2015).

The Effects of Self-Identifying as 'Homeless'. Given that objective definitions of homelessness do not always align with whether people self-identify as homeless, emerging

research on social identity has sought to better understand how the subjective experience of homeless identification impacts perceptions of well-being (O'Grady et al., 2020; Walter et al., 2015). Respondents in one study who rejected identifying with an externally imposed 'homeless' label reported lower negative mood symptoms and greater well-being than people who accepted the label, regardless of how long they had been homeless (Walter et al., 2015). A separate study showed that when people experiencing homelessness feel discriminated against based on their group identity (compared to personal discrimination), this was related to follow-up indicators of reduced group memberships and lower well-being (Johnstone, Jetten, et al., 2015).

Interestingly, feeling connected to a homeless accommodation and supported by the staff can potentially promote subsequent well-being (Johnstone et al., 2016). Self-identifying with various groups (e.g., at a homeless accommodation or social group) can help people experiencing homelessness navigate externally imposed labels, stigma, and discrimination through social support that could protect against such discrimination. Research into the psychological processes through which this self-identification occurs is crucial because of its potential influence on whether people feel connected and valued enough to access various housing or health-related support services (Walter et al., 2015). Further, this type of research could help such services better understand the experiences of people with various identities from diverse housing situations and create environments that promote a sense of belonging and social connectedness.

Deriving one's sense of self based on *multiple group memberships* (i.e., multiple social identities) is another mechanism through which well-being can be fostered among people experiencing homelessness (Johnstone et al., 2016). Membership in multiple groups can help people feel a sense of connectedness, belongingness, and cope with discrimination through access to social support. Indeed, one potential way that people experiencing homelessness can

foster well-being is by participating in, and identifying with, physical activity and sporting groups.

Homelessness and Group-Based Physical Activity

Numerous group-based physical activity and sport programs among homeless populations have aimed to foster well-being, encourage health-promoting behaviours, reduce social isolation, and improve physical health (Gregg & Bedard, 2016; Malden et al., 2019; Sofija et al., 2018). Accordingly, this section draws on studies from three focal areas: group-based physical activity and well-being, the Homeless World Cup, and street soccer programs.

Group fitness programs for people who experience homelessness have been identified as potentially valuable for supporting well-being through addressing both the complex health issues among this group and fostering social connections (Sofija et al., 2018). Interviews with previously homeless participants in one Australian group fitness program supported the perceived importance of social connection, with one participant stating, "I love the company when exercising. I can do more than I thought" (Sofija et al., 2018, p. 11). Similarly, Malden and colleagues (2019) conducted semi-structured evaluation interviews with 10 participants in the Street Fit Scotland program for people experiencing homelessness in Edinburgh, Scotland. An important feature of the Street Fit program was the provision of opportunities for participants to attend a subsequent peer support workshop to socialize, speak with a social worker or nurse, or listen to guest speakers give seminars. Participants reported that their self-esteem improved, and social interactions increased, which together supported their mental well-being. Outside of the program, participants also reported making healthier choices (e.g., reduced drug use and improved diet) and increased physical activity levels (Malden et al., 2019). Indeed, there is growing support for programs which aim to promote sustained physical activity among people

who experience homelessness due to the associated physical health benefits (Stringer et al., 2019).

      The Homeless World Cup. The Homeless World Cup (HWC) was created to offer people experiencing homelessness a chance to build social connections, access support services, and build confidence to make changes in their own life (www.homelessworldcup.org). Since the HWC has grown, so too has its obligations to corporate sponsors, seemingly contradicting its primary goals of social inclusion (for a full historical analysis, see Attali et al., 2018). Magee and Jeanes (2011) conducted semi-structured interviews at the beginning and end of the inaugural HWC in 2003, in which players described complex positive and negative experiences. Their thematic analysis showed that participants enjoyed *having something to focus on* while preparing for the HWC, which increased feelings of self-worth, team camaraderie, excitement to go overseas, and pride through collective effort and accountability (e.g., reduced desire to drink given the potential negative impact on the team; J. Magee & Jeanes, 2011). In a separate study, Australian players training for the HWC formed support networks with multiple community organizations to address their needs outside of soccer such as rehabilitation from substance or alcohol use (Sherry, 2010). Participation in the HWC, by fulfilling their commitment to train and compete, helped players feel capable to address mental and physical challenges in other areas of their lives (Gregg & Bedard, 2016; Jarvie & Ahrens, 2019).

      In contrast, Segura and colleagues (2017) acknowledged the significant emotional and symbolic impact of losing a game at the HWC through feelings of negative self-worth and stigma. Segura et al. (2017) interviewed players of the French delegation during and after multiple HWC tournaments before thematically analyzing transcripts and participant observation field notes using Goffman's theories of self-presentation (1959) and stigma (1963). In contrast to

prior *stigmatized self-perceptions*, participants entered competitions presenting *positive selves as footballers*, yet felt the experience of losing games resurfaced feelings of stigma that threatened this new self-presentation (Segura M. Trejo et al., 2017). Ultimately, such losses confirmed "concerns that they were not capable of surviving within mainstream society and reinforcing the negative views they already held of themselves" (J. Magee & Jeanes, 2011, p. 13).

Magee and Jeanes (2011) noted that after losing most of their matches and despite their intentions to stay healthy, players at the 2003 HWC began drinking excessively, struggled to sleep, and felt severe anxiety and self-doubt (within and outside the tournament). The resurfacing of previously held feelings of stigma among players could be an unintended effect of heightened inter-team competition at the HWC – a contest ostensibly aimed at promoting social inclusion and connectivity. The growth of the HWC has also coincided with the growth of sport for development initiatives globally, in particular, through community street soccer programs designed to support people experiencing homelessness (Sherry & Strybosch, 2012).

Sport and Physical Activity Interventions: Barriers and Limitations. Community street soccer programs for people experiencing homelessness can help foster social connection (e.g., through belonging, cross-cultural understanding, and reducing perceived exclusion), self-esteem, and increase health-promoting behaviours (e.g., physical activity, reduced substance use; Sherry & Strybosch, 2012). However, despite the positive social connection and motivation fostered among homeless men in the English Premier League-funded (EPL) 'Football in the Community' health intervention, players experienced economic (e.g., cost of transport) and social barriers (e.g., meetings with support workers overlapped with training) to participation which resulted in low attendance (Curran et al., 2016). As Curran and colleagues noted, practitioners should be better informed before engaging homeless populations in soccer

programs – such as by providing funding for transportation or streamlined access to social services in their community – to avoid exacerbating negative feelings or internalized stigma.

Framed as *health* interventions, community street soccer programs that are short (e.g., 12-weeks) or have a specified end date raise the question about who such interventions primarily benefit: researchers employed by private leagues (e.g., the EPL) to evaluate the program's relative *success*, or the homeless participants who receive no external support (e.g., with housing or social services)? Participating in short-term sport programs or competitions might positively, or even negatively, impact homeless participants' ability to develop new and more affirmative identities. Longitudinal studies are clearly needed to more fully explore the extent to which these identities could be (positively) fostered through longer-term sport initiatives. The following quote illustrates the *potential* mental health benefits of such community-based sport programs, "you haven't got time to be depressed if you have to chase a man and a ball" (Sherry & Strybosch, 2012, p. 503).

Gaps in Existing Literature. Clift (2019) acknowledged that community sport programs exist in a societal context where people who experience homelessness are perceived as "unruly" and "ungovernable" (p. 92) persons who live unhoused due to a failure of self-responsibility. Juxtaposed with these labels, people experiencing homelessness who involve themselves in physical activity initiatives are often celebrated for their efforts toward health self-sufficiency and "productivity" (p. 92) and achieving health outcomes (Clift, 2019). In light of this, sport and physical activity have been lauded by health professionals as valuable and healthy endeavours for people who experience homelessness (Sofija et al., 2018). However, limited research describes participants' unique attitudes and feelings toward such endeavours. As noted by Ensign (2003), researchers can facilitate opportunities for participants' experiencing homelessness to

describe "their lives and experiences" (p. 46). Such research has the potential to elicit candid perspectives about the perceived value of community sport programs in participants' lives.

In sum, there are various structural and community-level perspectives that have contributed to understanding and addressing the health consequences of homelessness. Of note, group-based sport and physical activity have the potential to enhance individual health through promoting well-being and social connectivity (Jarvie & Ahrens, 2019). Through this study, I seek to address a gap in the literature to understand how participation in a community soccer program potentially contributes to participant social connection, social identity, and well-being. This was done through partnering with a local sport program for people who experience homelessness: the VSSL. This research will help better understand participant experiences within sport and physical activity programs specifically aimed at fostering the well-being of people who experience homelessness. It is anticipated that this study will support emerging research on social identity, homelessness, and well-being, with a unique theoretical and methodological contribution by focusing on the role of sport participation.

Research Questions

In light of research gaps described above, the following questions form the basis of my thesis:

1. In what ways do people who have experienced homelessness form a social identity from playing in the VSSL?

2. What features of the VSSL program are perceived to contribute to well-being or ill-being among people who have experienced homelessness?

3. In what ways do people who have experienced homelessness perceive the VSSL social identity to contribute to well-being or ill-being?

4. In what ways does the VSSL social identity relate to other social identities participants may have?

Theoretical Framework: Presenting the Social Identity Approach to Health

The social identity approach is an approach to health that is presented within a *sociopsychobio* behavioural science framework. Recently, Haslam and colleagues (2019) critiqued the widely used *biopsychosocial model of health* for inadvertently reproducing a hierarchy of knowledge that privileges biomedical understandings and sidelines the influence of social factors (S. A. Haslam et al., 2019). The *sociopsychobio* framework, presented in contrast, considers social (group) life not as an appendage to biology and psychology, but rather as a basis for collective experience that shapes both (S. A. Haslam et al., 2019). In essence, the social identity approach considers the *self* as inextricable from ones' group memberships (i.e., social identities; Turner & Reynolds, 2012). It is comprised of two distinct, but highly inter-related, theories: social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorization theory (SCT; Turner & Reynolds, 2012).

Social identity theory is a theory of intergroup relations concerned with the way that identification with ingroups in contrast to outgroups shapes behaviour. Social identities are evident when people talk about 'us' and 'we', in contrast to 'they' and 'them'. SCT, on the other hand, focuses on within-group processes to a greater extent. As Turner and Reynolds (2012) note, the social identity approach elucidates inter- and intra-group processes embedded within their social context:

> SIT and SCT capture the socially embedded, situated, shared, social, group-located properties of human beings. This view contrasts with other approaches that reduce the working of the mental system to general (individual) psychological properties (e.g., information processing and memory systems) or the asocial (social environment-free) nature of the individual perceiver (e.g., personality, biology). (p. 1)

Within the social identity approach it is posited that a positive and meaningful social life significantly contributes to individual health and well-being (Jetten et al., 2017). Specifically, social identity and social connectivity are recognized for their capacities to help people address a range of health challenges (e.g., chronic mental health conditions, addiction, social isolation; Beauchamp & Rhodes, 2020; C. Haslam et al., 2018). A sense of shared social identity can improve individual health through fostering a positive orientation to others, a sense of meaning, self-worth, and agency (C. Haslam et al., 2018). This approach to health can also help people manage underlying social factors (e.g., stigma, social disadvantage). One meta-analysis found that social support and social integration were equally influential on *physical* health outcomes (e.g., morbidity, immune function) when compared to well-established mortality risk factors such as smoking or obesity (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010). Due to the positive well-being and improved health which comes when one feels a sense of belonging and connected to others, the social identity approach to health has been described as *a social cure* (C. Haslam et al., 2018). Although sport programs mentioned previously have seen similar effects when applying the social identity approach to health, no research has applied this approach to sport settings with people who have experienced homelessness.

Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory was originally conceptualized by Henri Tajfel, when his ground-breaking *minimal group studies* (1972) highlighted the ingroup favouritism and outgroup rejection by participants placed in groups that were created on the basis of minimal (and arbitrary) criteria. Specifically, Tajfel and colleagues (1971) asked schoolboys to assign points to two laboratory groups, one to which they belonged and one to which they did not. Without knowing the individual beneficiaries and receiving nothing themselves, they tended to favour (by

assigning more points to) their own ingroup and discriminate against the other outgroup. Social identity refers to the internalised sense of self we derive, as individuals, from the various social groups to which we belong (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). 'The self' is typically seen in individual terms in much mainstream psychology (e.g., *self*-esteem, *self*-regulation), but less often defined in terms of our social 'selves' (C. Haslam et al., 2018). As SIT suggests, we tend to define our identities not as inherently unique to us, but as based on similar characteristics to others with whom we share group membership. Through this sense of group belongingness, we are motivated to enhance positive identity (i.e., strong self-concept and enhanced well-being) by (a) determining the meaning and social standing of our groups through comparisons to relevant outgroups, and (b) differentiating our ingroups positively from those outgroups (C. Haslam et al., 2018).

Research with soccer fans, for example, demonstrated that an injured stranger wearing an ingroup (e.g., Manchester United) team shirt is more likely to be helped after falling over than if they wore an outgroup (e.g., Liverpool) team or nonbranded sports shirt (Levine et al., 2005). Social identity theory, then, outlines the boundaries within which group behaviour manifests (through shared social identity) and the basis for which inter-group behaviour can occur (through positively discriminating ingroups from outgroups). However, it does not clarify the *precursors* and *consequences* of social identity and social identification (C. Haslam et al., 2018). For that, I turn to self-categorization theory.

Self-Categorization Theory

Self-categorization theory explicates the cognitive processes by which people categorize themselves and others *within* various social groups. This occurs through self-categorization at different levels of abstraction (e.g., as an individual group member, as a member of some groups

but not others, and as a member of an inclusive superordinate group; Turner & Reynolds, 2012).

The core processes of SCT include depersonalization, and the extent to which an identity is

salient based on its *accessibility* and *fit* within any given context. Depersonalization refers to the

process by which people define themselves (and others) not by unique and individualized

characteristics but as members of a larger social category (by differentiating 'we' from 'I';

Turner, 1982).

Perceived *fit* can be differentiated based on normative and comparative components.

Comparative fit is defined as the perceived differences of one social category when compared to

another. Normative fit, in contrast, is defined as the extent to which people within a given social

category display behaviours that are expected within that social category. The *accessibility* of

social categories varies between people in any given context depending on their previous

experiences, expectations, and goals. When taken together, SCT describes the ways in which we

self-categorize (i.e., fit) into various social groups (Oakes et al., 1994; Turner et al., 1994).

Indeed, the extent to which people identify with some groups over others influences their

emotional, cognitive, and behavioural engagement with those groups (C. Haslam et al., 2018).

When people feel connected to others within their social groups (via this process of

categorization) they tend to experience positive benefits. These include an enhanced ability to

manage social factors such as stigma, health challenges such as addiction and social isolation, a

greater sense of self-esteem, as well as improved physical and mental health and well-being (C.

Haslam et al., 2018; Holt-Lunstad et al., 2010; Jetten et al., 2017). Given the previously

described (health) challenges faced by adults experiencing homelessness, I am interested in

whether identification with others (e.g., teammates, coaches, volunteers) in the VSSL is able to

afford those same benefits for this specific population. As such, the social identity approach

represents a particularly useful theoretical framework for my thesis because it considers how (shared) social identities influence well-being within individual life histories and current social contexts.

Paradigmatic Lens

Epistemological Constructionism. Constructionism is an appropriate epistemology for my thesis study as it foregrounds participants' own constructions and understandings of their social identity, as represented through discourse (i.e., language representing cognitive and emotional meaning; B. Smith & McGannon, 2017; Wiggins, 2017). Knowledge is thus context-sensitive and co-constructed between the participants (which, as described in the Methods section, was done through a social identity mapping activity and semi-structured interview) and the researcher for interpretation and discussion. Brubaker and Cooper (2000) stated that identities are an *essentialist appeal to who we are,* and we act in accordance with them (i.e., we *do* this because we *are* this). In my study, I sought to understand the meanings, descriptions, and psychological resources (e.g., sense of belonging) that each participant derived from, and attributed to, their various social identities. This process is highly interpretive, participant-driven, and can be connected to broader relational processes embedded in group life.

Previous research has been critiqued for reproducing stigma by treating participants who experience homelessness as intractable *problems to be solved* rather than dignified and fellow citizens experiencing economic and social hardship (Lister, 2015). Indeed, a notable strength of qualitative research is that it can provide equitable opportunities for participants who are marginalized to contribute to the "meaning making" process as part of research (Potts & Brown, 2005). This represents an important contribution considering the social identity approach to health research has primarily been quantitative in nature (Jetten et al., 2017; Tewari et al., 2012).

In sum, Kenneth Gergen's (1994) five basic assumptions of social constructionist research will guide my study:

1. "The terms by which we account for the world and ourselves are not dictated by the stipulated objects of such accounts". That is, no general principles can constrain the arbitrary way we ("signifiers") communicate about or represent the world ("the signified"). (p. 49)

2. "The terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and ourselves are social artifacts, products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people" (p. 49). For example, scientists strive for *methodological rigour* precisely *because* these words are given meaning through centuries-old social procedures (i.e., scientific inquiry).

3. The degree to which accounts "of the world or self are sustained across time" depends "not on the objective validity of the account" but on fluctuations in related social process (p. 51). For example, in recent years qualitative researchers have increasingly used interviews as a method (B. Smith & Sparkes, 2016), and accounts of this trend depend not on how the interviews are used (i.e., their objective validity), but rather the pragmatic ways in which academics agree to do their work.

4. "Language derives its significance in human affairs from the way in which it functions within patterns of relationship" (p. 52). That is, language does not represent *what is there* so much as it represents the *way we talk about what we think* is there, and both these functions influence human affairs. For example, scientists appraise their colleagues' work based on its relative significance vis-à-vis agreed upon norms about scientific knowledge production.

5. "To appraise existing forms of discourse is to evaluate patterns of cultural life; such evaluations give voice to other cultural enclaves" (p. 53). For example, discourse about cognition (e.g., through scientific research) can be evaluated based on its social consequences

(its contribution to scientific knowledge) and the ways scientific knowledge about cognition

is produced (e.g., through different methodological approaches) in different cultural contexts.

Ontological Relativism. Reality is impossible to access directly but can be understood as

it is represented (e.g., through language; Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). A main ontological

consideration for this study corresponded to the ways language shapes how knowledge (and

reality) is understood, including scientific knowledge. Jørgensen and Phillips (2002) stated it best

by noting that "as with all other discourses, scientific discourse produces knowledge, social

relations and identities" (p. 18). As such, the existence of reality is not *denied*, but rather socially

constructed. In my study I considered reality to be made up "of multiple, created, mind-

dependent realities" (B. Smith & McGannon, 2017, p. 4).

Potter (2012) asserted "how vital it is for social psychologists to systematically study the

machinery that generates their findings" (p. 447). A relativist ontology was selected in this study

to provide unique insights into the lived experience of the players experiencing homelessness

whom I interviewed. Specifically, it enabled me to examine the ways participants describe

meaningful experiences within, and attitudes towards, the VSSL and their other social groups.

Distinguishing Paradigms: Social Constructionism and Constructivism.

Constructivism is a psychological theory of individual learning and development (Piaget, 1959;

Vygotsky, 1978). Poucher and colleagues (2020), in their review of paradigms used within sport

psychology over the last 30 years, define constructivist research as that which examines

individual experiences and understandings of a given topic (e.g., doping in sport) but pays little

attention to how culture or historical context might shape those experiences. Citing Burr (2003),

they note that social constructionist research, in contrast, considers how power relations, society,

and cultures shape individual experiences (Poucher et al., 2020). Regarding the paradigmatic

approach to this study, I concur with Burr (2018) that "perceived tensions between social constructionism and individual psychology, especially constructivist approaches, […] have been more imagined (or even desired) than real" (p. 372). Individual subjectivity – of the researcher and participants, for example – plays an important role in social constructionist research as it shapes the portrayal of social reality as represented in the research process (e.g., interviews) and outputs (e.g., articles). As such, I believe social constructionism and constructivism are too alike in how they represent the nature of knowledge and reality to warrant an explicit distinction.

Research Setting: Downtown Eastside and the Vancouver Street Soccer League

  Downtown Eastside. There are over 2000 individuals living in Vancouver who identify as homeless (Vancouver Homeless Count, 2019). With the highest rates of poverty in British Columbia, 60% of people who experience homelessness in Vancouver live in the Downtown Eastside (hereafter, DTES) neighbourhood, and 40% identify as Indigenous (Vancouver Homeless Count, 2019). Undoubtedly, daily life for people living on the DTES comes with complex challenges – with high rates of drug use, high risk of violence toward Indigenous women (Bingham et al., 2019; Martin & Walia, 2019), and seemingly deviant yet necessary strategies of survival (e.g., panhandling; Vancouver Homeless Count, 2019). For decades, poets, community organizers, researchers, and activists have written about homelessness, drug overdose, police authority, and caring for community members within Vancouver's DTES (Boyd et al., 2009). In spite of this, common portrayals of the DTES consider the precarious material and social living conditions as relatively unchanged. In addition, government reports and the general media**,** which typically focus on health outcomes, epidemiological understandings, and institutional responses to *tackle poverty*, often superficially, if at all, include the perspectives of DTES residents (Currie, Moniruzzaman, et al., 2014; Government of British Columbia, 2019).

Research to date has inadequately articulated the diversity of experiences and identities among people experiencing homelessness. As such, academics who conduct research *on*, rather than *with*, people experiencing homelessness not only oversimplify the experience of homelessness but simultaneously risk marginalizing participants. For instance, historical and ongoing injustices against Indigenous women, youth, and men–who are greatly overrepresented in Canada's homeless population–risk being minimized when 'homeless people' are framed as a homogenous group (Gaetz et al., 2016; Kidd et al., 2019). Furthermore, the concept of Indigenous homelessness–not just an absence of housing, but a loss of a cultural, spiritual, emotional, or physical connection to one's Indigeneity and relationships–is rarely acknowledged in the literature (Thistle, 2017; Vancouver Homeless Count, 2019). In short, and as noted above, more affirmative representations of homeless people in the literature are needed. People experiencing homelessness should be recognized as active social agents characterised by industriousness and resilience as opposed to a singularly homogenous, *at risk*, or *vulnerable* group (Lee et al., 2010; Meanwell, 2012). The proposed study aimed to address this gap through adopting a paradigmatic framework that elucidates the experience of homelessness through participant-guided perspectives, understandings, and identities (Lister, 2015).

Vancouver Street Soccer League. The Vancouver Street Soccer League is a volunteer-run organization that has been operating as an independent non-profit organization on Vancouver's downtown east side since 2009. Before 2009, the VSSL was formed by the Vancouver Police Department and managed in partnership with the Portland Hotel Society, a non-profit organization based in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. On their website the VSSL states that through community outreach they seek to "address the issue of homelessness, marginalization, and addiction through inclusivity and soccer – believing we can enhance all of

our lives through the principles of Fair Play, Community Building, Supportive Partnerships, and Health and Safety" (Vancouver Street Soccer League, 2020, para. 1). The VSSL Board of Directors are comprised of three subcommittees: operations, fundraising, and communication (A. Cornish, personal communication, March 1, 2020). They are funded – thanks to work by the fundraising subcommittee – through a combination of donations, grants, and sponsors such as Vancity Credit Union.

The VSSL holds various open practices – organized by the operations subcommittee – two days per week at 10am, on Thursdays at Andy Livingstone Park and on Sundays at Strathcona Park. However, these were cancelled from March to September 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic and are now (at the time of writing this thesis) held only on Sunday's due to low attendance. Previously they have sent athletes to compete internationally at four Homeless World Cups, and regularly host matches against local organizations such as the Vancouver Police Department and the UBC Medical School. Players, volunteers, and staff have opportunities to socially connect every week at their open practice, but also online through a private Facebook group and public Instagram page that are managed by the communications subcommittee. Additionally, every summer the VSSL participates in a June Sports soccer tournament in Alert Bay, B.C. (CBC News, 2018), which was also cancelled in 2020 and 2021.

My Role. I attended 30 Sunday practices from September 27, 2020, onwards. Most were at Andy Livingstone Park until August 2021 when they moved to Oppenheimer Park, also within Vancouver's DTES. Based on jotted head counts at or immediately after each practice I attended (Case et al., 2014), there was an average of 13 players at each practice with approximately 400 attendances by 92 different players. Approximately four practices were cancelled due to government restrictions on group sport during the spring of 2021 but instead they involved

getting together to socially connect safely in person without soccer equipment. At all times the program's staff, volunteers, players, and I adhered to the VSSL's COVID-19 safety protocols. My involvement at practices totalled over 50 hours of fieldwork.

To date, research with the VSSL has focused on changes in volunteer attitudes toward players (Agha et al., 2017), medical students' professional development (Bluman et al., 2013; Boyda et al., 2017), and self-reported changes to players' physical health over one-year (Bates et al., n.d.), but has yet to appear in peer-reviewed publications. To my knowledge, this is the first study to examine in-depth the experience of players in the VSSL. I engaged with staff and players of the VSSL by attending practices (as an overt participant) to build rapport and familiarise myself with the context (Bryman, 2016a; Yardley, 2000). My main goal was to ensure there was "no research without relationships" (Potts & Brown, 2005, p. 263), by paying equal attention to what I was trying to *know* (i.e., how social identity processes contribute to psychological well-being in a community sport program among people who experience homelessness) and the experiences of those closest to it (i.e., VSSL players as the *knowers*).

Chapter 2: Methods

In this section I outline the methodological approach that was used in this study. Underpinned by a constructionist epistemology and relativist ontology, my methods included a Social Identity Mapping activity, individual semi-structured interviews, and field notes. I also utilised reflective journaling in the form of an audit trail and researcher diary. Aligned with the principles of doing research on Vancouver's DTES recommended by community members, I consulted with, and received input from VSSL board members, volunteers, and players regarding project design, ethics, and recruitment (Boilevin et al., 2019). I first describe my methods in detail, before explicating my approach to data analysis and the ethical considerations of my proposed methodology.

Social Identity Mapping

The Social Identity Mapping tool (SIM) is a method for visually representing and assessing a person's subjective network of group memberships which helped answer my last research question (see page 26). It is a tool that can help to understand social identity constructs, is accessible for participants, and can help participants to gain insight into social identity dynamics (Cruwys et al., 2016). Social identity mapping has been used in various forms to explore group membership predictors of well-being in the workplace (S. A. Haslam et al., 2003), before and after stroke (C. Haslam et al., 2008), during recovery from substance addiction (Beckwith et al., 2019), for reflecting on researchers' social positioning (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019), and as a key component of an evidence-based social-identity intervention to improve mental health (C. Haslam et al., 2016).

The SIM provided participants the opportunity to visualise social identities in a way that is relevant to their lives (Bentley et al., 2020). Research suggests that perceptions, as opposed to

number, of social ties makes group membership psychologically relevant (Sani et al., 2012). In this study, users created their own social identity map in paper format by creating nodes (using 'Post-it' notes) of the different social groups with which they identified. Users selected those groups based on answers to questions such as, "I am a _____"; for example, "I am a teammate." While the online version of this activity is very similar to the 'paper version', Bentley et al. (2020) outlined the procedure for completing the paper SIM activity:

> Specifically, participants used separate Post-it notes to represent groups that were self-selected as relevant in their lives—choosing from small, medium, or large Post-it notes to represent groups of low, medium, and high importance, respectively. Participants then used Likert scales to rate the quality of their group memberships by answering questions about each group represented on each Post-it note, (e.g., "How positive do you feel about this group?," "How representative are you of this group?"). Finally, participants placed the Post-It notes on a sheet of paper in a spatial configuration that represented both the perceived similarity of groups to each other (with similar groups close together, and different groups far apart) and also their perceived compatibility (with straight lines drawn between two compatible groups and jagged lines drawn between two incompatible groups). (p. 3)

Importantly, SIM helps explicate a range of social identity processes that contribute to health and well-being (C. Haslam et al., 2008; S. A. Haslam et al., 2009; Jetten et al., 2017). These include group importance (i.e., size of post-it notes), multiple group memberships (i.e., number of groups), group positivity (i.e., rating how positive the group is), prototypicality (i.e., how representative one feels of the group), group similarity (i.e., how close groups are to each other), and group compatibility (i.e., group relationships indicated by straight or jagged lines).

SIM was a particularly useful method for this qualitative study. SIM can complement and facilitate the use of interpretive research methods, such as interviews. While previous studies have emphasized SIM's predictive, convergent, and discriminant validity, it can also form the basis of discussion points for participants to reflect on their social landscapes with a sense of agency (Bentley et al., 2020; Cascagnette et al., 2021; Cruwys et al., 2016). As such, SIM was combined with semi-structured interviews to provide an opportunity for people who experience

homelessness to reflect on their social groups. During interviews, participants could reflect on their feelings about the SIM activity, consider what was not captured by the map, and discuss the myriad ways social group memberships might contribute to their well-being.

Notably, what constitutes a social identity is highly interpretive. Each participant alluded to which groups were meaningful for them by virtue of including some groups on their map and not others (Bentley et al., 2020). The experiential aspect of the mapping process is similar to the 'saying-is-believing' principle, whereby participants use their own words (through writing, for example) to internalize adoption of a certain perspective (Walton et al., 2015). SIM enabled participants to generate insights into their own identities through a process of seeing-is-believing. While participants could include any social identity on the SIM, only those they included were considered in the subsequent analyses.

Individual Semi-Structured Interviews

Practically speaking, interviews provide an opportunity for conversation, a shared discourse between researchers and participants (B. Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Interviews, and in particular interviews exploring a psychological mechanism such as social identity, are "an arena for identifying and exploring participants' interpretative practices rather than an instrument for accessing a veridical account of something" (Potter, 1996, p. 15). As such, the semi-structured interview format is constrained by what language the interviewer does or does not use to (inadvertently or not) *guide* participant reflections (e.g., in direct response to a predetermined question). Nonetheless, different types of interviews, such as expert interviews, whereby participants are recruited to provide an expert opinion, for example, can serve different purposes.

I chose the semi-structured interview method, whereby I used an interview guide developed around central themes (e.g., experience with VSSL, social connectivity, social

identity), because it fostered participant agency in relation to the topics discussed and helped

answer my research questions. A copy of the interview guide is included in Appendix A.

Supporting autonomy in the research was important because I was an outsider directly benefiting

from interviewing members of the VSSL community, who represent a population that is

systematically marginalized (Boilevin et al., 2019). Interviews "can also generate insights into

the context in which people live. When researching sensitive topics that require a degree of trust,

rapport, and empathy between people, and an intimate setting to facilitate all this, interviews can

be useful" (B. Smith & Sparkes, 2016, p. 108). Accordingly, I encouraged rather than disrupted

elaborative points or stories that may have deviated from the interview guide. As an example,

combining curiosity-driven (i.e., detail-oriented, elaborative, and clarifying; B. Smith & Sparkes,

2016) questions helped explore how participant stories reflected themes of *quality* group

memberships (Bentley et al., 2020).

Participants were encouraged to share experiences, attitudes, and reflect on their time

with the VSSL. The interview guide was iterative (i.e., questions were added, changed or

excluded as I learned more about the topic; B. Smith & Sparkes, 2016) yet oriented around the

SIM activity, including questions about why participants chose certain groups and decisions

made while completing the map. As mentioned above, participants had the choice between in-

person interviews (aligned with VSSL and Provincial Health Authority COVID-19 Protocols at

the time of interview) or online using video conferencing software (Zoom, hosted by UBC).

Field Notes

I used field notes to capture noteworthy information, observations made during

interviews, consider the impacts of my social positioning on the study, and to aid recall of that

information during data analysis (B. Smith & Sparkes, 2016). Field notes were organized into

three sections: (1) overall impressions regarding my interactions with participants and behaviours during the interview (e.g., emotions elicited), (2) considerations for the overall project (e.g., things to change, follow-up on, consider for analysis, that reminded me of other interviews), and (3) general notes jotted down during interviews. Specifically, I focused on how the interview experience may have influenced the co-construction of meaning and how it could be changed, if needed, in the subsequent interview (Roger et al., 2018). I wrote field notes immediately after each interview to ensure details, feelings, and thoughts were captured thoroughly, totalling 30 single-spaced pages of field notes. An exemplar field note entry was:

> **February 15, 2021.** I notice myself asking similar questions that receive similar answers, and over several interviews I've gotten the impression that this is a limitation of my guide: the structured mapping activity followed by *semi*-structured interviews leads participants to answer in more structured ways and [become] less inclined to talk at length about stories or provide notable examples. This has differed between participants and to the extent I've used the guide. Indeed, some participants could likely see me looking down at the guide (away from the camera) and others may notice I'm more engaged in active listening.

Researcher Diary. Much like field notes, a researcher diary allowed me to reflect on my interactions with the VSSL staff, volunteers, and players and within the VSSL group itself (e.g., staff/volunteer/player interactions with each other, attitudes toward each other and me, the physical space). However, the researcher diary is distinct from field notes for two reasons. First, I used the researcher diary throughout all stages of the study, whereas I only took field notes after each interview. Second, my reflections focused on the social context of the research setting (i.e., the VSSL organization, Vancouver's DTES). For example, I reflected on my experiences interacting with Board members and players, playing at practices, and travelling to and from the research setting. I also reflected on how my increasing familiarity with the VSSL influenced my understandings of how participant experiences and social identities (are/were) shape(d) (by)

membership in the VSSL to help establish trustworthiness in my overall findings (Bradbury-

Jones, 2007). An exemplar researcher diary entry was:

> **November 1, 2020.** I get the sense there are three groups of players, in order of
> 'privileged VSSL status': Board members involved in organising games and long-time
> players committed to the VSSL as a non-profit (Jake, Will, Alesha[2]); long and short term
> casual players who enjoy the game of soccer (and may be involved in other pick-up
> games in Vancouver; Samuel, Phillip, Terry, Monica); long and short term
> volunteers/UBC Med students.

Audit Trail. I used an audit trail to record methodological decisions made throughout the

study, such as changes to interview settings or schedule, selecting interview participants, or

analysis decisions (Carcary, 2009). I also reflected on shifts in my paradigmatic and theoretical

understandings throughout the research process. For example, my understanding of social

identity theory and self-categorization theory changed as I examined them in the context of also

examining the perspectives of VSSL players who experience homelessness. An audit trail

enabled me to dialogue the ways my theoretical understandings, participant reflections (e.g., on

their understandings of social identity), and alternative interpretations of those understandings

(e.g., how strong social identification influences psychological safety) related to each other and

changed throughout the course of the study (Carcary, 2009). Additionally, maintaining

reflexivity through an audit trail, much like field notes, supported data analysis through

accessible recall of how my varied understandings and decisions influenced the research process

(B. Smith & Sparkes, 2016).

Quality in Qualitative Research. Ensuring quality in qualitative research has been the

focus of extensive debate among scholars in the sport, exercise, and health sciences and beyond

(Braun & Clarke, 2020; Burke, 2016; B. Smith & McGannon, 2017; Tracy, 2010). Considering

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[2] All names in this document are pseudonyms to protect the identity of VSSL members and others who frequented
Andy Livingstone Park or interacted with the VSSL.

arguments against a criterion-based approach to methodological quality, whereby universal criteria are used to evaluate all qualitative research, in this study I adopted a relativist approach. That is not to say that with a relativist approach *anything goes*. Instead, a relativist approach draws on various *characteristics* that are developed both *in situ* (i.e., are time and place contingent) and based on prevailing disciplinary agreements surrounding quality, trustworthiness, and importance (J. K. Smith & Hodkinson, 2009). An example of an in situ characteristic might be 'width', whereby evidence is presented in a full and comprehensive manner such as through the use of multiple, potentially contradicting, quotations, and where alternative interpretations are suggested (Burke, 2016).

The multi-method approach of SIM, interviews, and reflective journaling specifically addressed a need for *requisite variety*, whereby research instruments should "be at least as complex, flexible, and multifaceted as the phenomena being studied" (Tracy, 2010, p. 841). As such, I considered two characteristics as particularly salient to judge the rigour of research in this study: relevance and credibility (Burke, 2016). First, I aimed for my study to be relevant to VSSL staff, players, and stakeholders by contributing a nuanced perspective about the role of the VSSL in the lives of its players (Bryman, 2016c). Second, credibility is the degree to which participants' own understandings are foregrounded in the findings. I strived for credibility by allowing participants to elaborate in the interview on the choices they made while creating their SIM, and by using a range of quotations in the findings to give voice to their narratives.

In line with a relativist approach, I also suggest readers scrutinize the study based on relevant disciplinary agreements about quality criteria. Tracy (2010) and Bryman (2016a) suggest some criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research that readers may choose to consider when evaluating a given study. These include whether the research focuses on a worthy

topic, displays methodological rigour, whether the work makes a significant contribution, and the coherence of the study.

Participants

A total of 10 people who identified as having experienced homelessness, and had experience playing in the VSSL, participated in the study. Noteworthy identities among people living unhoused in Vancouver include those in relation to Indigeneity (33%), gender (73% men, 25% women, 2% non-binary), and age (67% 25-54 years of age, 24% 55+ years of age, 9% 24 years of age and under; BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 2020). Indigenous people are overrepresented among Vancouver's homeless population and are "13.2 times more likely to experience homelessness than their presence in the general population would predict" (BC Non-Profit Housing Association, 2020, p. 4). Six study participants identified as Indigenous (including as First Nations, Métis, and Navajo), and other self-identified cultural identities included white (European descent), Arab, and African. Participants ranged in age from 24-47 with a mean age of 33 years. Participants' gender identities included man ($n = 7$), woman ($n = 2$), and non-binary ($n = 1$). People who identify with genders other than man were less likely to participate in the study because they are less represented in Vancouver's overall homeless population, more likely to be hidden, and/or have caretaking responsibilities (Vancouver Homeless Count, 2019; Martin & Walia, 2019). Of note, the sample's demographic make-up in relation to age, Indigenous identity, and gender identity is comparable to that of Vancouver's homeless population according to the 2020 Homeless Count in Metro Vancouver (2020). Demographic information for the sample can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Information

Name	Age in years	Gender identity	Years played with the VSSL	Roles held in the VSSL	Current living situation	Living situation at time of joining the VSSL
Ainsley	27	Non-binary	5	Player	Was previously, but no longer homeless	Shelter
Will	42	Man	5	Player, Board member	Was previously, but no longer homeless	Shelter
Jayden	42	Man	7	Player	Street homeless	Street homeless
Alesha	47	Woman	9	Player, Board member	At-risk of homelessness / hidden homeless	At-risk of homelessness / hidden homeless
Terry	32	Man	8	Player	Was previously, but no longer homeless	Street homeless
Jake	36	Man	7	Player, Board member	Was previously, but no longer homeless	Shelter
Nick	27	Man	3	Player, Board member, Volunteer	Was previously, but no longer homeless	Street homeless
Cory	26	Man	5	Player	Was previously, but no longer homeless	Shelter
Hayley	35	Woman	3	Player	Was previously, but no longer homeless	Unknown
Dylan	24	Man	Less than one year	Player	Shelter	Shelter

Note. All names in this document are pseudonyms to protect the identity of VSSL members and others who frequented Andy Livingstone Park or interacted with the VSSL. Although all participants identified as current VSSL players, Ainsley and Hayley had not (at the time of conducting interviews) played since the outbreak of COVID-19 in Canada (March 2020).

Sampling. The number of interviews suitable for developing sufficiently rich insights to answer a set of research questions is often decided based on whether data saturation has been adequately addressed. Data saturation refers to when interviews are conducted until themes start to recur without generating new or meaningful insights (G. Guest et al., 2006). However, each interview is unique and has the potential to offer new theoretical insights (Braun & Clarke,

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2019b). As such, my sampling decisions constituted "an interpretive judgement related to the purpose and goals of the analysis" (Braun & Clarke, 2019b, p. 10). Given that neither the social identity approach nor SIM have been utilized in research with people who experience homelessness, I interviewed enough participants to ensure the data were both manageable and sufficient for providing a "new and richly textured understanding of experience" (Sandelowski, 1995, p. 183).

Purposive Sampling. I based my purposive sampling on three player status criteria (described below), the goal of answering my research questions, and suggestions that themes become fairly consistent after 6-12 interviews if the participants in a sample are somewhat similar (Braun & Clarke, 2019b; G. Guest et al., 2006). I recruited people who identified as having experienced homelessness and had experience playing in the VSSL. Further, I recruited players across three VSSL *player status* sampling categories: long-time players of six or more years (four), medium-term players of one or more years (five), and one new player of less than one year. Therefore, people who had not experienced homelessness nor played with the VSSL program were excluded from participating. I asked questions about participants' experiences playing and not playing with the VSSL to learn from participant dropout experiences, as these perspectives are often absent in sport and exercise research (Ponic & Frisby, 2010; Sofija et al., 2018). Each participant was compensated for their time with a $40 honorarium (Boilevin et al., 2019). My non-sequential sampling approach enabled participants from each category to generate new and alternative perspectives to my research questions (Bryman, 2016b).

Procedures

Recruitment. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) on September 16, 2020 (H20-02421). The sample

was feasible due to an evolving partnership with the VSSL Board of Directors who supported

this study (a letter of support is included in Appendix B). These gatekeepers helped me recruit

interested participants and ensure player safety was a foremost consideration. In accordance with

the Public Health Agency of Canada COVID-19 Guidelines for community sport programs and

the VSSL's safety protocols, I conducted in-person recruitment using verbal communication and

snowball sampling. VSSL contacts shared information about the study to peers/other VSSL

players and those who were interested in participating contacted me directly via email. In

addition, I recruited via email with the assistance of a gatekeeper (to a database of current and

past VSSL members; a copy of the email is included in Appendix C) and social media posts (in a

closed Facebook group for VSSL members). Importantly, I encouraged potential participants to

express interest in their own time and without gatekeeper influence. Details about the research

project and my contact information were shared for potential participants to express interest. I

recruited online to reach players who had not recently attended a VSSL practice or were more

accessible online. In total, seven participants were recruited at practices, two expressed interest

(one in-person and one via email) after seeing a recruitment post on the Facebook group, and one

participant expressed interest after a VSSL Board member shared a letter of information and

recruitment poster via email. Copies of the information letter and recruitment poster are included

in Appendices D and E, respectively.

      Interested participants were provided with an information letter via email or printed

copies at practices (depending on their preferences and whether they had access to a

computer/internet or not). Then, if they were interested in participating, we arranged (either via

email or in-person) to conduct an interview at a time and location (in-person or online) that

suited them (Bryman, 2016a). This approach enabled examination of social identities (and the

interview experience itself; B. Smith & Sparkes, 2016) that are differently influenced by, and understood within, the different (social) contexts of participants' lives, whether they were homeless (or not) at the time of conducting the research, and across the three player status sampling criteria (Boilevin et al., 2019; Potts & Brown, 2005). Verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant after reading through the consent form prior to interviewing. A copy of the consent form is included in Appendix F.

  Interviews and SIM. After obtaining verbal informed consent, each participant completed one semi-structured interview and SIM. Participants who were interviewed using online video sent me a photo of their completed SIM via email after the interview. Most interviews took place on Zoom (hosted by UBC; $n = 9$) and one interview was conducted in person at a mutually convenient and agreed upon location. All interviews were audio recorded (not video recorded) using either Zoom's local recording or the Voice Memos app using a password protected iPad. All interviews were transcribed verbatim using Zoom's Otter.ai transcription software. Any errors were corrected, and necessary adjustments were then made to each transcript. Interview transcripts were de-identified; any information that could have identified participants (e.g., name, workplace, etc.) was removed. The interviews ranged from 53 minutes to 107 minutes in length, with an average time of 83 minutes and combined total interview time of 13 hours and 51 minutes. The interviews yielded 346 single-spaced pages of transcripts in total. I noticed similarities between interviews after approximately six interviews.

Data Analysis

  Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) represents a theoretically and methodologically flexible data analysis tool for coding, categorising, and developing themes from qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2019a). Language is considered the central mechanism through

which psychological phenomena are experienced and made socially consequential (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). Language constructs meaningful representations about participants' social identities which I analyzed using RTA. In line with my theoretical and paradigmatic lens, and to sufficiently answer my research questions, RTA was the most appropriate method of data analysis as the patterns of meaning identified in the data drove the analysis (Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2019a). RTA emphasized *staying with* participants' understandings (of their social identities), as opposed to imposing one's own theoretical perspective onto their responses (B. Smith, 2016). Additionally, RTA encourages comparing interviews to establish representativeness in the findings (Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012, 2019a).

I broadly followed the six-step process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2019a). Before beginning the RTA process, I separated the transcripts into VSSL-related content (218 single-spaced pages) and SIM-related content (143 single-spaced pages). In the below section, I first discuss the six-steps which guided the RTA (i.e., generation of fully realised themes) of the VSSL-related content transcripts. Following that, I outline my descriptive analysis (i.e., using themes to guide creation of domain summaries) of the SIM-related transcripts, recognising that there was some coding overlap between the two sets of transcripts.

The first step involved *familiarising myself with the data* through transcription, repeated reading of the transcripts, and taking note of first impressions. During this familiarisation phase, I read the transcripts twice: once while amending and anonymising my transcripts and again while making detailed memos and annotations of noteworthy semantic and latent features of the data using the *GoodNotes* app on a password protected iPad.

Second, *generating initial codes* involved systematically coding and grouping notable features of the data across all interviews. I completed two rounds of abductive (deductive and

inductive) coding on the VSSL content transcripts. The first round involved coding for semantic and latent elements of each data segment based on its relevance to answering the overall research questions. Deductive coding involved drawing on extant concepts from the literature on social identity and self-categorization theories (e.g., group supportiveness, norm-enactment), well-being (e.g., social, psychological, and subjective), homelessness (e.g., ontological security), and health psychology (e.g., perceived or received social support, stress appraisals). In contrast, inductive coding placed greater emphasis on interpreting what participants *said* in relation to their own experiences, social identities, and my interactions with them at VSSL, rather than imposing extant concepts from the literature on their words, making it easier to entertain other potential interpretations. Abductive coding helped me articulate my interpretations of the data and allowed me to ask critical questions of those interpretations (e.g., does this interpretation resonate with what the participant said? Would someone else examining the data agree with my interpretations?) and consider what else I might *not* be seeing. My field notes, researcher diary, overarching research questions, perspective on the VSSL and its history situated within Vancouver's DTES, and relationships to participants and VSSL group members also informed these analytical decisions. The following is an example of an audit trail entry during my analysis stage:

> **May 5, 2021.** Notably, some participants speak to such diverse contexts (e.g., June Sports vs. regular Sunday practice) that a finding might in fact be the degree to which social identities are dependent upon, and activated within, any given context. While descriptively my findings speak to *various* contexts in which the VSSL (as a social identity) manifests, they might substantively speak only to *some* select contexts.

As described in Trainor and Bundon (2020), I compiled a list of final codes into one document and refined them by either combining "like codes" (i.e., codes that represent similar ideas) into one code, or subsuming like codes under a potential parent code that operated as a

unifying concept (or candidate theme). I also created a working definition for each of these final parent codes and sub-codes. A total of 301 like codes were grouped into 31 parent codes.

Third, *constructing themes* involved labelling groups of codes based on potential themes and amalgamating all relevant data into each potential theme. Once I had my final list of refined codes, I organized them into similar categories of potential themes and subthemes. The fourth step involved *reviewing themes* to ensure that they were distinct from one another, reflected patterns of shared meaning and fit in relation to the exemplar quotes (or data extracts, each other, and the dataset). Fifth, themes were *defined and named* by specifying how they were distinct from, and/or related to, each other and ensuring the name of each theme and subtheme captured its central meaning. *Writing* was utilized as a method of analysis throughout the research project to relate ongoing findings, discussions, extracts, field notes, and reflective journaling back to the research questions and literature (Braun & Clarke, 2020), before compiling a final research document (Braun et al., 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2019a; L. Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

Finally, I completed a descriptive analysis – what Braun and Clarke (2019a) might consider a 'domain summary' as opposed to fully realised themes – of the SIM-related content transcripts. To generate the findings, I followed a similar process to the analysis of the VSSL content transcripts, except instead of an abductive RTA, I deductively analysed the SIM-related content transcripts using the four themes as sensitising concepts. Specifically, I wrote out the themes and sub-themes on a page and referred to them alongside my initial reading of the transcripts. I looked for similarities and differences between how participants talked about the VSSL group when *compared to other groups* on their SIM (whilst considering the *contrast principle* of self-categorization theory, Turner, 1985; Turner & Reynolds, 2012). I also examined what *types* of groups participants found meaningful and how they described them in relation to

the SIM's overarching concepts, that reflect supportiveness, positivity, group compatibility, and group contact (Cruwys et al., 2016). Prototypicality relates to perceptions of what it means to be "an exemplary," "model" or *ideal* type of group member, not an *average* type of group member (i.e., how similar one is to others in the group; Steffens et al., 2014, p. 1003). Accordingly, perceptions of prototypicality were rarely considered in the analysis because most conversations of prototypicality in the interviews referred to notions of average type/typicality. Notably, most participants talked about the perceived positivity and supportiveness of their groups. In sum, my results include four fully realised themes generated by the RTA of VSSL content transcripts and domain summaries highlighting similarities and differences between seven group categories.

Ethical Considerations

Relational Ethics. In this study, I navigated relational and institutional ethical obligations. Relational ethics involve managing ethical concerns *in the moment* with participants in the field and addressing any concerns they may have, such as concern about the security of their interview transcripts (Palmer, 2016). They are especially important when conducting research with individuals that experience marginalization and various vulnerabilities, such as homelessness, mental illness, unemployment, or chronic illness (Boilevin et al., 2019; Palmer, 2016). Homeless people are often "displaced from their own stories, being talked about rather than talked to" (Hodgetts et al., 2008, p. 937). As such, I openly and willingly attempted to suspend any preconceptions I had about people experiencing homelessness and allowed participant accounts to inform the research process as much as possible (e.g., by adapting interview questions). Throughout interviews I sought to listen non-judgementally and attentively to what was shared about participants' identities.

Psychological Safety. Some interviews elicited sensitive information to which I was prepared to appropriately respond. First, I drew on trauma-informed principles to remain sensitive to participant needs when approaching topics that seemed unbearable, irretrievable, or incommunicable due to potential psychological distress embedded in previous trauma (e.g., asking if participants wanted to change topics; Jessee, 2018). Second, I directed conversation toward the visible SIM rather than prompting about difficult experiences. Lastly, I directed two participants to resources listed on the consent form (including counseling as well as 24/7, confidential health supports), as parts of our conversations seemed to cause some distress.

Minority Groups. There are several minority groups, such as people who identify as Indigenous, who are overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness on the DTES (Vancouver Homeless Count, 2019). As such, I took a culturally responsive approach to relational ethics that was reflexive (i.e., considers my privileged positionality), prioritized respectful connections, placed importance on cultural differences, as well as recognized power imbalances and (ongoing) historical injustices, such as those imposed by settler-colonialism (Martin & Walia, 2019; Palmer, 2016). It was also important to acknowledge that "much of the recent energy and innovation in the ethics of protecting marginalized communities from exploitative research emerged first in the resistance of Indigenous communities to colonial research practices" (Boilevin et al., 2019, p. 3). Staying aware of how various structural and cultural factors may influence participants' lives helped ensure that such differences within the sample were not only recognised but valued and given due consideration.

Institutional Ethics. I fulfilled institutional ethical obligations as required by the UBC BREB. Participants could choose not to answer any question or end the interview at any time without giving a reason (and without experiencing any negative consequences). Importantly,

these ethical considerations included working with the VSSL to ensure the research aligned with "Research 101: A Manifesto for Ethical Research in the Downtown Eastside" (Boilevin et al., 2019). Research 101 is a document formed with community members to help researchers in the DTES understand why their research should ensure ethical and trauma-informed principles are followed. This document was an essential guide for this study. I also took necessary steps to ensure player safety (e.g., ensured anonymity when speaking with VSSL administrators; A. Cornish, personal communication, March 1, 2020).

Chapter 3: Results

Four themes were constructed to describe how the participants came to be involved, and stay involved, with the VSSL and what features of the VSSL they perceived contributed to their well-being or ill-being. The four themes included: (1) Coming together through soccer; (2) Dynamics motivating continued involvement in the VSSL; (3) Leaders and leadership: Social influence in the VSSL; and (4) The VSSL and health outcomes. All themes and sub-themes are listed in Table 2 and are presented in the subsequent sections.

Table 2

Themes and Sub-themes

Themes	Sub-themes
Coming together through soccer	a. Past identities merged through soccer b. Connectivity and friendly competition c. Soccer changes during the COVID-19 pandemic
Dynamics motivating continued involvement in the VSSL	a. Features of The VSSL *Practice Spirit* b. Social support in the VSSL c. The VSSL as family
Leaders and leadership: Social influence in the VSSL	a. The VSSL leaders and identity entrepreneurship b. Everyone has a say: Shared leadership in the VSSL
The VSSL and health outcomes	a. Experiencing recovery and the VSSL b. The paradox of psychological safety c. Protecting against out-group stigma

Theme 1: Coming together through soccer

This theme focuses on the fostering of social connection among players because of a shared interest in soccer and sport generally, and the meanings attached to soccer as a base from which social identity/ies are formed and changed. Three subthemes were developed. These corresponded to: (1) *Past identities merged through soccer*, in which the ways individuals with a

shared interest in soccer came together as members of the VSSL; (2) *Connectivity and friendly competition*, that reflected how favourable norms of connectivity and friendly competition in the VSSL help foster social ties; (3) *Soccer changes during the COVID-19 pandemic*, that reflected the impacts of soccer being absent from players' lives due to the pandemic.

Past identities merged through soccer

Participants described a range of life experiences, but all had a shared interest in soccer. Soccer was reported to help create social connections with others, provide opportunities for physical activity, help players develop new skills, allow them to enjoy and talk about their favourite professional teams, and gave them the chance to pursue goals as part of a team.

Most participants talked about having played either on recreational teams, socially with friends, or competitively from a young age, progressing either to a professional or interstate level (outside of Canada). For the participants who described their involvement in recreational soccer (whether as a youth or adult), they often described it as part of a broader fitness identity which underpinned their involvement in a variety of sports such as basketball, baseball, or boxing. Participants who described their experiences in competitive soccer appeared to exhibit stronger athletic identities as *soccer players*. Those who saw themselves as soccer *athletes* talked more generally about how the VSSL aligned with their personal motives for playing soccer – a sport with which they had been involved their whole lives – compared to those who felt like the VSSL simply provided an accessible place to enjoy fun physical activity. For some, identifying as a soccer player came before joining the VSSL, and for others, such as Jake, it came after:

> I've always hated soccer. Like I said, I grew up with [demonym], and they love that shit. I grew up along Commercial Drive. And every, every time the World Cup happened, that street would be flooded with soccer fans, you know, Spain, Italy, Ireland, Scotland, all these hooligans and I never understood. Like, why people will go crazy over, you know, kicking a ball from one end to another. I never understood that until I became involved myself. And then I understood it.

Despite previous ambivalence towards soccer, Jake reported that he *got* why people are such diehard fanatics. It is unclear what *getting it* meant to Jake in this context, but nevertheless he developed an affinity for soccer based on his own positive experiences and ultimately felt like he could relate to other 'soccer enthusiasts' in a way he did not before joining the VSSL. Another player who developed a soccer identity through their involvement in the VSSL indicated that it was now the only sport for them. As Will described:

> They've been really important to me. It's as close of a family as I have here, right? Like I said, my family isn't here. So I don't, you know, I could go play basketball but like, I'd have to, you know, I'm not gonna go play multiple sports just to meet other people, it's ridiculous. I can't do that anymore. I'm a one sport kid now.

Two participants described how their experiences in different roles within past soccer teams influenced how they categorized themselves as members (e.g., as a goalkeeper, striker, athlete) within the VSSL. For example, Alesha was recruited to join a women's street soccer team (before the VSSL) because they needed a goalkeeper and she had experience in that role. Despite being recruited based on her 'goalkeeper' identity/experience, Alesha did not think she fit what she perceived as a 'homeless' prerequisite. Alesha compared what social identities she felt she shared with the team (e.g., past soccer player) to those she felt she lacked (e.g., homeless experience), and was not sure if she fit the (prototypical) 'mould'. As she explained:

> And so, she was telling me all about [the street soccer team]. And then I shared, I shared a story. It's like, "oh, yeah, I used to play soccer," and she goes, "oh, really?" And she goes, "what position did you play?" I say, "oh, you know, I was a goalkeeper" and then she just flipped out and said, "Alesha, you got to come play with us. You got to play on our team. We need a goalkeeper, we need you." I said "no, I'm not homeless," but she was persistent. And she goes "yeah, you are because you're making plans to stay on my couch." Which is true because I'm a member of the [housing co-op] and our building was condemned. And in that year, […] we were given notice that we were going to have to seek our own housing and that because they were going to demolish our building.

Three players felt like the VSSL is just one group through which they can enjoy participating in a sport with others. Feeling a sense of soccer identity (i.e., "I am a soccer player"), in this regard, likely occurs *while playing the game*, but less so outside the game

setting. Cory described how he had a general love of sport, which helped him feel connected to

informal sporting groups like the VSSL:

> I just loved soccer. I'm just a big soccer guy and I wanted to play or join any kind of
> group that I could, like if there's baseball and other stuff, I'd probably join those groups
> as well. Because I just like those sports and I like playing those sports and you can just
> jump in and stuff and people know what they're doing and stuff and it's pretty decent.

Three players described feeling motivated by the skill development that occurs when

playing together regularly. As Jayden described: "I just play as much as I can. Because I like to

see. They're getting good. Everyone's getting better, right? So it's good. Good to see what you

put in is actually helping." These players also felt that the transient nature of the VSSL group –

with new players frequently coming and going – influenced the style of play at weekly practices.

Indeed, Jake felt that this inconsistency can be a challenge: "Well, you're playing against other

people too, right? So trying to connect with those people. […] It can be hard, you know,

especially when new people come every, every time. You have to adapt to that, I suppose."

In addition to being able to *play* soccer, what also motivated players to engage with the

VSSL was that they could have conversations about their favourite professional teams,

particularly those in the English Premier League. Conversations about the results of the games,

player performance, and decisions made by coaches and management enabled the construction of

soccer fan identities. Those fan identities – regardless of which team players supported – became

a basis from which players such as Terry could feel connected to one another: "We're similar

because we're fans of soccer. We were very supportive, we're big fans. We support our teams.

And we talk a lot about the results of the games, most of the time." This basis for connection

superseded any perceived difference between fans of opposing teams. In this way, a soccer

identity made salient by the VSSL manifested as a fan identity whereby players and coaches

could socially connect about their favourite EPL team.

Others Are Like Me: Soccer and Homelessness Meet. Beyond the formation, renewal, and/or maintenance of soccer identities influencing players' involvement in the VSSL program, participants described other motives for joining. Notably, Ainsley highlighted the self-acceptance and social acceptance that came with knowing that others had also experienced homelessness:

> So I think the community, and the acceptance that comes with the community is like, a big thing for my well-being, I don't feel like I have to justify myself, I don't feel like, I don't know, I just feel like, and like, I feel like there's shared understanding of certain circumstances and things, there's not, I just feel like I can fully be myself, which is nice.

Cultivating a shared sense of identity, whether it is through a shared interest in soccer or other similarities, provides one way that people felt drawn to playing soccer. Nick described the ways that he felt wanted as an athlete and teammate while living in his car:

> Soccer was there for me, you know, it's a good thing. Get out of the car at least doing something you know, at least moving my legs and I got, I have skill with my legs. So, it was nice to, to do that and to feel, to feel wanted.

Similarly, Alesha described how when she first joined a street soccer team, she felt compelled to do it to help the friend who invited her. Alesha was staying with her friend at the time and recognised the stress her friend faced as a single parent trying to stay housed. Indeed, their shared experience as members of the hidden homeless community acted as a basis for social solidarity and support through soccer. As Alesha explained:

> I said "okay, I'll come play" because I'm also an added stress to her right because like she had a house, but it was it was like the rent was too high. We know it's like probably not gonna last very long because she has kids and single parents you know often get hustled out of their housing out based on like housing complaints alone, whether or not they're fabricated you know, so for have, so I went we started. To go out and just play soccer was was a nice thing was a nice invitation I responded to, it was something I knew what to do and she was a friend.

Connectivity and friendly competition

Social identities have different norms and influence shared experiences in different ways depending on the context(s) in which they are made salient (Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). For example, at the VSSL's weekly practices players enjoy a casual game of soccer and socially

connect with others, and value the feeling of togetherness that arises. In competition settings, however, a 'VSSL social identity' is made salient when players (i.e., the in-group) compete (and contrast themselves) against other teams (i.e., out-groups), making competitiveness and positive distinctiveness (e.g., as a Vancouver team) salient identity features within that context. This sub-theme illustrates how two social contexts, and related cognitions, influenced the formation of a VSSL social identity. The two contexts include Andy Livingstone Park (where weekly practices were held during the study from 2020-2021) and June Sports, an annual invite-only competition in which the VSSL participates.

Andy Livingstone Park and Social Connectivity. Most players described how street soccer games were organised at Andy Livingstone Park (ALP) on days when the VSSL was not running a practice. A few participants described playing soccer almost daily with multiple groups. Indeed, there were several sporting groups active in other parts of the park during the weekly Sunday practices I attended – these included friend groups, local clubs, youth development squads, and people exercising. Jayden, who described ALP as his 'backyard', said he would often happily play with any group when invited to join:

> I play every sport, not in a league or sort, but if some of my friends or even people I don't know said "hey, we need a guy" and I'm in that area sitting on a park bench and I had the time, I would just go and join them, and I don't even know them sort of […] Yeah, yeah, it doesn't matter what the sport is.

One group, commonly referred to as 'Phillip's group', ran drop-in soccer games two days per week. However, Phillip often referred many players to the VSSL if they were more interested in slower paced games. This was how Dylan first became involved with the VSSL:

> Yeah, I was first introduced when I saw you the first time. I was doing some soccer on Tuesday and Thursday with like a group at Andy Livingstone. And then one of the guys, his name's Phillip, he told me to come down on a Sunday. And then I came down and that's when I met Cameron [the VSSL coach] and you guys.

Similarly, Nick's connection to ALP after moving to Vancouver led him to the VSSL: "I loved Andy Livingstone, and I was playing all the time. […] Some, some days, four hours, some days, three hours, it was a daily thing. And then I found myself with the VSSL playing with them." Several players felt a soccer identity was made salient at ALP, which facilitated involvement in the VSSL or other groups playing there.

June Sports and Friendly Competition. Shared team identity can bond people together and help group members see themselves not as either players or spectators but as *one VSSL team*. Terry described how watching the VSSL win a tournament during the final match made him feel proud of *his* team's achievement. Not only was that collective success a *shared* source of joy, but it symbolised, to Terry, the importance of goal striving and making what he regarded as 'good choices' in life generally:

> I was so happy, me and Cameron, I remember I was hugging Cameron and we couldn't stop hugging. It was a great experience because it means that dreams do come true in life, if you know, if you stay positive, if you work hard, and you know, keep coming to practice, keep playing soccer, keep playing football, you know. […] The Vancouver team won, it went to [housing site], the trophy. It kind of like it, the trophy still stays at home. It comes toward, to *us* [emphasis added], you know?

Beyond the joy elicited from collective achievement, players attached certain meanings to this shared VSSL identity within the June Sports context. June Sports is for some a chance to travel and compete with friends, but for long-time players, such as Jake, it can also symbolise the team's competitive improvement over time:

> So, even though our first year being there, it was so hard because the field, we were playing on a full-size field. […] Our group dynamic very much, we very much came together like, everybody knew their position, everybody was accepted with their position on the field. And we came together like Voltron, really, you know, things, everybody just started connecting on a different level. And year after year, we went back to June Sports. And, you know, we still haven't, I don't think we, we still haven't made top, I don't know, if we made top three yet. It doesn't really matter. But I know, they always tell us and, and I see it myself a lot of the times being on the sidelines, that we've really come a long way. Huge, huge difference.

Will, another long-term player in the sample, described that due to a lack of technical coaching and the VSSL welcoming players of all skill levels, the team can struggle to perform cohesively at June Sports. Will described wanting coaching and skill development to play a role in the VSSL as a potential source of team bonding:

> We've got talented people like we got athletic people. Right? It's great. But we're not a coached group. So we don't actually know how to play fundamental soccer. If that makes sense. Our X's and O's are shit. […] We're a transient group, we're a low barrier group, that comes with the territory. So yeah. But if we become a bigger group or a more stable group, we can create coaching. Have some coming in for personal drills, instead of just doing passing stuff because like, you know, passing drills are great. But you know, when we go, when we go to June Sports, we get whooped because we don't move as a group, we're playing small ball in ones and twos when we need to be playing elevens together, right as the unit. We don't move as a unit like that.

For half the participants, June Sports is a context where other social identities become salient. Hayley described how her family was connected to the competition and other players at the tournament sometimes asked about her father, a former June Sports athlete. Similarly, Will explained how being *physically present* on the island where June Sports is hosted makes salient his identities as both a soccer athlete and as an Indigenous person:

> Junes Sports is great because we get to play full field, man. I'm back in my element. But like no one else knows how to do it. So. But I love full field. And it's Indian. It's lots of Indigenous people because it's on Alert Bay Cormorant Island, so a lot of Indigenous stuff, feelings and vibe going. So, it's just a nice time. […] We're not, we're not far removed as a group, as a tribe, as a band, as nations to have lived in small communal groups, right? We're not that far removed from that. So when we're together, we feel each other. We don't say anything or nothing, we just feel the vibe. You can feel it when you walk into a space. Like this has been smudged, or this is, yeah, it's in your bones.

It is clear that a sense of *place* – comprised of part physical environment and part social relationships – can contribute to the formation and maintenance of multiple social identities. While soccer seemed to bring people together within the VSSL, it also acted as a pathway through which members learned about other identities they shared (e.g., as a person who has experienced homelessness, soccer fan, Indigenous person).

Soccer changes during the COVID-19 pandemic

> *[At] the beginning of the pandemic, I really noticed that like not being able to play soccer, because my husband also plays it a lot as well, and I think it's like what we both use for like, our physical mental health and like social connection and stuff. So when we weren't playing, we could like notice an impact for sure.* (Ainsley)

In this sub-theme I summarize a range of feelings and experiences that participants described regarding soccer and VSSL involvement during the COVID-19 pandemic. From March to September 2020, following the Government of British Columbia's health order to cancel group sport, the VSSL cancelled practices. Most players described feeling a sense of loss and some still went to the field each Sunday to safely socialize in person. By reflecting on the *absence* of the VSSL during the pandemic, participants alluded to the importance of soccer and this program in their respective lives. As Jake described:

> Yeah, there was a few of us that would show up, you know, and, you know, we'd just talked about, you know, negative things, right? It's a very short conversation. And, you know, nobody was happy about it. But we did try to figure out like, how, in the future, this was all gonna look, because obviously, at least my fear was that VSSL was going to die out because of this.

While the VSSL adhered to provincial health orders to keep players safe, Will described feeling frustrated that other groups at ALP continued playing. As Will described:

> It sucked not playing because you know, weather was great. I'd go by the field and see all these other groups playing and be like, "that's fucking stupid." Right? […] We're talking like people didn't stop playing. […] But, you know, people would ask "when are we gonna play?" Like, no. […] We're a league, we're an organization. As an organization we have to follow organizational rules, which means no group play.

After returning to play in September 2020, the VSSL introduced rules to reduce the transmission of COVD-19 such as requiring members to stand 6ft apart, regularly wash/disinfect their hands, wear masks, and stay home if feeling ill. Terry felt that the rule changes due to the pandemic changed drastically what it looked and felt like to be a VSSL player:

> Ah man. COVID has done a lot of like, step back. To say, you know, like a lot of things that are not back to normal. We're not playing like we used to play before, used to be fun every Sunday, but ever since COVID started, ever since COVID started, we stopped

showing up and we doing, like gathering, social, you know. […] Before it was an amazing experience. Lots of people show up, man, every Sunday, every Thursday. […] Now it's a small group because of COVID. And it's a big, you know, it's a big gap. You can see the difference there. […] The spirit is still there. But it's not the same spirit, like the ones, the one that we have with a lot of people and there's no COVID. The way we're not supposed to touch each other. Like, we have to keep a distance and stuff like that.

Immunocompromised players who were more likely to get severely ill from COVID-19 had the added burden of deciding whether to risk their health (and life) by returning to play or continue feeling socially isolated. As Cory, who is asthmatic, described:

I just moved here in March and my place here in downtown, and I was living in Surrey before. And I was gonna start going [to the VSSL] every week, and then COVID happened. And I'm asthmatic, so, and then they're telling me how you can die easier if you're asthmatic or some shit, so I didn't want to risk it at the time.

Some players reported being restricted from engaging with valued groups. Dylan noted how his housing site prevented him from playing soccer during the pandemic, and as a result impaired his general well-being. When only allowed out for two hours per day, Dylan described how his access to valued groups like the VSSL was restricted:

They let me do it once and then that's when I met, met, saw the guys on Tuesday playing soccer. So I joined in with them. […] At first I wasn't allowed to, for a couple of weeks. […] COVID affected me playing with everyone, which made me a bit depressed in some ways, because I just wanted to try and get some fitness in and play some, meet some new people and play. So COVID backed that off for a couple weeks. […] 'Cause it was a bit hard being down here as well being on lock down here as well, we're only allowed out for two hours at a time and all that.

Theme 2: Dynamics motivating continued involvement in the VSSL

The second theme reflects which features of the VSSL program participants perceived to underpin their continued involvement over time. Three sub-themes were developed. These included: (1) *Features of The VSSL Practice Spirit*, that reflected the meanings participants attached to the program; (2) *Social support in the VSSL*, that reflected the dynamics of perceived and received support within the VSSL; and (3) *The VSSL as family*, that reflected participants' sense of belonging and group identity as VSSL members.

Features of The VSSL Practice Spirit

Each week, the VSSL coach (Cameron) sent an email to players announcing details of the upcoming practice (e.g., start time, location, information about lunch, COVID-19 safety rules). In one email he described 'The VSSL Practice Spirit' as follows:

> I would like to thank our players, particularly the regulars, for showing such a great example regarding the VSSL practice spirit, and for guiding the new players that join the practice most weeks. In our practices we respect all players and avoid aggressive play (e.g. slide tackles). We make sure that every player, no matter their skill level, fully participates and enjoys. We do not criticize, but we do praise.

Participants' experience of this 'spirit' varied in ways that both expand upon, and provide nuance to, the coach's description above. VSSL practices are relatively open to anyone interested in playing social soccer and supporting the program (with safeguards in place against 'outsiders' like researchers such as myself or potential volunteers). Four participants described how bringing along friends and family to join in for a game was normalized and that bridging the connection between their 'VSSL community' and other communities to which they belong merges disparate aspects of their self-concept. Players articulated how social connection and a commitment to "respect all players" is prioritised over "aggressive play" or competitiveness, which constitutes a key tenet of The VSSL Practice Spirit.

Four players described their preferences for going to VSSL practices with friends rather than alone but also enjoyed meeting new people. Ainsley described how they attended regularly once they started playing soccer at the VSSL with their partner:

> I started going again, I feel like once my life became a little more stable, and I went with my now husband. It was really nice to go. Because before when I first started, I went with like, another other people from the shelter. And then that was kind of nice. We do that together. And then when it was kind of just me, I didn't really go by myself as much for various reasons. And then when I had someone else to go with, I started, my partner, I started going more often.

Dylan described how, related to his competitive soccer experience from a young age, it was the only physical activity he could see himself doing consistently because of the social benefits. He stated, "that's the only way I can see myself having a healthy life and doing things, getting out and doing things. I'm not the type of person to go running round the block for three hours. It's a bit boring." By highlighting how running alone is "a bit boring," Dylan reflected the sentiment of most VSSL players I interviewed that soccer is a fun and social sport. Extending the importance of sociality further, Ainsley compared the 'all are welcome' approach which characterised the VSSL with the often-stringent criteria for accessing traditional services for housing or health supports:

> One thing I really like is like, I don't know, I was able to bring my sister, which was really cool. Because again, I don't know, when I've been like accessing services, I feel like there's *requirements* [emphasis added] and it's like, limited, but like for VSSL accessing it as like, as a player. Like, it's really great. That there's not like, "oh, well, my sister can only come if" like, I don't know, "she's also experiencing homelessness," or I don't know, something like if she's at risk, like, there's no qualifications for like, who I can bring. So that is nice. Yeah, the fact that I could bring my like partner who's like a big part of my life and soccer is something we like to do together. The fact that we can go together was just like, is *completely different* [emphasis added]. Like, he can't come to my research with me. He can't come to like other aspects of my life with me. Like that's not. Yeah. That's not something that happens.

The VSSL's modus operandi was described as 'flexible' for any interested players, or players' friends and family, to come and go as they pleased. Jayden described this flexibility: "VSSL is open free, come as you go, go as you come. I don't see it being a problem or any kind of, constricting, you know what I mean? […] And that's the reason why it's good for everybody." Women players who had child-caring responsibilities also benefitted from the flexible and non-conditional VSSL membership. For example, Hayley explained how when she struggled to find childcare for her two daughters, she could either bring them to the VSSL or, otherwise, would not be able to attend practice:

> So it was kind of hard going, and then I started to commit to going. And sometimes it was hard because I, my youngest daughter was always all over the place. So I had a hard time

having somebody be able to watch my daughters while I was practicing or playing and a couple of times, they got involved and they ran around the field too. But, um, when it was more of a like drills and stuff, like I couldn't really keep an eye on them. So it was kind of hard to get a sitter, so that's why I was off and on as well.

The VSSL Practice Spirit was characterised by non-competitiveness and a deemphasis on skill and ability. A common feature of The VSSL Practice Spirit was the emphasis placed on connection and social inclusion over competitiveness. Most participants felt that the VSSL's welcoming culture facilitated connection with others in a way they did not experience in other sporting programs. Unlike the competitive norms (e.g., playing in specific positions) of settings such as June Sports or the Homeless World Cup, social inclusion was emphasized at VSSL practices. Will noted that "it's really hard to play striker properly, when you play with a whole bunch of people who don't know actually how to play the game itself." Despite this, he reflected the attitudes of most participants when explaining that players of all skill levels should be able to participate. He felt that those who attend practices to compete for "their fake championship" did not fit with the VSSL Practice Spirit's ethos of social inclusion:

> I always make sure that when [on] the playing field that the ball moves around, like I'm always conscious about including whoever else is playing and not just getting the ball to whoever is the best. I hate that. […] It's just like, you know, there's guys, you know, "great, you're really good. That's great. But you're running from one end to the other. You're not allowing other people who don't play as well to play like this." I never play 100% with this group, yeah. But guys come along, and they do. Everyone's like, "oh, they're great." This is like, "yeah, but like, no one's having fun. I don't want to watch him. Okay, I didn't come out to spectate. We came out to play together."

Dylan, a player who had been involved with the VSSL for about one month at the time of our interview, recognized it can be irritating when players are too competitive, but felt this was less of a problem in the VSSL. Specifically, he compared the VSSL to a previous drop-in soccer group he attended: "Like say, we messed up a pass, they'd be like pretty aggressive towards you and all that. Yeah. Whereas at the VSSL, I think when I made a bad pass like no one was really on my back about it." Nevertheless, Dylan sat out of the game at one practice I attended in

March because another player had acted aggressively toward him for making what he saw as a bad pass. Aggression of any kind during practices are typically denounced by other players. Half the participants noted that there are occasionally players who undermine the VSSL Practice Spirit. Alesha described how competitiveness can undermine people's ability to connect. In contrast, the value of the VSSL's "street soccer" culture was its emphasis on having fun and supporting one another, as Alesha noted:

> Because the spirit of sport, if when you're in the game, and games on, we create it. It's freedom. You know? […] Because I'm too, I've been training for so long within street soccer, where *we're there to have fun to support one another* [emphasis added]. And you know, and have, if you do have a good, a good competitive game, it's for the spirit of that sport. Whereas, if you're going into an environment, where it's all about competition, it's about the it's about the win, the culture of win, and the culture of being the best […] it's like, either it's about belonging or not belonging or being good enough or not being good enough. And, and I just that's, that's a culture that I kind of like, I find distasteful.

Social support in the VSSL

> *It takes a lot of courage to play with a bunch of people. But if you see them like me, you see them as your family, you don't you, don't you don't see them as a stranger, it helps your situation.* (Terry)

In addition to social inclusion and connection being important features of The VSSL Practice Spirit, most participants described the VSSL as a source of perceived *and* received social support. Perceived support refers to how people perceive others in their social networks, such as family or friends, as sources of (social, material, or emotional) support. Received (or enacted) support refers to the tangible receipt of support from others, such as receiving lunch or new soccer cleats from the VSSL. The importance of the VSSL as a support system was reported to be valued within the VSSL setting and in players' lives generally. When asked about which VSSL features contribute to his well-being, Terry noted the emotional support players receive:

> Caring for the players and asking how they're doing outside their football game, like outside the football. "How's life outside football, outside soccer?" […] Yeah. "How's life?" You know, "how are you doing? Are you in school? Are you in, are you a member of a community? Why like, why, what are you up to?" You know, [the VSSL] care for you. They care about you as a person.

Most participants felt that the VSSL offered them support with whatever they needed as individuals and perceived the environment to be highly supportive in general. Hayley described the emotional support she received:

> They make you feel comfortable, like warmly. Make sure you're included and that your voice is heard. And understand that everyone has their own daily life struggles, and you know, they don't push anything on you like, they're just there to make sure that you're okay. And if you're not okay, that, you know, they're there to support you in any way that they can. Kind of thing, I guess. So, I think they're pretty awesome.

Reflecting a similar sentiment, Alesha noted that VSSL players "learned that it's not just the game itself that's important. It is the support on the sidelines […] [that] plays an important role, not just with your physical health, but your mental health." Half the participants reported that VSSL membership in itself made them feel valued and supported. Ainsley described how material supports from the VSSL while homeless were more beneficial when compared to their current living situation (of being housed), but the benefits of belonging to a supportive community had endured:

> I think it helped my self-esteem because it was like, I'm still a whole person and I still get to have like, access to a community, access to soccer, like I was still, that was still seen as valuable. I didn't have to like, earn it or like it I wasn't looked down upon because I didn't have money. Like they gave me cleats and like stuff like that, like. […] But I still have that benefit now because I can, I have the resources to buy cleats or to go and do those things. But back then I didn't have those resources. So there was like particular, particular things I benefited from when I was homeless.

Most participants, whether they were regularly involved or not, described the feeling of support as being a crucial aspect in the formation, and maintenance, of an internalised VSSL group identity. Contributing also to this identity process was the received, or enacted, support provided to players by individual members of the VSSL (board members, volunteers, or other players). Many players discussed the support they received, including coaching support to develop their soccer skills, obtaining a free pair of cleats, lunch provided at all practices

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(although this stopped temporarily during the COVID-19 pandemic), and support in finding

work. In describing the coaching support he received from a friend, Jake stated:

> My best friend, Alex, he's a marathon runner. He helped me out. At least with the running side for the first little while, and then he showed me how to apply that on-field. Because a lot of my friends noticed that I was very fast. But applying that fastness on field, you know, it takes a little bit of brain work.

In line with Alesha's point that the VSSL offers a "completely different" type of support

compared to most other support services for people who experience homelessness, Nick said he

joined the VSSL not because *he* felt supported, but because he wanted to *give* support to others.

In other words, norms of prosociality embodied *by* the VSSL encouraged Nick to provide

support *for* the VSSL:

> At first, I was a volunteer. I joined the Board, I even brought, I brought [employment agency] over to the VSSL I wanted [employment agency] to you know bring some work over and they can recruit players from, from there, you know, help out with, some, some income. […] Some of the VSSL players did end up going to [employment agency] and, and finding careers, and work. […] I was really happy with that.

The VSSL as family

> *Family for me is, not just like I said about VSSL, it's not just the family of people that you are born with from the same roots or the same blood, like VSSL, your community can be a family for you.* (Terry)

When I asked Will whether he felt like he belonged at the VSSL, he replied, "I dare

someone to try to kick me out," indicating the strong affiliation some members felt toward the

program. For those who had played with the VSSL for almost a decade, perceiving the VSSL as

a 'family support system' appeared to be a primary motivation that underpinned their consistent

involvement over several years. Every participant described their involvement as being 'off and

on' over time; regardless of how long they had played with the VSSL, they always considered

themselves VSSL members even during times they were not playing. Alesha described it as the

VSSL's "largest success," highlighting how the VSSL developed special celebrations (such as

the Holiday Haul Christmas event and donations drive) which facilitated a sense of belonging

and group identity:

> The Street Soccer, the VSSL. It's a continuum of care. […] And even though we have established, our own little model of, of operations, of kind of community celebrations that are, are special to us. And so we have players that continue to return. And as long as we have- It seems like we have developed a family system within sport. And that's what I believe is the largest success of street soccer.

For five participants, June Sports reflected a time when players come together as a

family. Not only because they would compete against other teams, but because travelling to the

island where June Sports takes place, and staying together, required cooperation from everyone

(e.g., organizing vehicles, ferry tickets, sleeping arrangements, cleaning). As Hayley described:

> We came together to play. And we came together to eat. And so like, I'd go meet them in the mornings or on the field. When we'd share meals, I would help clean, like we all took turns helping like clean, do the dishes clean up. Make sure we kept on each other's kids, an eye on each other's kids. And yeah, it's pretty, pretty awesome. Like we all were there for each other in any way that we could. And just to be more family, like staying together doing things together, like going swimming and stuff. Going for walks and stuff like that.

Perceived stability through belonging to various groups, including the VSSL, helped

most participants develop a sense of belonging. Hayley felt like her "friends became family," for

example: "And I just didn't feel like I really had my family in my life, a whole lot. So, being a

part of all these different groups, I kind of felt like I belonged somewhere." However, a stable

sense of belonging derived from VSSL group membership was more important for some than

others. Three players, who shared that they were in the foster care system as children, described

feeling like the perceived stability from the VSSL contributed to their well-being, which was in

stark contrast to their lack of stability while growing up. As Ainsley described:

> I feel like I'm, even if I'm not going, it's nice to know that it's like an option there. And it's nice to see, like, I follow the Facebook and I like, know that it's still there. That's been really, really nice. Especially as someone who's like, as I said, like aged out of [foster] care and like, moved around a lot. It's really nice to just like, there's not a lot of like, places that I can like just go back to. So it's nice. I'm like, oh, if I'm feeling disconnected, or if I want to play soccer, like, I know, I can always go there. So that's, that's nice.

The VSSL group was perceived as having permeable boundaries. Most participants reported this as meaning they could leave and return anytime they needed during periods of instability without compromising the support and social connection the VSSL fosters. Ainsley explained how the VSSL and an organization with whom they volunteer felt more like communities to which they belong rather than groups with conditional membership:

> When I first joined, I was going through a pretty rough time. And it's been really nice to, like, have that consistency. […] It's like this idea that we're building a community and it's ongoing, and you can, like kind of, with an understanding of life circumstances. So in both of those organizations, so [foster care organization] is like the advocacy group that I'm a part of, and with both that organization and VSSL, I feel like I can go away for a year I can, you know, like, let's say, my housings up in the air, which it has been in the past, like, I can go sort myself out, and then come back, and it's still there. Which is like very much not the case, especially growing up in foster care and things like that. It's like, once you leave, like, that's it, or you age out, or there's like some kind of cut off to like, you know, you're only eligible for a certain amount a month or something like that.

Theme 3: Leaders and leadership: Social influence in the VSSL

The third theme reflects the role of leadership in creating and maintaining a shared understanding of the VSSL community. Two sub-themes were developed. These corresponded to: (1) *The VSSL leaders and identity entrepreneurship*, in which administrators of the VSSL were designated as identity entrepreneurs that created a collective sense of 'us' among VSSL group members; and (2) *Everyone has a say: Shared leadership in the VSSL*, that reflected leadership in the VSSL as shared and diffused among all members.

The VSSL leaders and identity entrepreneurship

This sub-theme describes the ways in which appointed VSSL leaders such as the coaches, board members, and volunteers created a sense of togetherness within the VSSL practice setting. This common language – friendly welcomes to each player, weekly emails about practices, asking old players to mentor and welcome newcomers to the field – helped bring individuals with diverse identities and backgrounds to feel a collective sense of 'us' *as members of the VSSL*.

For example, the following excerpt from the coach's weekly emails reflects a form of identity

entrepreneurship (i.e., creating a common identity among VSSL members) by defining group

values (e.g., respect for individual choices) and ideals (e.g., keeping each other safe):

> **Reminder that Vaccine Registration is Open:**
> As a reminder, registration for vaccinations is open! All adults over the age of 18 years old are eligible to register and you will be contacted when space is available. […]
>
> Obviously it is a personal decision whether or not to get vaccinated. I know that you will consider your effect on others, and that this will be a part of your decision-making. As you know, VSSL provides a safe space. For the space to be safe we need to minimise all risks to our players and volunteers and guests. Does an unvaccinated person represent more of a health risk (to himself/herself and others) than a fully vaccinated one? Everything that I have read or heard suggests that the answer to that question is "Yes." Please do your own research, particularly about the new strains of the virus.

A few players described how the VSSL engaged in outreach strategies with homeless

shelters in Vancouver to promote the program and prior to the COVID-19 pandemic would

sometimes drive players to and from practice. For instance, four participants were recruited to

the VSSL when a volunteer came to their shelter to promote the VSSL. Ainsley described how

despite being picked up alongside players from the men's shelter, they felt valued as a non-

binary member of the VSSL in a mixed gender setting:

> And then when I was in […] kind of like secondary housing. […] And then the secondary housing was above the men's shelter, anyway. So once he would come to the men's shelter, like I would still go with him, and it was just fun. He would come and he would like wake people up and he'd be like, "okay, let's get going." […] It was definitely something to like, look forward to. And it was nice that even though I had like, changed locations, like I still got to see Cameron and yeah, it's definitely like he was the person bringing me in, and it wasn't him every week that did it. But um he's definitely one that stands out in my mind.

VSSL administrators are largely recognised as *the* leaders of the VSSL because if they

did not organize practices, facilitate opportunities to play, and fundraise, the VSSL could not

continue. Players sometimes helped to complete basic tasks (e.g., set up the goals or equipment),

but only some took on roles with the Board at any given time. As Jayden described:

I just like to get my exercise, and because they got, those guys already have those positions taken care of, I'm not worried about trying to take someone's job or anything. I am happy that they're happy doing it, and yeah that's my goal.

VSSL coaches completed a host of tasks at weekly practices. These included setting up equipment, collecting player information for contact tracing, welcoming newcomers, running warm-ups, calling drink breaks, arranging lunch, and maintaining permits to play at the field. The VSSL coaches strived to make sure players had a quality experience at each practice, both materially (e.g., food, soccer balls) and in the form of social acceptance. As Jayden described:

Location is everything, so being here, where I live. They don't have that everywhere; they don't have stuff like this every place in the world. Not the way they run it here, at least. […] Yeah, not spoilt rotten like we do. Not rotten, but you know what I mean, we got it pretty good here – AstroTurf, coffee, pizzas, and all that.

Values of social inclusion, support, and safety fostered by leaders were embedded in the VSSL program by its founder(s) in 2010. As Alesha described:

And [the founder] always acknowledged, you know, and gave gratitude for us to come as players because like, we were always, everybody was just grateful, right? It's like, 'thank you, you know, for, for hosting. Thank you for bringing snacks, thank you for bringing training, thank you for bringing gear.' […] And but, he goes 'well, you know, we are volunteering our time, but you're volunteering your time' he goes, he would thank us back. He goes, as players, as showing up, he goes, 'thank you for showing up.'

Several players described this leadership style as upholding the VSSL as a place where players can feel valued as members. Two players noted having personal friendships with VSSL leaders. As Terry described: "[Cameron] cares about me outside football, he's not just a soccer coach for me, he's just a family, like a member of a family or a friend. A good person, a good friend, a genuine friend." Participants described feeling supported when walking into a VSSL practice for the first time because a conscious effort was made to include them, and thus feelings of being an outsider were quelled quickly. Hayley described this feeling when she first joined:

I felt like an outsider. But that's just because I, I was shy and quiet. And I talked to the nicest one that would talk to me first kind of thing, but I don't know. Everybody was pretty accepting of an outsider. […] But yeah, they are pretty good with it, the staff's

pretty good about that, too. And just letting everybody know and all that, you know, we're all a team.

Dylan described feeling comfortable from the outset, and at his first practice the VSSL coach introduced him to everyone: "[he] made a few jokes that me being, thinking I was English, and he didn't like that. But like then he goes, 'oh, you're [demonym]. That's okay.' It was, that broke the ice." Many players described that whether they were looking for cleats, help finding work or education, or just interested in playing, the coach would try and help in any way. In so doing, the VSSL leaders were seen as representing the VSSL's values and norms. Dylan noted how he felt supported and was encouraged to return after having played one or two practices:

> Cameron has been supportive, he got me a soccer ball. And he has been trying to ask
> people but, [to] find work for me as well. And he's, he's inviting me to come down more.
> So, and I felt supported when I was there, I didn't feel really anxious.

Everyone has a say: Shared leadership in the VSSL

> *A group that has that kind of heart deserves to be able to do more with it. So you know,*
> *they say that these Provincial and governmental organizations that keep saying 'no, you*
> *can't have non-profit status' need to pull their heads out of their ass because, just with*
> *their little means that they've created privately like, what they could do if they were a true*
> *non-profit…* (Will)

The previous sub-theme reflected what most players perceived as the *appointed* VSSL leaders. In contrast, this sub-theme reflects the notion that the *day-to-day* leaders of the VSSL – those who constitute the network of people invested in sustaining this soccer group – are the players themselves. At different levels of self-categorization, 'core' and 'peripheral' players act as social identity leaders, influencing the VSSL through shared leadership over the program as a whole and within the practice setting. Core players correspond to those who feel their VSSL social identity is strong and who are actively involved in the VSSL on a regular basis (e.g., played for a long time, worked on the Board). Peripheral players may attend the VSSL

irregularly, not participate in external competitions or board meetings, and feel (somewhat) limited social identification with the team.

Players with stronger VSSL social identities appeared to feel a strong sense of shared leadership within the VSSL. As Alesha described, opportunities for representing the VSSL such as at competitions, helped foster a sense of prototypicality of what it means to be a VSSL player and sense of pride that motivated her desire to create similar opportunities for other players:

> So we've been invited to the Vancouver International Street Soccer Festival, we've been invited out to Aboriginal FC events. […] I got really kind of comfortable being an invited player of VSSL. But then I realized like, now I'm more than just a player with the street soccer. It was, it's so it just gave me the, the confidence to advance as an individual, right? So that I can create space for another player to get selected for these opportunities. Because I was feeling a little, yeah, I was a favorite, right? So, I was feeling a little guilty. So yeah, do I feel very proud in everything? It's like yeah, but the thing is I also feel a sense of responsibility to share the floor.

Similarly, Ainsley described a sense of influence over how they felt players *could* feel at the VSSL. For example, they described feeling a responsibility to normalize homelessness among VSSL players because they personally related to the self-consciousness of being a new player:

> I can offer empathy to […] some of the situations that like, people who are currently experiencing homelessness can like, are going through, and also just like, normalize it. Like, I know, for me, when I entered VSSL, I felt like, "ah, this is so weird," like, "I'm weird," or like, "there's something wrong with me," or like, I don't know, whatever. And to just to kind of go to, then when I went to VSSL, like, "oh, there's a diverse group of people here" and like, "it's okay," like, "it's gonna be fine." And like, "these people have gone through it," like, "I can get through it." And so, I feel like just going and showing up and being positive […] like, kind of making people feel like understood.

The way players supported those who were struggling with stress or feeling defeated is another example of shared leadership within the VSSL. Hayley gave an example of how her brother, who played on a VSSL Homeless World Cup team, provided emotional support to the team when they were feeling down about losing a match. By momentarily pushing aside the competitive culture fostered within the Homeless World Cup environment, he was reported to

draw on their social identity resources (e.g., emotional safety, social support) as VSSL members

to help challenge their collective distress. As Hayley described:

> What they said about what my late brother did when I guess they were losing when they
> went to [country]. And then the team started to feel down about it, or whatever. And what
> my brother did was he uplifted the team and just reminding them to just to have fun and,
> you know, "we don't need to be number one," but they you know, they're playing with
> heart and […] that's something big.

All players were welcome to attend monthly board meetings and were consulted at each

practice about how they wanted that day's practice to run. As such, decision making was

perceived as shared throughout the VSSL – both with respect to how the games run and how the

organization functioned (i.e., "our VSSL") – and this facilitated a diffusion of influence and

leadership among players over how *their* team runs itself.

Theme 4: The VSSL and health outcomes

The fourth theme reflected the health benefits which participants perceived to be

associated with their involvement in the VSSL. Three sub-themes were developed. These

included: (1) *Experiencing recovery and the VSSL*, which reflected participants' differing notions

of 'recovery' – including from illness and addiction; (2) *The paradox of psychological safety*, in

which participants described the provision of psychological safety (along with instances of

countervailing diminishment of psychological safety) in the VSSL; and (3) *Protecting against*

outgroup stigma, which reflects processes of identity restoration in response to out-group stigma.

Experiencing recovery and the VSSL

The deemphasis on skill and ability within the VSSL weekly practices helped four

players feel safe to play at their own pace, something which Will described as uniquely valuable.

The physical accessibility of the VSSL made playing soccer attractive for those with mobility

concerns which may also have prevented them from playing in other, more competitive, settings

like UrbanRec – a commercial multi-sport league in Vancouver. Will explained how the VSSL was crucial to his recovery from pneumonia:

> They play for, you know, help people's health. Like I said, I was, I was just coming off of pneumonia, when I joined this group. I was a month; I had a month left of my pneumonia when I started playing for Street Soccer League. So I was literally atrophied. I couldn't bend my knees, I couldn't run, and I was about 128 pounds, and I was able to play with the group. So, like that you can't get that anywhere else man. You can't get that, you think inter-, you think intramurals at UBC are going to be nice to you like that? Hell no. That's fucking savage shit. I played that. […] We [the VSSL] don't slide tackle. We don't over 50/50. So, I was able to come and feel safe, atrophied at 128 pounds. There's no other soccer group that would ever allow that. […] I probably wouldn't have gotten physically recovered to the level I'm at if it wasn't for Vancouver city Soccer League.

The accessibility of the VSSL both financially and for any skill level was reported as attractive for new players who saw it as an opportunity to improve their health. As Jake described:

> And yeah, and then I guess like seven, eight years ago, VSSL came along, really inspired me to be a better person. And soccer really helps physically like just to become better, you know, you like exercise, you know, it makes you run. And obviously through exercise you get like a better stable mind. Which has helped me at least be able to walk to any interview and feel confident enough to get the job. […] I was on welfare at the time. So you know, I had nothing better to do anyway, other than to yeah, just, you know, better my health, I guess, mostly. […] Which it has done that for me because I was very much a heavy smoker then too. And smoking and soccer don't mix. So I, you know, it's like, a choice. You know, the choice is pretty easy. You know, smoking costs a lot more than soccer does so. And, and health wise I never wanted to become a smoker anyway. But, you know, life happens, and, you know, soccer definitely helped with that, as well.

Getting involved with soccer as a regular pastime helped Jake enter an environment which supported regular physical activity and what he regarded as opportunities for personal growth. In so doing, Jake felt that he avoided a potential return to using drugs. Jake described how soccer helped him disengage and move forward in his recovery from drug addiction:

> And then I don't know maybe like a few weeks into my recovery, a couple of girls that came by talking about the VSSL. […] So she had came by to talk about street soccer in general. It sounded interesting to me. Especially considering like, like, you know, trying to like, get my mind, mostly just trying to get my mind off of like, not wanting to do drugs anymore. So yeah, and then I guess I just been going ever since, really.

By emphasising this impact on his recovery, Jake noted that: "to the very core soccer has saved my life. But if it wasn't for the VSSL, I wouldn't have known soccer." However, encountering people using drugs at ALP can be a distressing trigger for players in recovery. Dylan described this experience after recently spending time in hospital due to using drugs after a period of abstinence:

> When I go to the toilet, sometimes there's some people like in the change [rooms], like in there doing drugs, and it's a bit confronting, but that's not really VSSL. I wouldn't put that in the same thing as that. […] It's just confronting seeing like it being used because I'm like, I'm in recovery. And it's sort of like, 'wow, I wish I didn't see that.'

Dylan described using drugs during a difficult period of identity transition after realising he likely would not be able to play professional soccer in his home country where he had played soccer at a club, district, and state level since he was 12. This disruption of athletic identity which had been a key basis for self-definition during his development led to a period of depression and personal identity disruption which made him ambivalent toward a game he used to love. In addition to participating in a mental health team program mandated by his housing site, Dylan described how he irregularly started playing social soccer again during his recovery:

> I was trying to get back into it because there was a little period where I become an addict and then didn't really care about [soccer] anymore. […] I dropped off for a bit, I like lost the passion for it a bit, I got a bit depressed because I wanted to make it as a pro, but it wasn't gonna happen. And then you know what I mean, so I kind of dropped off it a bit. And then when, when I got, I don't know, it's got, soccer this last year, last year, has sort of been on and off.

In addition to the recovery support described above, most participants also reported that the VSSL environment supported their health. Jake described how the VSSL offset some of the stress from not working, by stating: "And going [to the VSSL] every Sunday, it really helps alleviate from that, you know. If I can't find work, if I can't find a job, at least I look forward to every Sunday." Alesha felt that being surrounded by people "advancing their health care" within

a community characterised by high rates of substance use and poverty felt novel compared to other environments in which people who experience homelessness might spend time:

> It was completely different switch from other supports I had received at that time as a parent of a young child. […] And so, being able just to have a goal to go to the field knowing that fields gonna be free of rigs[3], you know? It's also safe from harassment. […] And that's something that's really rare to see, I believe, in East Van, because I see a lot of people exploiting their health. And that really upsets me, especially as a mother, right? And so being in a group of mindful individuals within East Van, who give a shit about their health, who give a shit about other people's health and who know how to have fun, that is, it was a strong motivator to keep coming back.

The paradox of psychological safety

This sub-theme describes a tension regarding how the presence of psychological safety for some players in the VSSL may undermine such safety for others. Psychological safety is defined as the result of a perception of in-group belonging which enables group members to feel comfortable expressing themselves, asking for help, and expressing mutual respect without fear of consequence or concern about their self-image (Fransen et al., 2020). On the one hand, in participating in a social group based on people's shared interest in soccer and shared identities as group members reflects the strong social bonds formed within the VSSL. Such bonds enable a sense of psychological safety by way of meeting group members' psychological needs (e.g., relatedness). On the other hand, because many members of the VSSL experience challenges with their mental health and traumas related to their life experiences, they may feel that the VSSL is a psychologically safe environment to express themselves. Paradoxically, those expressions (e.g., of anger, frustration, aggression, or oversharing personal information) can be stressful for players who come to the VSSL to play soccer with friends as a potential respite from daily life.

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[3] Rigs are the colloquial term for needles used for injecting drugs. Bins/containers for needles (or 'sharps') are commonly found in public spaces in the DTES such as ALP for safe needle disposal (Vancouver Coalition Against Prohibition and Overdose, 2021).

"Driven by passion," is how Alesha described the ways that some players expressed emotion at VSSL practices. She highlighted how it is important to her that VSSL players feel safe to express themselves, even if in ways that could be deemed inappropriate in other settings. She further highlighted how street soccer offered her a supportive reprise during personal crises:

> People fucking hate the fact that I go play soccer in the middle of a crisis, but I'm just like, "you know what? That shit kept my brain going." I have lived the truth where my brain has turned off. And I went on automatic pilot. And soccer pulled me out of it. So, I know that's a success. So that's, that's a guaranteed success. So that's something I will return to. Because like, through the wisdom of life, I know that these periods are temporary, the storms, whatever.

Interestingly, when asked about negative features of the VSSL, Will described how he felt some individual players can undermine the psychological safety of others:

> You know, some people bring their baggage to the field. And I'm the kind of person like what's between the lines is like, between the lines and the other shit just stays out? Like, "I don't want any of your shit at soccer. I don't want to hear your life fucking problems. I don't want to hear conspiracy bullshit. I don't want to hear sexist bullshit. I don't want to ask. I don't want to hear it." It's a safe space, but that means it's also safe space from other people's trauma. Like, I don't bring my fucking trauma to the soccer field. I'll be having a bad day, but I'm not fucking, ranting and raving. […] Because the thing is, now someone has to listen to someone else, others pain and that just makes you think, like I came here to not think about pain. […] Because the thing is, is if you like, if, if I go and I actually pay attention, I'm gonna have to fucking become a part of what's going on, that's, I can't take on other people's stuff. […] So, I can only handle so many people's trauma. So, when I come to Vancouver Street Soccer League, and the first thing that starts is someone else's trauma. It's no longer safe space at that moment.

What is noteworthy about Will's perspective is how perceptions of *who* is an in-group member and out-group member can differ among players. In-group members, as Will saw it, are those who adhere to the VSSL's various norms he values, such as ensuring players' psychological safety or keeping it a "safe space from other people's trauma". On the other hand, out-group members undermine such norms, including those who feel comfortable expressing their own emotional needs, frustrations, or remarking at other's expense. Indeed, while many may feel that the VSSL is an environment in which they can feel (psychologically) safe to express themselves, perhaps as a means of catharsis, it can be stressful for those on the receiving

end. This tension regarding how norms of psychological safety are constructed within the VSSL has important implications for player well-being.

Ainsley described being impacted by rape jokes made by some players at practices. They felt their distress was compounded by an absence of other femme-identifying[4] and/or gender diverse players with whom they bonded. Ainsley described their emotion-focused coping strategies to address their safety concerns (e.g., leaving the VSSL for a few months):

> It was nice to be able to go with other people, and particularly like other people from marginalized genders. So, when I was like, at [housing site], as I said, Cameron, I was like, I was staying at the women's shelter, because they only have two. And there was women that would come with me, and like, we would all go. And that was really nice. I'm sort of uncomfortable going by myself, if I was the only person there that was femme. […] People, like, some of the players like, have made like rape jokes and things like that, which like, makes me feel emotional, even now, just saying that. Um, so there's like, that's definitely contributed- wow. That means like, just some of the language that made me feel very unsafe. And so, there's definitely periods of time where like, I couldn't go.

It is important to consider that players may actively avoid practices because it could make their day worse or because they lacked a sense of (psychological) safety. Nick described how he would avoid the VSSL when having a "bad day" because "negative" players can make his day worse. As another example, the ways in which players expressed themselves, such as through aggression, can be harmful. Taking one's frustration out on the ball is one thing, but outright aggression directed towards others can cause unnecessary harm, such as sexist remarks, that can discourage players to return. As one entry from my research diary described:

> **February 15, 2021.** Eric, at one point, said "girls shouldn't try to shoot," after Monica missed two or three goals. I should've said something, reflecting on it now. This is what Thorpe and Olive (2011) meant by "feminist failures" and "reflexivities of discomfort" (Pillow, 2003, p. 175). […] He projected himself so unfairly into that situation, while others were laughing *with* Monica about "getting it next time."

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[4] Femme is a term commonly used to describe an individual's expression of feminine identity "that is dislocated from, and not necessitating, a female body" (Blair & Hoskin, 2014, p. 232).

It is possible that *if* I said something at the time it could have complicated my relationship with players with whom I was trying to build trust, but as Thorpe and Olive (2011) note, apathy in the field can prompt reflexivity about our ethical codes, identities, and praxis as researchers. In any case, (psychological) safety (whether felt or not) is seen as important within the VSSL practice setting. A player's ability to feel such safety on an ongoing basis appears to be influenced by a range of factors such as similar gender identity, whether one feels welcomed, or their time involved, but this safety can be undermined by those who do not consider the impact that their words or expressing emotional struggles can have on others.

Protecting against out-group stigma

Four participants described feeling distress from stigmatizing attitudes directed at them by others within and outside the VSSL program. Like Ainsley, Alesha's gender identity reflected a minority of VSSL players and felt particularly isolated when insulted or experiencing conflict with players who are men (i.e., the majority gender). Notably, Alesha described feeling self-conscious when social identities that she does not share with other players (e.g., single mother) are stigmatised:

> And that's where I deal with a lot of repercussions, because of, I have to be in the presence of other people's systems of belief that are not my own. And um, and their system of belief, I am technically basically, well, marginalized, so yeah. I'm a single mom, I'm never married, […] you know, people can come up with whatever reasons why I'm not the ideal person, right? […] Sometimes I feel like they're true, you know, they'll, they might hit me on a day that, you know, I'm feeling low. And so yeah, that's an insecurity, you hit the button and there, there it is.

In contrast to stigma experienced within the VSSL, Ainsley talked briefly about stigmatization from out-group members, such as their university professors. Ainsley experienced homelessness for a period while attending university and described the stigma they faced when people who had not personally experienced homelessness generalized about "homeless people." For example, when describing their involvement with the VSSL to one professor, the professor

assumed Ainsley was a volunteer. Ainsley felt like the professor positioned the roles of VSSL

player and VSSL volunteer at opposite ends of a *spectrum of respectability*. In the professor's

eyes, being a VSSL *player* (i.e., a homeless person) was non-normative for students and thus

considered a role for *others* with whom they would not affiliate. In contrast, being a VSSL

volunteer was seen as normal for students and reflected model citizenship. As Ainsley described:

> [My professor] just assumed that I was like a volunteer. It's like, "no," like, "I was a,"
> like, "I'm a player," like, "I was homeless," you know, like, "I started as a homeless
> person." And now like, "I'm not homeless anymore, but it's part of the community that
> I'm a part of." And it's just so interesting that like, yeah, this perception of like, it's only
> palatable if like, you're not, you don't have lived experience with that. I don't know. It
> was like a weird, like, like, it should just be just as valuable. Like, why does it matter?

Stigma directed towards VSSL players could also have reinforced Ainsley's self-

identification as a VSSL player. Ainsley described a similar situation in a university classroom:

> I was back at [university] taking an economics course, one professor actually mentioned
> VSSL. He's like, "see, like people are homeless, and they're playing soccer," like "you
> would- that's bizarre," like "you would think that they're looking for jobs or housing and
> not like playing soccer." And I was so mad. And he was using it as an example to
> illustrate like, people have diverse needs, but I was like, "you're," like "the message
> you're sending with that is that it's strange and bizarre that these people are trying to have
> some kind of like community and like, health and physical health."

Ainsley affirmed that this stigma was misguided and did not reflect their personal

experiences with participating in the VSSL. The interaction that Ainsley described also

highlights how stigma can motivate identity restoration behaviour. Ainsley described frustration

at their professor's problematic assumptions and at how his message contributed stigma toward

people with whom they felt a strong sense of community (i.e., the VSSL). As such, Ainsley's

identities, as a person who experienced homelessness, VSSL player, and as someone entitled to a

sense of community and health, were supported by a refusal of the stigma they encountered.

Results of Social Identity Mapping

The SIM results are structured in two sections. First, participants reflections on doing the

SIM activity are listed. In the second section, the findings are arranged into categories based on

the type of group that participants recorded. In order of appearance, the group categories

included Sport and Physical Activity Groups, Friends and Family Groups, Work Groups,

Healthcare and Housing Groups, Volunteering and Advocacy Groups, Indigenous Identities, and

School Groups. Regarding how representative each group category was of the dataset, at least

three participants are included in each, with Friends and Family comprised of the most

participants (eight). Specifically, the categories represented groups that met two criteria: (1)

participants included them on their map, and (2) explicitly described them in the interview, either

in relation to the VSSL or in a way that reflected one of the four themes identified above. Of

note, while many social groups to which participants belonged may or may not have been

reported on their maps, only those which met the two criteria are reported below. The

subheadings under each group category reflected aspects of the SIM activity (supportiveness,

positivity, and group compatibility) in relation to which participants gave examples from various

groups. Descriptive statistics for the SIM results are included in Appendix G.

Participant Reflections on Doing Social Identity Mapping

While the SIM activity was intended as a conversation prompt to facilitate rich dialogue

and as a data collection tool for answering the research questions, an unanticipated outcome

corresponded to participants' reflections on the process. Specifically, five participants saw

considerable value in completing the SIM as they described developing an awareness of the self,

their various social identities, and related values and goals. They described how the SIM activity

helped them consider personal goals, build an awareness of groups to which they belong (to

which they may have paid less attention because of the pandemic), and *see* the concept of

identity in a different way. One participant (Nick), however, described some indifference toward

the SIM component (as described below). Some participants shared what they thought of the

SIM activity after each interview and their responses are summarised here:

> **Terry:** I like this thing very much. I like this thing, what you're doing, and now for the groups that we're doing, it kind of helps. And to rethink or to, to make sure that, "is this group very important? Did this group mean something to me?," you know, "does this group get me somewhere in life?," or you know what I mean, "which group is important? Which group is not important?" You have to eliminate that group that is wasting your time and focus on the group that is, the same group, it's the group that is not wasting time, and you know, it keeps you, it keeps you positive, and you are able to focus and look for a direction.

> **Jake:** Because of the pandemic, I really haven't been that in touch with myself. So I suppose the map kind of like it really opens up aspects of my life that I, I kind of ignored because of the pandemic. I kind of put it on the back burner. […] I don't think of it anymore.

> **Ainsley:** Yeah, it's good. It was interesting to see like, mapped up, I feel like identity is something that I think about a lot and like, I've read a lot about and stuff, but, um, it was cool. I have never, like, mapped it out. And like, put all my identities in, like group identities and tried to see how they connected. So yeah, that was cool.

> **Dylan:** I thought it was fun, it got me to learn a little bit more about myself around how I think about things. And the way things, that I actually am connected with things in my life when I don't feel like I actually am [*laughs*]. If you know what I mean.

> **Cory:** It was kind of eye opening, eye opening for some things, I didn't realize that. It was like "oh, I should work on that." You know?

> **Nick:** Oh, yeah, it was building. It was touching some spots, but for, for the whole overall, the interview, it was touching some spots. But no, it's constructive.

Social Groups and Identities

Sport and Physical Activity Groups. Seven participants noted sport and physical

activity groups, other than the VSSL, that benefitted and challenged them. Specifically, Hayley

described how her group entitled "workout" helped her develop a healthier sense of self, Nick

described how people at his gym can be antisocial (unlike at the VSSL), and Dylan noted how

his previous soccer club felt like a family (like the VSSL). Two participants felt that the relative

importance of groups in their lives depended on whether they were involved at that time. For

example, although Cory ranked one of his sport teams as less important because the season had

ended, Hayley, who despite not having participated in her dance and soccer groups since the

pandemic, said "it's almost like every day that I think about [them], because I do want to get

back into playing soccer and, and dancing powwow[5]."

       Supportiveness. Hayley felt that the group she listed as "workout" was important because

it helped her cope with various injuries and health challenges. Having "actually been pretty

active in my working out lately," Hayley rated the group 10 out of 10 on supportiveness because

it was "helping me get my strength back in a lot of different areas."

       Positivity. In contrast to feeling accepted right away at the VSSL (see sub-theme: The

VSSL leaders and identity entrepreneurship), Hayley felt like it took a while to fit in at her group

entitled "urban dance group." As she described:

> It's an eight [out of 10], just because I don't know maybe that was just my own sense of
> belonging, because I was kind of like well, I've been urbanized[6] my whole life, right? So,
> it took me a while to even approach the group and let them know who I was, even though
> they knew who I was. But it took a while to finally feel like I fit in, I guess.

       Friends and Family Groups. Nine participants described a supportiveness and positivity

within their Friends and Family Groups akin to what they felt in the VSSL. For example, Alesha

described how being mother of a hospitalised child felt "typical" in the hospital context but

"atypical" in other contexts, much like how being a VSSL player meant different things in

weekly practices compared to competition settings (see sub-theme: Social connectivity and

competition):

> I'm a typical parent that has a patient child. My child has a rare condition, and so we are
> within a lot of specialized environments. […] I put a one dash 10 [*laughs*], the whole
> range. Yeah. Because, yeah, it depends what environment I'm in, if I'm at the Children's
> Hospital, I'm a typical parent. Or I'm a 'mother to a child patient'. Well, as soon as I
> leave the environment, it's, I'm not, we're not typical.

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[5] Powwow refers to a social and ceremonial dance performed by various Indigenous communities across North America.

[6] Urbanized is a colloquial term used here most likely in reference to a diverse urban Indigenous identity that is shaped by living for all or most of one's life in an urban setting, having a mixed cultural background, and growing up in some way distanced from one's cultural identities (Fast et al., 2017).

Supportiveness. Jake described how becoming part of a foster family at a young age

helped him become independent and accept help from others:

> I know how, how it feels to be, you know, when you have nothing and you need
> something, and and it's hard to ask people for help. […] My last foster family, they were
> really good people. You know, they, they really showed me what it felt like to have a
> home and to be in one and to also have a family dynamic because I've never really had
> that growing up. I was always looked at as a number. I was always looked at as a subject,
> you know, just something that needed to be taken care of, but not really nurtured, you
> know?

Hayley felt like the groups on her map, in various ways, reflected notions of family

because of the support and sense of togetherness they provided:

> VSSL, floor hockey, breakdancing, powwow, family, are being, dance group, [drum
> group] and Board of Directors, they're all like, pretty much like family because they're
> supportive. And we become family because we become a team. […] Oh, and then like,
> well, I guess volunteering they end[ed] up becoming family too because you get to know
> your peers and people that you're working with and for.

Work Groups. Three participants described work not as an activity based on personal

interest, like the VSSL. Rather, work was seen as a means to achieve various ends, such as a

stable income or avoiding homelessness. Two participants felt inauthentic when presenting as

their 'work selves', unlike at the VSSL where they felt they could bring their whole selves. As

Nick described:

> Because [work] is a big part of my life. […] It's not very relatable of people and who
> they are and how I want myself to conduct myself. I wouldn't want to conduct myself as
> most of the construction guys. They are really good guys. […] Sometimes you just have
> to put on a face, you know. I've realized over the years that you have to put on a face.

Supportiveness. Participants generally described feeling like work supported them with

financial security, getting off the street, and building social skills. In contrast, most participants

noted that beyond their practical needs, support from the VSSL was meaningful by virtue of

being together and having fun (see Theme 2). As such, participants rarely befriended their work

colleagues and communication mostly occurred to simply help them complete work tasks. As

Terry described:

> I chose one [out of 10], non-supportive because we never talk. […] We never talk about
> our ambitions, and we never talk about future goals and career paths you want to choose.
> You know, we just talked about the company how it is most of the time for for the current
> company that I'm working for. Yeah. There's no motivation, motivating each other. […]
> Everyone is just doing their own thing, trying to pay the bills and get ahead in life.

Jake described how working six days per week helped him move into his own place:

> But you know, it was worth it. You know, like I said, it got me off the streets got me out
> of out of a shelter, you know, into, yeah, not, not a very big place. You know, it was just
> one bedroom. Very small. But it was my own. You know, I didn't have to, I didn't have
> to share my space with anybody, so.

Healthcare and Housing Groups. Beyond the notion that healthcare and public housing

are benevolent institutions supporting human thriving, three participants offered nuanced insight

about their experiences in such groups.

Supportiveness. Alesha described feeling that she could not feel fully accepted as an

Indigenous woman in healthcare settings, and that expressing her identity was safer in "low

barrier" groups like the VSSL:

> **Alesha:** So I added a block [to the map]. Same with the [hospital centre], sort of within
> the healthcare system, there's still a lot of blocks.
> **Joseph:** When you say block, what do you mean by that?
> **Alesha:** […] It's not full support. Yeah, it's it and it's not Indigenous. And so then
> there's, there's streams in here that won't recognize me as being Indigenous. Because
> within these streams here [gesturing to the map], because they're low barrier, low access,
> it's self-identifying. So you're welcome. And you are like, in your you put to practice
> your Indigenous ways, Indigenous cultures, and you get reunified with your Indigenous
> cultures, but as soon as I switch in, and continue to advance within like the, the Canadian
> model of service, such as education or health care, all the Indigenous channels get shut
> down.

Positivity. Dylan described how a mental health clinic, which he was mandated to visit by

his housing site, helped him with his recovery. However, he described feeling like attendance

was an overall negative experience:

It like puts my confidence down going to the mental health place. […] And I've been back there every two weeks, for like a needle and the needle, like makes, the next day makes me get a headache and like vomit all the time for a few days. So, I turn out, like turn into being a zombie. It's not really, it's not a positive experience.

Group compatibility. Dylan felt conflicted about the mental health clinic group because it interfered with the leisure activities that he valued, such as the VSSL, particularly for coping with the pandemic and stay-at-home orders. As he described:

I find that my mental health team group gets in the way of my, my more leisure activities […] Like if I'm feeling dopey the next day from my medication. Like, I can't really play soccer if I'm feeling tired or and sometimes with the [housing site] groups, they have activities we do and, and I can't do it sometimes due to having to go to the mental health group. […] I feel let down a bit. Having to do that all the time. […] I just feel like feel let down that I can't do a group if I've got to go to the mental health place where I don't really want to be.

Volunteering and Advocacy Groups. Five participants described groups related to their volunteer and advocacy work. Jayden described how he made friends through volunteering at a soup kitchen that is close to ALP:

Oh, through a breakfast place that I go to. It's a volunteer program that I do for serving breakfast to people in the community. […] It's a soup kitchen. They give hot coffee, free muffins, snacks and stuff. […] I go there every day most of the time.

Supportiveness. Ainsley felt one advocacy group to which they belong, because of their shared experience in foster care (much like the shared experience of homelessness among VSSL players), fostered an accessible and supportive an environment. As they described:

Foster care alumni, it's a 10 I feel like that, like, that social group, if I need anything, or if I were to, like, approach others from that group, and I'm like, 'I need help,' feel like there's a lot of understanding that they have. And I don't usually, I don't normally go to them for support, but it's just a really supportive environment where I feel like really understood in a lot of ways, so I said, 10 for that.

Indigenous Identities. Out of the six Indigenous participants in the sample, three talked about their Indigenous identities, often with pride and a desire for personal growth. Cory described a strong sense of pride as an Indigenous person and explained wanting to 'do more' for "my people" by going to rallies, practicing Cree, and attending rallies. Hayley described a

similar pride when noting the diverse ways that Indigenous identities interacted during dance and

drum cultural practices within her groups. Hayley remarked that unlike some Indigenous groups

to which she belonged, there were no expectations on who players must be at the VSSL – anyone

is welcome regardless of their background. Hayley described feeling like her urbanized

Indigenous identity complicated feelings of belonging in primarily Indigenous groups, which

fostered a commitment to continue learning about her community. As she described:

> I was really shy. And I felt lost. And I was urbanized. So like I learnt a lot of different
> teachings from different, different tribes and nations. Like the drum, [youth organization]
> Young Women's Drum Group is like a big powwow and women weren't allowed to sit at
> the drum. So it took me a while to get in with that, but with it, and then so I became a
> powwow dancer. And I, like I know so many teachings from other nations like, tribes and
> whatnot. And I didn't really know who I was, from where I was from, and I just, I don't
> know why I didn't feel accepted in the group right away. […] And I started to, just take it
> upon myself because you know, there's people that'll teach us, but it's up to us if we want
> to, to continue to learn.

School Groups. Three participants described school groups on their maps in relation to

the VSSL.

Supportiveness. As described in Theme 2, a key motivation underpinning involvement in

the VSSL was the consistent social fluency it fostered; however, there were moments when it

was undermined by competitiveness. Similarly, Terry felt that his school reflected elements of

competition because he shared similar goals and classes with his friends, yet the value of their

friendship was a core feature of his schooling experience. As he described:

> **Terry:** The friends from school. They can be a competition, but they are supportive too,
> they are nine, nine out of 10. Yeah, because they can be competition too, in the same
> class and all that stuff and you know, going for the same goals. Yeah.
> **Joseph**: Is there other ways that they support you like, or just to do with your goals?
> **Terry:** They ask if everything's okay. Yeah, "you need help, you need something?" Like
> the VSSL group of friends, they always ask if everything's okay. "How is life?" And you
> know, socialize, you know?

Group compatibility. Hayley felt like her experiences with homelessness, drug addiction,

and mental health challenges helped her relate to others who struggled with similar experiences.

She mentioned that this motivated her to finish school, go to college, and then work as a mental

health professional so she can help others. As she described:

> I just got two classes to graduate. I just got English Part B and math. And then right after that, I can go into college. To work with the youth, like to give back to the community because like the community has done so much and saved and my life in all of these different areas. […] I've been homeless, I've been homeless. I've been, I was stuck in addiction with drugs and alcohol. And I went through a lot of things growing up being a mom to my brother since I was seven to the time I left home. And then understanding mental health issues, and just being aware and knowledgeable about a lot of different things that [I] have gone through in my life and being able to say that "I went through it" and understand anyone that I'm going to be willing to help in the future. To be able to help them get through it is something that's gonna mean a whole lot to me.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The overall purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of players in the Vancouver Street Soccer League as they related to social identity, group membership, and well-being. Ten participants, who were previously or currently homeless at the time of conducting the interviews, reflected on their experiences joining and participating with the VSSL and considered the VSSL's relationship to other social groups that they valued. In this chapter I discuss the results in relation to the relevant literature and my overall research questions.

The chapter is organized into six sections. First, I begin with a discussion of how the results build on and/or complement research into athletic identity and authenticity, with reference to the role of perceived stress brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. I then discuss how the emphasis placed on connection and social inclusion over competitiveness as a common feature of The VSSL Practice Spirit related to players' well-being. Third, I consider the results pertaining to the key features of the VSSL's approach to social inclusion in relation to literature on the psychological need for autonomy, social support, and ontological security. Fourth, I explore the health implications of involvement with the VSSL as described by players specifically regarding psychological safety, stigma, and recovery (from illness and addiction). The fifth section includes a discussion about research into shared leadership and its capacity to enable members to shape the VSSL's norms and values in ways that support player well-being and contribute to the VSSL's continuity. Last, the study's potential for practical application and knowledge translation is discussed before considering future research directions and limitations of the methodology.

Formation of a VSSL Social Identity: Athletic Identity, Authenticity, and Stress

One notable finding of this study was that participants described themselves as either having competitive or recreational sporting pasts which influenced their present participation in sport and in the VSSL. Athletic identity is defined as the extent to which an individual identifies with the athlete role as part of one's overall self-concept (Brewer et al., 1993). This study's results, prior research, and anecdotal evidence suggests that high performance athletes can experience homelessness at various stages in their athletic careers due to a range of socioeconomic, developmental, and structural factors (Book Jr et al., 2020; Condon, 2018; Whitley et al., 2016). This study contributes to a better understanding of how athletic identity among former and current recreational and high-performance athletes who have experienced homelessness underpins decisions to engage in a local soccer league and the program's influence on their lives more broadly. Specifically, participants described how joining the VSSL enabled them to renew past athletic identities and build a sense of community with others who shared similar experiences (e.g., homelessness) and interests (e.g., soccer).

Many interventions target the agentic capacities of people experiencing homelessness to exercise with the goal of addressing their *individual* health needs (Clift, 2019; Gregg & Bedard, 2016; Parry et al., 2021; Quinton et al., 2021; Sofija et al., 2018). In contrast, participants in the present study pointed to the *communal* capacities of social groups (i.e., the VSSL) to promote health via social belonging, social support, and a sense of community. In other words, sport-for-development programs are valued most by players when positioned not as individualised tools of health promotion, but as forms of health promotion focused on meeting people's communal needs and involve localized community collaboration (such as the VSSL in Vancouver's DTES; Guest, 2018). Participants saw the VSSL as a key group in their (social) lives, and not simply an

intervention designed to help them. This finding is important because sport-for-development initiatives have been critiqued based on their potential to "act as a form of social control rather than an avenue for social mobility" (Coalter, 2015; Sherry & Osborne, 2018, p. 381). Indeed, this study illustrated that players' continued involvement in the VSSL revolved around feeling valued as whole persons, experiences of social inclusion and social support, and feeling like a family. Programs can aim to leverage the inherent commonality among participants and make salient the social identities which they feel most relate to their involvement (e.g., shared athletic identities).

In proposing a conceptual model that reflects one's social identity fit to the environment, Schmader and Sedikides (2018) argued that people strive for authenticity in any given context. Researchers suggest that state authenticity has important implications for self-segregation out of, and participation in, social groups, goal pursuit, general well-being, and belonging (Aday & Schmader, 2019; Rivera et al., 2019; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). State authenticity can be understood with regard to three forms of 'fit' which drive approach or avoidance behaviours to and from social groups: goal fit (which fosters motivational fluency), social fit (which fosters interpersonal fluency), and self-concept fit (which fosters cognitive fluency; Schmader & Sedikides, 2018). The present study contributes to this conceptualisation of 'fit' by demonstrating that VSSL players who have experienced homelessness see themselves as default members of the social group and can feel authentic in the VSSL environment. As a result, players experienced cognitive fluency (e.g., shared interests, experiences, and identities (e.g., Indigeneity) with others), motivational fluency (e.g., opportunities to build soccer skills and compete), and interpersonal fluency (e.g., socially connected with peers at practices) across VSSL contexts.

Identity fit to the environment is multifaceted and can depend on self-perceptions of authenticity (Rivera et al., 2019), group-identity affirming features of the (physical) environment (Meagher, 2019), and the identity centrality of one's experience with homelessness (Parker et al., 2016). Notably, "homeless people do not passively, inevitably, and uniformly accept a deprecated and devalued sense of self" (Parker et al., 2016, p. 214). The potential for other identities to be made salient in the VSSL context (e.g., Indigenous identity, athletic identity) demonstrates the ways that players felt able to present authentic versions of themselves when playing as members of the VSSL. Nonetheless, it is important to consider that while the VSSL environment may afford opportunities for authenticity, and thus promote continued involvement (Aday & Schmader, 2019), participant well-being may be undermined by extraneous structural (e.g., economic; Luchenski et al., 2018) and social identity-based (e.g., racial) discrimination in other contexts (Rivera et al., 2019).

Players described the features of the VSSL which enabled them to feel pride, supported, and a sense of belonging by cueing features of the self as parts of a higher-order VSSL social identity. However, despite the role that a desire for authenticity and positive identity may have played in participants' self-selection into the VSSL group, this study occurred within a societal context of heightened social isolation and stress due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Pixley et al., 2021). As Turner and colleagues (1994) noted, "identity varies in order to represent the perceiver's changing relationship to reality" (p. 458). As such, reduced involvement in, or loss of, other valued groups (such as work or recreational groups), likely attenuated the importance players placed on the VSSL group (as a social identity resource) at a time when the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted people's ability to participate in group life. While it has been contested whether leisure opportunities can exist for people living on the street (Harmon, 2019),

this study demonstrated that people who have experienced homelessness engaged in a supportive

recreational soccer program for varied reasons (e.g., as a potential source of support) during a

time of heightened social isolation and health risks associated with the pandemic.

Consequences of Unwelcome Performance-Driven Competitiveness

Most participants recognised that competitions, particularly those resulting in collective

achievement (e.g., a trophy) or experiences (e.g., valued social bonding), and the relationships

formed through weekly Sunday practices positively impacted their social well-being. It should be

noted, however, that during the VSSL's weekly practices, *performance-driven competitiveness –*

the desire to win over others at all costs – was seen as unfavourable, whereas a desire for social

connectivity and cooperation was seen as favourable. In other words, "socially oriented" players,

groups, and settings, were valued more than those which were "football oriented" (Segura M.

Trejo et al., 2017, p. 626). Similarly, Macnaughton and Meldrum (2017), in their 19-month

ethnographic study with a street soccer team in Victoria, B.C., noted that many players attending

a regional competition valued the experience of socially connecting more than the desire to win.

Previous research has recognised that street soccer programs which foster social

acceptance – of any player regardless of skill level – and focus on cooperation over performance-

driven competitiveness can foster social integration, long-term engagement, and self-

determination among participants (J. Magee & Jeanes, 2011; Segura M. Trejo, 2013; Sherry &

Strybosch, 2012). The results suggest that performance-driven players' over-involvement in a

hypercompetitive and win-at-all costs climate can undermine the VSSL Practice Spirit's

emphasis on social integration, cooperation, and *friendly* competition. In performance-driven

circumstances, research suggests that participants (in particular, those with low perceived skill

and/or mastery) experience less enjoyment, satisfaction, lower rates of participation, and feel

worse about themselves and the sporting environment (Roberts et al., 2012). However, competition which is friendly and cooperative has been associated with group cohesion (Harden et al., 2014), and was described by players in the current study as a welcome and celebrated feature of the VSSL.

Inclusion as Social Identity Content: Features of Autonomy, Social Support, and Stability

The VSSL's perceived inclusivity towards newcomers (including players' friends and family), flexibility to come and go, and social support were examples of the VSSL social identity content – the specific meaningful reason(s), such as the norms, interests, and ideals, why people identify with a group (Miller et al., 2021; Postmes & Spears, 1998). The results of the present study support previous work suggesting that shared social identity content is the schematic 'fruit' on the cognitive 'branches' of social identity processes underlying social action at the intergroup (A. G. Livingstone et al., 2009; A. Livingstone & Haslam, 2008) and intragroup (Miller et al., 2021; Slater et al., 2019) levels. Livingstone and Haslam (2008) emphasise that social identity content, rather than generic structure and processes of social identity (e.g., identification, categorization), are the basis from which social identities are *made meaningful*. In other words, the shared social identity content of the VSSL in specific social and embodied contexts is an example of "situated cognition" (Solomon, 2007). Four distinct norms (as social identity content) of the VSSL social identity identified in the results (i.e., inclusivity, autonomy support, social support, and stability) bolster these claims and the latter three norms are discussed below.

Autonomy and relatedness are argued to be two basic human needs and dimensions of well-being variously fulfilled in daily life (Reis et al., 2000). Among people experiencing homelessness, relatedness and autonomy have been described as workable strategies of survival and tenuous social connection within and outside social services (Barker, 2014). The VSSL's

approach to supporting player autonomy through soccer reflects an "indirect, rather than direct/paternalistic, intervention" like other autonomy-supportive services with homeless adults (Parsell & Clarke, 2019). This approach enabled players to *voluntarily* engage in practices of identity development, relationship building, and leisure through the VSSL in ways that mattered to them, as opposed to ways that met the aims of VSSL administrators and funders. All participants valued the VSSL's flexibility whereby they could attend (or not) whenever it suited them and trusted that they could return seamlessly if they were absent for an extended period.

Research suggests that social support may improve resilience, subjective well-being, and reduce perceived stress among participants in Housing First programs (Addo et al., 2021; Durbin et al., 2019). Two separate studies demonstrated that social support mediated the relationship between group identification and well-being and enhanced well-being regardless of housing status among residents of a homeless shelter in Brisbane, Australia (Johnstone, Parsell, et al., 2015; Walter et al., 2016). Contrasting with traditional supports or groups participants might need or want (e.g., housing services, other sport leagues), access to the VSSL was not based on certain criteria (e.g., severity of homelessness). Notably, all participants felt like the VSSL provided them unconditional social and material support (e.g., help finding work). The results suggest that support from other VSSL group members underpinned feelings of belongingness and social connectedness, which is consistent with previous findings that shared group memberships can bolster well-being in part due to perceived support and connection (Jetten et al., 2014; Johnstone et al., 2016).

Many qualitative studies have drawn on the concept of ontological security when seeking to explore people's experiences of homelessness (Stonehouse et al., 2020), living in supportive housing (Henwood et al., 2018), participation in a housing first program (Padgett, 2007), and

returning from incarceration (Rosenberg et al., 2021). Overall, ontological security is defined as a sense of home, beyond the minimal provision of a physical space, which addresses the need for privacy, safety, routine, and buffers against feelings of stigma, social exclusion, and uncertainty about the future (Rosenberg et al., 2021). However, a sense of ontological security does not necessarily prevent feelings of impermanence and lack of control due to other factors (e.g., job insecurity, immigration status concerns). The present study highlights how notions of 'stability' are constructed as influencing involvement with valued groups (e.g., VSSL, university) and relate to one's life experiences (e.g., instability as a youth in foster care or with housing). Additionally, stability was described as a form of identity continuity (i.e., how persistent social identities are perceived to be over time) and many stressed that the VSSL community is akin to a family. Importantly, creating conditions for identity continuity and ontological security can underpin psychological and social well-being (Rosenberg et al., 2021; Sani et al., 2008).

Negotiating Psychological Safety, Stigma, and Recovery in the VSSL

The present study highlights that when VSSL participants overshared personal traumas or expressions of anger due to a psychologically safe environment with other players, this can be perceived as stressful by those who are looking for a safe escape from, and to perhaps not be reminded of, their own challenges. Participants described coping with stressful encounters with other VSSL players, which compromised their psychological safety, by not returning to practices (Cohen et al., 2016; Folkman et al., 1986). However, many participants described the VSSL as a "safe space" in which they positively identified as soccer players, in contrast to the discrimination and stigma they experienced elsewhere. Psychological safety, mostly researched in organizational contexts, is related to performance, learning, and information sharing (Edmondson & Lei, 2014; Frazier et al., 2017). In a competitive context, for example, Fransen

and colleagues (2020) demonstrated that psychological safety mediated the negative relationship between coach and teammate identity leadership and athlete burnout. The context of the present study, however, shows some of the interpersonal complications (e.g., avoidance, re-traumatization) that can arise when psychological safety is undermined in group settings where members live with trauma.

When facing stigma from *out-groups*, some participants highlighted the positive VSSL group's (identity) distinctiveness despite it overlapping with a stigmatized group identity (i.e., homelessness). This finding contrasts with Walter (2015) who found that rejecting a homeless label led to greater well-being and relates to how Parsell and Clarke (2019) described homeless adults' varied understandings of agency. Instead of players out-right denouncing (or accepting) a homeless identity as influencing their well-being, the results suggest that it is the construction of stigmatized (and related) identities *in positive ways* that supports well-being via perceptions of solidarity with the positive social group with which participants identified (e.g., VSSL).

One way that people navigate health challenges is through (re)negotiations of the self by revaluating (and/or maintaining) existing social identities and pursuing new ones (Dingle, Cruwys, et al., 2015; C. Haslam et al., 2008), such as recovery identities among drug users with and without experience of homelessness (Beckwith et al., 2019; Best et al., 2016, 2018; Bower et al., 2021; Dingle, Stark, et al., 2015). Beckwith and colleagues (2019), guided by the idea that individual "recovery journeys" are socially negotiated (Best et al., 2016), used social identity mapping with 155 members of a therapeutic community to demonstrate that increased strength of one's recovery identity was associated with involvement in a higher proportion of groups where not using alcohol or drugs was normative. The results of the current study highlight that although for some the VSSL can be an escape from social and recovery-related challenges, given the high

rate of poverty and public substance use in Vancouver's DTES, there is the potential for distress from encountering people using drugs within the surrounding area.

Participants described complicated experiences with their own (and others) drug use as it related to their social relationships, highlighting the complicated dual role of "user" and "non-user" for people navigating recovery (Bower et al., 2021). In this sense, VSSL involvement was described by some participants in relation to a constant need to "maintain a positive social identity" and "belong," when also juxtaposed against "broader normative cultural discourses in which homelessness and substance use are stigmatised and pathologized" (Bower et al., 2021, p. 78). While the specific contexts are different to the present study, similar changes to behaviour and the development of new social identities were reported in interview studies with street soccer players in Scotland, USA, and Norway (Ogundipe et al., 2020; Whitley et al., 2021). Researchers reported that the unique soccer context aligned with participants' love for the sport, combined with trauma-informed programming, motivated player involvement, helped them foster new identities, develop resilience, and restore a sense of belonging to their community which aided in the recovery process (Ogundipe et al., 2020; Whitley et al., 2021).

(Shared) Leadership Underpins VSSL Norms and Values

Sports coaching research has been criticized for over-focusing on performance settings and overlooking the realm of coaching in community settings and the experiences of marginalized populations (Spaaij et al., 2014). The present study extends the idea that relationship-building is central to effective community coaching and demonstrates that the VSSL coaches' ability to bring diverse individuals together to feel a collective sense of togetherness is a form of social identity leadership. Although social identity leadership research within sport settings is nascent, a growing body of work suggests that there are distinct components by which

leaders foster group identity: identity prototypicality (being seen as a group member), advancement (working on behalf of the group), entrepreneurship (crafting a group identity), and impresarioship (embedding meanings to the group identity; Steffens et al., 2014). Accordingly, the results support the idea that the 'appointed' VSSL leaders (i.e., Board members, coaches, volunteers) engaged in strategies of identity entrepreneurship in part by sustaining shared identity content (such as positive sport experiences, social support, and psychological safety; Slater et al., 2019). Of note, participants described feeling recognised by the VSSL leaders upon first joining the program which, in turn, facilitated social belonging and continued participation. This reflects similar findings from studies of social group participation among individuals who have experienced homelessness (Johnstone et al., 2016; Rutenfrans-Stupar, Van Der Plas, et al., 2019) and meta-analytic evidence that social identification-building programs demonstrate improvements on multiple well-being indicators (Steffens et al., 2019).

Emergent and shared leadership among all members of the VSSL can transcend and complement the designation of formal roles to the VSSL's *appointed* leaders, such as coaches, board members, and volunteers (Fransen et al., 2020). The results suggest that stakeholders at all levels of the VSSL (players and administrators) felt able to contribute to decision making. People who experience homelessness are often denied choice and agency in their daily lives (Parsell & Clarke, 2019). As such, in expanding the idea of individual 'leaders' into encouraging the capacities of every group member to contribute to 'shared leadership', the VSSL demonstrated that members felt more supported and capable of engaging in forms of identity leadership (e.g., identity advancement, prototypicality; Steffens et al., 2014). Noting the ways that players felt they *shared* influence over the VSSL is not to state that the VSSL is completely non-hierarchical. Nor does it mean that any player can show up to practice and expect to influence how the VSSL

runs. However, *perceptions* of influence among all shared leaders showed how the shared VSSL social identity was collectively shaped in ways that continually reinforced and built its underpinning meanings, norms, and values (Reicher et al., 2005; Turner et al., 1994).

Practical Implications and Knowledge Translation

The results of this study provide several key directions for practical application, knowledge translation, and future research. The results of this study shed light on the experiences of soccer players who have experienced homelessness in a street soccer league in Vancouver. Based on the interview accounts and social identity maps of current and former players in the Vancouver Street Soccer League, this study has the potential to provide valuable insights into ways in which community sport organizations with aims of social inclusion can create environments that facilitate social belonging, psychological safety, connectedness, and shared leadership. Potential future research directions are also discussed in this section.

As suggested by Edmondson and Lei (2014), psychological safety and the climate conducive to learning and expressing oneself freely, does not emerge accidentally. This study suggests that there is a need to consider ways to ensure players can all feel safe whilst being able to share their experiences openly and seek help for their needs. In addition to the VSSL Practice Spirit and norms of supportiveness, inclusivity, and friendly competition described in weekly emails, there is potential for VSSL coaches and volunteers to introduce new players to, and periodically remind current players of, the VSSL's Code of Conduct (Vancouver Street Soccer League, 2021). Specifically, such activities could demonstrate that performance-driven competitiveness potentially undermines the VSSL Practice Spirit and may negatively impact players' enjoyment, desire to return, and psychological safety. It would also be important to consider how all members within the VSSL cooperate to not only create, but renew, maintain,

and uphold such standards over time. Moreover, the VSSL could incorporate the tenets of trauma-informed programming, such as those suggested by Whitley and colleagues (2021), to the Code of Conduct to help cultivate norms around what is or is not appropriate to share openly at the VSSL. The VSSL could also build partnerships with health organizations in the DTES to improve awareness of trauma-related supports available in the community (Boilevin et al., 2019).

Another potential avenue for knowledge translation is in the realm of coach leadership education. Specifically, beyond existing recommendations that coach education streams be developed for community coaching settings (Spaaij et al., 2014), coaching accreditors in Canada (e.g., National Coaching Certification Program) could hire members of the community coaching (volunteer) workforce (e.g., from street soccer programs across Canada) to share their learnings about community coaching with student coaches. Future coaches could benefit from an awareness of the social determinants of health underpinning social exclusion and marginalization, systemic inequality, and the values of relationship and community building efforts over performance-related goals (Spaaij et al., 2014). In addition, given the VSSL's existing relationship with UBC's Medical School whereby students play at the VSSL once per month to gain experience working in settings with marginalized community members, there is potential for similar partnerships to be developed with coach education programs.

Based on my observations at practices and attendance at Board meetings, board member communication with players, including those on the Board, was limited by the COVID-19 pandemic due to challenges with technology access and thus an inconsistent ability to attend online Board meetings. Accordingly, formally fostering shared leadership among players by adding opportunities for communication with the Board is another potential application of the results. For example, Board members could create player feedback sessions at regular practices

such that input from those unable to participate in Board meetings is formally recognized and actioned. Such changes could improve players' capacity to share leadership and contribute to organizational decision making and suggest tangible changes regarding their needs.

As illustrated in the results, the SIM activity helped participants build self-understanding, consider group-related goals, and renew appreciation for the role of groups in their lives. While all SIM questions were designed to relate to the VSSL and it was not explicitly delivered as a mental health intervention, several participants spoke extremely positively about doing the activity. The SIM is a low cost and easily accessible activity which could be used in social service settings with individuals seeking support, given its demonstrated potential for supporting mental health and building self-understanding (Beckwith et al., 2019; Bentley et al., 2020; C. Haslam et al., 2016), to help them consider such questions as: With which groups would you like to spend more time? With which groups do you want support to remain involved? Which groups are not on your map, but you would like to be? How do these groups (positively or negatively) contribute to your life? Indeed, in settings with individuals experiencing marginalization or disadvantage, the SIM may help them realise what supports they have.

Future Research Directions

Although the SIM results reflect people's expressed understandings of the various groups at the time of conducting the interviews that comprised this thesis, it is unclear to what extent participants reflected on how those relationships are/were meaningfully lived *over time* because participant's social groups/SIMs were not discussed again after the interview. Longitudinal multi-site ethnographic research, using SIM, could help explore the ways that people perceive, compare, or *experience* intra-group relationships, which evolve and change over time, as opposed to how they portray their understandings of those relationships in a single research

interview. Additional interviews over time could potentially relieve the cognitive load of creating, describing, and reflecting upon them in one sitting (Bagnoli, 2009). In line with a need for *requisite variety* (Tracy, 2010), such in-depth approaches could improve understandings of how involvement in social groups contribute to the health and well-being of communities who experience marginalization and/or who are disadvantaged.

Much sport-for-development and health promotion research with homeless communities involves time-limited interventions (e.g., Curran et al., 2016; Malden et al., 2019). Such interventions often do not attempt to address the systemic impacts of inequality on health outcomes among people living in poverty, manufacture intervention groups aimed at behaviour change, and place the burden of health improvement or goal attainment on individual participants (Clift, 2019; Gregg & Bedard, 2016; Parry et al., 2021; Quinton et al., 2021; Sofija et al., 2018). There is a need to understand the participation of people who experience homelessness in various social groups as an *active choice* rather than due to a *passive need* for support (e.g., from researchers, community mental health workers, municipalities). Action-oriented ethnographic research, in partnership with community organizations, could potentially help elucidate how participants consider the spatial, temporal, embodied, and relational elements of sport programs when deciding whether to engage (Clift, 2020; Hodgetts et al., 2014; Koch et al., 2018; Scherer et al., 2021).

Limitations

Balanced against the contributions of the research presented in this thesis, limitations should also be considered when interpreting the results. First, any consideration of the study's results should also be grounded in the fact that I was an outside researcher who, despite involving myself with the VSSL almost weekly for over one year, have never personally

experienced homelessness. As a white settler trained in western academic forms of knowledge gathering involved with a community which is decidedly Indigenous and racialized, my positionality and ideological position affected my interpretations of conversations with individuals with their own worldviews (Olive & Thorpe, 2011; Thistle, 2017). This may have resulted in two limitations that correspond to participant recruitment as well as representativeness of the study findings (in relation to the totality of VSSL participants' experiences). Specifically, VSSL players may have been uninclined to express interest in participation due to perceiving me as an outsider. In addition, participants may have provided somewhat superficial accounts or not fully revealed or elaborated upon certain details in the interviews due to my 'outsider status'.

The last limitation of my study relates to the diversity of the sample. While the sample reflects the general gender make-up of the VSSL, the Board noted that participation from women and gender diverse players in the VSSL had significantly reduced in number because of physical distancing and isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Indeed, the pandemic has heightened vulnerabilities for low-income women and gender diverse individuals (Nordhues et al., 2021). As such, opportunities to learn about their experiences was limited.

Summary of Contributions. Homelessness constitutes a transition through various states of being that, as this study alludes to, are inimitably intertwined with experiences of stigma, recovery, ontological security, identity change and continuity, and the desire for social connection and community (McNaughton, 2008). Like Clift (2020), "this work picks up on the tension between the discursive formations that construct 'the homeless' and how homeless people engage in identity work through the practice" of playing in a local soccer league (p. 98). Substantively, the project provides a novel perspective on street soccer research and offers

insight into potential psychological mechanisms through which participants connect with, support, and lead each other through the lens of the social identity approach (Segura M. Trejo, 2013; Sherry, 2010; Sherry & Strybosch, 2012). Methodologically, little research has used Social Identity Mapping (Beckwith et al., 2019; Bentley et al., 2020; Cascagnette et al., 2021; Cruwys et al., 2016; C. Haslam et al., 2016), and thus this study demonstrates the use of a novel method of inquiry within a qualitative research project situating players' accounts within an array of experiences, identities, and social groups. Accordingly, the study is analytically generalizable for future research in which the social identity approach might generate useful insights and the results are potentially transferable to other urbanized street soccer contexts across the world (B. Smith, 2018).

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Social Connectivity and Well-being: The Case of Vancouver Street Soccer League

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

The following questions represent an overarching agenda for all interviews with study participants. The questions may be altered and added to over time as different themes and patterns emerge, though the headings will remain the same. Participants should only discuss any matters that they are comfortable discussing and they are free to choose not to answer any question or terminate the interview without experiencing any negative consequences. This includes a question about COVID-19. You can indicate that you do not want to answer any questions by saying or typing 'pass'.

PAPERWORK

1. Is there anything you would like to ask me before we get started (about the consent form, SIM or interview questions, or how your responses will be used)?

2. Do you give your permission for us to audio record this interview and photograph your SIM so that we can concentrate on what you have to say rather than on taking notes?

DEMOGRAPHIC INFO

3. Demographic data will be used to describe the people who participate in the study. Could you please complete this short demographic form? You will not be identifiable.

TELL ME ABOUT YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE VSSL

4. When and how were you first introduced to the VSSL?
5. What has been the evolution of your involvement?
    a. Prompts: what is good about it, what is bad about it, what are the people like? Had you ever played sport before joining?

PART 1 – SOCIAL IDENTITY MAP
- Preamble: Now I hope we can complete a mapping activity where you create a map to identify the various social groups to which you belong, including the VSSL. Then we will discuss how these groups relate to your participation in the VSSL. Feel free to refer to the map, ask questions, or share stories about it throughout the interview.

Identifying groups: Please think about all the groups to which you belong. These groups can take any form, for example, they could be broad opinion-based or demographic groups (e.g., feminist; Canadian; activist); leisure or social groups (e.g., book group or gardening group); community groups (e.g., church group); sporting

groups (e.g., soccer or basketball group); work groups (e.g., sales team); professional groups (e.g., trade union); or any others you can think of.

To start the process of Social Identity Mapping, please write down the names of each group to which you belong or are a member on separate post-it notes. Remember that the size of the post-it note matters, so write down the name of each **very important group on a large post-it note**, write down the names of each **moderately important group on separate medium sized post-it notes**, and the name of each **less important group on separate small post-it notes**.

Thinking about your groups: I'm now going to ask you to rate each group based on the following questions and then ask you to share why you chose that rating.

6. How typical (or representative) are you of what it means to be a member of these social groups?
   a. Indicate how typical you are of each of the groups identified in your map using a scale from 1 to 10 (where 1 = not at all typical, 10 = very typical). Write this rating in the **top left corner** of each Post-it note.
   b. Can you walk me through why you chose that number?
   c. Prompt: Are these typical hobbies, sports, employment etc. for you? To what extent are you similar to other members of the group?

7. How many days in a month do you engage with each group?
   a. If you engage with this group every day, the number would be 30. If it is every week, then the number would be 4. Write this number in the **top right corner** of the Post-it for each of your groups.

8. How much support do you get from each group?
   a. Rate how much support you get from each group on a scale from 1 (no support at all) to 10 (a very high level of support). Write this rating in the **bottom right corner** of the Post-it note for each of your groups.
   b. Can you walk me through why you chose that number?
   c. Prompt: soccer skills, mental health or social support

9. How positive do you feel about being a member of each group?
   a. Rate how positive you feel about being part of each group on a scale from 1 (not very positive at all) to 10 (very positive). Write your rating in the **bottom left corner** of each Post-it note.
   b. Can you walk me through why you chose that number?

Mapping groups in relation to each other:

10. How different are your groups from each other?
    a. Place them closer together on the map if they are very similar, and further apart if they are very different. Can you walk me through how you've placed them?

11. How easy or difficult is it to be a member of your groups at the same time?
    a. Because we typically belong to a number of groups at the same time, it can sometimes be hard trying to juggle your involvement in them. For example, as a VSSL player it might be easy to also be a member of your family, but not easy to participate in other hobbies such as dog walking or being online. Show the ease or difficulty of being part of multiple groups at the same time by using different types of lines.

    If two groups are **easy** to belong to simultaneously, join them with a <u>smooth</u> line. If two groups are **moderately easy** to belong to simultaneously, join them with a <u>wavy</u> line. If two groups are **hard** to belong to simultaneously, join them with a <u>jagged</u> line.

12. Can you described how you see these groups as similar or compatible? Can you walk me through why you chose each line?

13. How do you define 'well-being'? What does well-being mean to you? Given that, do the groups you've described here contribute to your well-being? Can you describe how?
    a. Prompt: What are examples of how participation in these groups does or does not contribute to your well-being?

PART 2 – GROUP MEMBERSHIP IN THE VSSL

14. In what ways does being a member of the VSSL compare with being a member of these other groups that you've listed here?
    a. Prompt: do you have any preferences? What is similar or different about them? Ask them to identify a relevant comparator group and compare it to the VSSL.

15. What is your current involvement in the VSSL?
    a. Prompt: How much support do you give to the VSSL? Are there particular roles within the league/team that you have the opportunity to take on (e.g., organizing fixtures, half-time refreshments, captain etc)?

16. Can you describe any positive features of the VSSL (e.g., people, the sport, location, lunch) that contribute to your well-being?
    a. Prompt: In what ways does the VSSL/players give you support?

17. Similarly, are there any negative features of the VSSL that impair your well-being (i.e., feeling unhappy or negative emotions)? If so, could you describe them.

18. To what extent do you identify as a 'VSSL player'?
    a. Prompt: could you describe what being a 'VSSL player' means to you?

19. To what extent do you feel like you belong at the VSSL?
    a. Prompt: Has that changed since you first joined? Could you explain more.

20. To what extent is participating in the VSSL something you value?
    a. Prompt: Please describe what aspects (people, location) you value most?

21. Tell me about how COVID-19 has impacted you and your VSSL involvement.
    a. Prompt: what was it like not being able to attend practices or June Sports?

22. Tell me more about the groups you have listed here. Prompt: Can you explain your thought process throughout the activity.

23. Do you have any closing comments in relation to the groups in your map or involvement with the VSSL?
    a. Follow-up: How was that activity for you?

Appendix B: Letter of Support from VSSL

31 July, 2020

School of Kinesiology
155 Auditorium Annex 1924 West
University of British Columbia, Vancouver Campus

To whom it may concern:

The Vancouver Street Soccer League (VSSL) is a volunteer-run, registered, non-profit organization based at Vancouver's downtown eastside and governed by a dedicated Board Directors. Our Board of Directors is comprised of family members, members of the local business community, and other interested community members. The VSSL addresses issues of homelessness, marginalization, and addiction through inclusivity and soccer – offering weekly practices for old and new players.

The VSSL is funded by various grants and sponsors such as Vancity, LUSH, generous community donors and by provincial sporting grants. The VSSL reaches out to individuals who have been homeless, are currently homeless, or are at risk of homelessness, as well as individuals who feel marginalized within their communities, or are recovering from drug and alcohol addictions. The VSSL also holds regular matches against or alongside teams from the UBC Medical School, the Vancouver Police Department, the Vancouver Mayor's Department, and the UBC Women's Varsity Team. The VSSL has sent players to four Homeless World Cups, held in Milan, Rio de Janeiro, Paris, Mexico City, and Poznan.

Since March 2020, the VSSL has been working with Joseph O'Rourke and are particularly keen to support his master's research into how the VSSL program potentially contributes to participant well-being, social connection, and social identity. This research will involve Joseph conducting in-person interviews with VSSL players about their experiences in the VSSL program and what makes it meaningful to them.

In the current health context, several safety measures will be put in place to ensure player, volunteer, and researcher safety and minimize the risk of COVID-19 transmission. In addition to making a number of COVID-19 safety resources available on our website, we have implemented non-contact, drills-based practices, physical distancing, and encourage mask wearing in line with Provincial Health Authority guidelines. These guidelines have been approved by the BC Recreation and Parks Association and viaSport BC and will also apply to this research project during in-person recruitment at VSSL trainings and during interviews.

The VSSL is in full support of this research project and we look forward to working further Joseph O'Rourke and his supervisor, Dr Mark Beauchamp. If I can be of any further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me by email (Email removed for confidentiality reasons.).

Sincerely,

Name and signature removed for confidentiality reasons.

– Vice President, Vancouver Street Soccer League

Appendix C: Recruitment Email

[**CAUTION:** Non-UBC Email]

Greetings!
Just sent.
Stay safe!
☒☒☒

Names and email addresses removed for confidentiality reasons.

---------- Forwarded message ---------
From: ☒☒ ☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒
Date: Thu, Nov 19, 2020 at 2:10 PM
Subject: VSSL - Social Connectivity and Well-being Project - Call For Research Participants
To: ☒☒☒ ☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒☒

Social Connectivity and Wellbeing Project

CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Greetings!

I hope you are well.

To better understand the extent to which the VSSL contributes to social connection and wellbeing among players, and provide VSSL with information that could improve our service to our players, we are supporting researchers from UBC's School of Kinesiology to conduct research into the experiences of VSSL players.

Field research will be undertaken by Joseph O'Rourke. You may have met Joseph at recent Sunday practices. He has already interviewed a number of VSSL players.

The purpose of the project is to understand in what ways VSSL players experience social connection, how this experience potentially contributes to wellbeing, and how it relates to other social groups with which participants identify.

You are eligible to participate if you are currently, or used to be, a player in the VSSL and have experienced homelessness.

Names and contact information removed for confidentiality reasons.

Stay Safe!

Stay Tuned!

Regards,

Name removed for confidentiality reasons.

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Appendix D: Letter of Information

LETTER OF INFORMATION

Social Connectivity and Well-being: The Case of Vancouver Street Soccer League

STUDY PURPOSE

We're inviting you to participate in an interview that will discuss to what extent the Vancouver Street Soccer League (VSSL) fosters social connection and well-being among its players. People experiencing homelessness experience social and economic inequalities that often relate to impaired psychological and physical health. Research has found that social connectivity and social identity (i.e., a sense of 'us') can help people address a range of health challenges such as mental health conditions and social isolation. As a result, the purpose of this interview is for researchers at the University of British Columbia to understand how players in the VSSL come to experience social connectivity and social identity in the VSSL, what ways this experience potentially contributes to health and well-being, and how it relates to other social groups with which participants identify. Furthermore, this study has the potential to provide useful information and feedback to support the improvement of VSSL programming which serves a group at-risk of negative mental and physical health impacts (especially resulting from increased social isolation due to COVID-19).

As a valued member of the VSSL program, you are being invited to participate in this research project. Your input is critical to help us learn about positive and negative aspects of your experience with the program, so that the VSSL can optimize their program to support the well-being of players. Your input may also help enhance the VSSL's community outreach to make the program more accessible for people experiencing homelessness, marginalization, and addiction challenges on the downtown eastside.

WHAT WILL PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY INVOLVE?

If you agree to participate, you will be invited to complete two activities for a total of 1 to 1.5 hours: 1) a Social Identity Map (SIM) and 2) one interview at a location of your choosing (you **must be 19 years or older to participate**). You will be invited to complete a SIM and participate in an interview with Joseph O'Rourke, who is completing this study for their master's thesis. The SIM will involve using paper, pens, and post-it notes to identify social groups that you belong to and answering questions about what they mean to you (more information will be provided before the interview). You do not need to talk about any issues you do not feel comfortable discussing and all participants will be sent a copy of their transcript after the interview.

You can choose to be interviewed either in person or via online video (i.e., Zoom). When using Zoom, you can mute your microphone when not speaking and/or turn off your camera, if you wish to do so. Please note you will need a camera for the SIM activity. If you choose to be interviewed online, your mailing address may be collected only if necessary, for the purposes of mailing SIM materials to you (e.g., pens, post-it notes, paper). Your address will

be deleted/destroyed immediately after you receive these materials and not kept by the researchers for any reason. The discussion will be audio-recorded (although the interviews will be conducted by video-conference only the audio section of the interview will be recorded) and transcribed (written out word for word) for analysis.

CONSENT, CONFIDENTIALITY AND RIGHTS
Informed consent means that you have been prepared with information and knowledge before you agree to participate. Individuals consent to participate in this study by reading and signing a consent form. Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. This means that you can choose to not answer any question and you may withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reasons, and without experiencing any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, the information you provide will then be destroyed and deleted (both study documents and audio recordings). Note that it may not be possible to honour all requests for the deletion of data upon withdrawal, such as in the case where the data has already been published or presented.

Please note that any information that you provide in the interviews will remain confidential and de-identified. This means that no information that can identify you (e.g., your name) will be discussed or made available within any reports that may result from this research. All audio-recordings, transcripts, and data will be encrypted and kept anonymous on secure servers, for a minimum of 5-years. The only people who will have access to your information and recordings are the principal investigator and the student investigator.

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE STUDY
There are no known physical or psychological risks from participating in this study. However, reasonably foreseeable risks might include negative feelings or discomfort associated with sharing your own past experiences and reflecting personal details about your (social) identity. The data will not be made publicly available in the future. As a potential benefit to participating, your help will support the improvement of VSSL programming.

If, over the course of this study, or afterward, you experience any distress the Government of Canada and British Columbia have provided a list of resources (including counseling as well as 24/7, confidential health information and advice). This information can be accessed at:

- Government of Canada's Mental Health supports (https://ca.portal.gs/?lang=en-ca)
- Crisis Centre BC (https://crisiscentre.bc.ca/)
- Mental Health Commission of Canada (https://theworkingmind.ca/sites/default/files/twm_self-care-resilience-guide.pdf)
- MindHealthBC (http://www.mindhealthbc.ca/)

STUDY RESULTS
The results of this study will be shared with the VSSL to help them identify ways to improve their community outreach, programming, and organizational practices and policies where possible. Your identity will not be indicated in the results shared with the VSSL. In addition, the results will be published in academic journal articles and/or book chapters and shared at conferences.

REMUNERATION:
Participants will be provided with a $40 honorarium for participating in the study.

COVID-19 SAFETY PLAN AND INTERVIEW QUESTION:
Interviews can either take place in person or online. For in-person interviews, a Safe Research Plan with COVID-Safe measures to ensure participant and researcher safety has been developed. If you would like a copy of the plan, please let us know and we can provide one. The researcher will ask a question regarding the impact of COVID-19 on your VSSL involvement, but this can be skipped (as can any of the other questions) if you do not wish to answer.

WHO TO CONTACT ABOUT THE STUDY?

> Names and contact information removed for confidentiality reasons.

STUDY TEAM:

> Names and contact information removed for confidentiality reasons.

Appendix E: Recruitment Poster

Social Connectivity and Well-being: The Case of Vancouver Street Soccer League

VSSL
CHAMPIONING INCLUSIVITY
THROUGH STREET SOCCER

CALL FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Principal Investigator: Dr Mark Beauchamp, School of Kinesiology, UBC

PURPOSE
We are researching how the Vancouver Street Soccer League (VSSL) fosters social connection, social identity, and well-being among their players.

This research will provide important insights about the program that could potentially help the VSSL improve their programming and community outreach.

ELIGIBILITY
You are eligible to participate if you are currently, or used to be, a player in the VSSL and have experienced homelessness.

Names and contact information removed for confidentiality reasons.

NOTE: We will respond to emails with the Letter of Information.

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Appendix F: Consent Form

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CONSENT FORM

Social Connectivity and Well-being: The Case of Vancouver Street Soccer League

STUDY PURPOSE:
We're inviting you to participate in an interview that will discuss to what extent the Vancouver Street Soccer League (VSSL) fosters social connection and well-being among its players. People experiencing homelessness experience social and economic inequalities that often relate to impaired psychological and physical health. Research has found that social connectivity and social identity (i.e., a sense of 'us') can help people address a range of health challenges such as mental health conditions and social isolation. As a result, the purpose of this interview is for researchers at the University of British Columbia to understand how players in the VSSL come to experience social connectivity and social identity in the VSSL, what ways this experience potentially contributes to health and well-being, and how it relates to other social groups with which participants identify. Furthermore, this study has the potential to provide useful information and feedback to support the improvement of VSSL programming which serves a group at-risk of negative mental and physical health impacts (especially resulting from increased social isolation due to COVID-19).

As a valued member of the VSSL program, you are being invited to participate in this research project. Your input is critical to help researchers learn about positive and negative aspects of your experience with the program, so that the VSSL can optimize their program to support the well-being of players. Your input may also help enhance the VSSL's community outreach to make the program more accessible for people experiencing homelessness, marginalization and addiction challenges on the downtown eastside.

STUDY PROCEDURES:
If you agree to participate, you will be invited to complete two activities for a total of 1 to 1.5 hours: 1) a Social Identity Map (SIM) and 2) one interview at a location of your choosing (you must be 19 years or older to participate). You will be invited to complete a SIM and participate in an interview with Joseph O'Rourke, who is completing this study for their master's thesis. The SIM will involve using paper, pens, and post-it notes to identify social groups that you belong to and answering questions about what they mean to you (more information will be provided before the interview). You do not need to talk about any issues you do not feel comfortable discussing and all participants will be sent a copy of their interview transcript.

You can choose to be interviewed either in person or via online video (i.e., Zoom). When using Zoom, you can mute your microphone when not speaking and/or turn off your camera, if you

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wish to do so. Please note you will need a camera for the SIM activity. If you choose to be interviewed online, your mailing address may be collected only if necessary, for the purposes of mailing SIM materials to you (e.g., pens, post-it notes, paper). Your address will be deleted/destroyed immediately after you receive these materials and not kept by the researchers for any reason. The discussion will be audio-recorded (online interviews will not be video recorded) and transcribed (written out word for word) for analysis.

CONSENT AND CONFIDENTIALITY:
Informed consent means that you have been prepared with information and knowledge before you agree to participate. Individuals consent to participate in this study by reading and signing this form.

Please note that any information that you provide in the interviews will remain confidential and de-identified. This means that no information that can identify you (e.g., your name) will be discussed or made available within any reports that may result from this research. All audio-recordings, transcripts, and data will be encrypted and kept anonymous on secure servers, for a minimum of 5-years. The only people who will have access to your information and recordings are the principal investigator and the student investigator.

YOUR RIGHTS:
Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. This means that you can choose to not answer any question and you may withdraw from the study at any time without having to give any reasons, and without experiencing any negative consequences. If you choose to withdraw, the information you provide will then be destroyed and deleted (both study documents and audio recordings). Note that it may not be possible to honour all requests for the deletion of data upon withdrawal, such as in the case where the data has already been published or presented.

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

POTENTIAL RISKS AND BENEFITS OF THE STUDY:
There are no known physical or psychological risks from participating in this study. However, reasonably foreseeable risks might include negative feelings or discomfort associated with sharing your own past experiences and reflecting personal details about your (social) identity. The data will not be made publicly available in the future. As a potential benefit to participating, your help will support the improvement of VSSL programming.

If, over the course of this study, or afterward, you experience any distress the Government of Canada and British Columbia have provided a list of resources (including counseling as well as 24/7, confidential health information and advice). This information can be accessed at:

- Government of Canada's Mental Health supports (https://ca.portal.gs/?lang=en-ca)
- Crisis Centre BC (https://crisiscentre.bc.ca/)
- Mental Health Commission of Canada (https://theworkingmind.ca/sites/default/files/twm_self-care-resilience-guide.pdf)
- MindHealthBC (http://www.mindhealthbc.ca/)

REMUNERATION:
Participants will be provided with a $40 honorarium for participating in the study.

COVID-19 SAFETY PLAN AND INTERVIEW QUESTION:
Interviews can either take place in person or online. For in-person interviews, a Safe Research Plan with COVID-Safe measures to ensure participant and researcher safety has been developed. If you would like a copy of the plan, please let us know and we can provide one. The researcher will ask a question regarding the impact of COVID-19 on your VSSL involvement, but this can be skipped (as can any of the other questions) if you do not wish to answer.

STUDY RESULTS:
The results of this study will be shared with the VSSL to help them identify ways to improve their community outreach, programming, and organizational practices and policies where possible. Your identity will not be reported in the results that we will share with the VSSL. In addition, the results will be published in academic journal articles and/or book chapters and shared at conferences.

WHO TO CONTACT IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THE STUDY?

> Names and contact information removed for confidentiality reasons.

STUDY TEAM:

> Names and contact information removed for confidentiality reasons.

CONSENT

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Do you agree to participate in this study? Yes / No (An oral agreement to participate denotes consent, and will be recorded before prior to the interview taking place)

Do you consent to having your interview audio recorded? Yes / No

Name of Participant _____ Date: _____

Contact information (e.g., phone number, email, or a best meeting time at the VSSL):

_____ _____ ____

_____ _____ ____

Signature of Interviewer _____   Date: _____

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Appendix G: Social Identity Mapping Descriptive Statistics

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics Related to Social Identity Mapping Constructs

	M	Median	*SD*	Range
Number of groups	9.6	6.5	5.48	5–20
Number of important groups	4.3	4	1.9	1–7
Number of representative groups	4.2	3	2.66	2–10
Number of supportive groups	6.1	5	5	0–15
Number of positive groups	7.1	5	5.13	1–15
Group compatibility	6.9	5.5	5.82	1–18
Number of high-contact groups	6	5.5	3.77	2–12
Number of supergroups	3.38	2.5	2.26	1–6

Note: n = 10. The operationalization of five SIM constructs was based on Cruwys et al. (2016):

(1) Number of important groups was operationalized as the *number of groups with highest importance rating (3/3)*; (2) Number of supportive groups was operationalized as the *number of groups with 8, 9, or 10/10 supportiveness score*; (3) Number of positive groups was operationalized as the *number of groups with 8, 9, or 10/10 positivity score*; (4) Group compatibility was operationalized as the *proportion of group links that were rated 'easy' to be members of both*; and (5) Number of high-contact groups was operationalized as the *number of groups people engage/participate with on at least a weekly basis (4+ days/month)*. Inclusion of the number of supportive groups and number of supergroups (operationalized as the *number of groups that scored above six on all four quality indicators: positivity, representativeness, and supportiveness, and that had a majority (i.e., over 50%) of compatible links to other groups*) was based on Bentley et al. (2020). When interpreting these scores, it is important to consider the diverse understandings participants expressed about each construct in the SIM interviews in relation to their diverse social groups. This reflects the meaning behind the numbers, in what Cruwys et al. (2016) call 'social identity complexity.'