

AGING ON WHEELS:
THE ROLE OF AGE IN A QUEER FEMALE BIKER COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

AGING ON WHEELS: THE ROLE OF AGE IN A QUEER FEMALE BIKER COMMUNITY

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This qualitative exploratory study examines the role age plays and the significance it has in a queer female multigenerational social group. This study explores this research question through interviews with ten members of the social club known as Bitchez*n*Bikez (BnB).

Bitchez*n*Bikez is motorcycle club based out of a Midwest metropolitan area. Interviewing this community of queer women provides insight into the aging experience and the intergenerational relationships that flourish among this unique minority population. The findings of this research suggest that it is not just chronological age that is salient to the group but also one's bike age, membership age, and to a degree biological/functional age. Using role theory as a lens, the analysis of this study asserts that age impacts the roles the women have within their relationships with other members and the roles they carry within the club.

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Introduction

This qualitative exploratory study examines the role age plays and the significance it has in a queer female multigenerational social group. This study explores this research question through interviews with ten members of the social club known as Bitchez*n*Bikez (BnB). Bitchez*n*Bikez is motorcycle club based out of a Midwest metropolitan area. Interviewing this community of queer women provides insight into the aging experience and the intergenerational relationships that flourish among this unique minority population. From this research, I develop new insights into how age and aging carries significance within this extraordinary group of women.

Background Literature

The Aging LBGTQ Population: What Do We Know on the Macro Level?

Research in gerontology continues to cultivate our understanding of aging as populations throughout our communities are aware of the growing number of older adults. The output of gerontological studies expands knowledge on topics such as retirement, widowhood, caregiving, past and future policy implementation, and health care needs. Although this research has the potential to improve the quality of life in our aging society, there are many subcultures within the heterogeneous aging population that have not been fully studied. Little has been done to understand the unique aging experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LBGTQ) individuals. However, the field of gerontology is not solely at fault. The research that dominates gay and lesbian studies have applied a major focus on issues relevant to young and middle aged cohorts, ultimately neglecting LBGTQ older adults.

Research and education is needed to understand the challenges in which the aging LBGTQ population face and how they affect the future wants and needs of this demographic. This population of elders is growing fast and it is projected that the number of LBGTQ seniors will continue to increase as the Boomers grow into their later years. The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Aging Initiative (2009), estimates that there are currently three million LBGTQ individuals over the age of sixty-five. This number is expected to double by the year 2030. However, it is nearly impossible to predict the true size of this population, for this cohort of individuals has achieved “invisibility” in order to survive and succeed in the hetero-normative culture of yesterday and today (Services and Advocacy for LBGTQ Elders, 2008). The LBGTQ population suffers from policy inequities, healthcare discrimination, social stigma and marginalization.

At the macro level, this aging population faces inequality in health care, legal rights, and retirement income (Chapin et al, 2002). For example, the benefits administered by the Social Security Administration are based on legal familial relationships (Social Security Online, 2008). As result, gay and lesbian couples can not access the partner benefits associated with retirement, disability, and survivorship (Dubois, 2008). In addition to Social Security benefits, queer couples are also excluded from the Medicaid benefits designed to protect the healthy spouse of an individual who is disabled or chronically ill. Without this protection, these populations are left

vulnerable to economic hardship. Likewise, due to the fact that lesbian and gay couples are not recognized as legal spouses, the processes of transferring estates, property, and gifts become much more complicated. As a result, many queer partners struggle with the intricate legal system in efforts to protect their possessions upon the unfortunate death of a partner.

Unfortunately the inequalities in Social Security and Medicare are not the only issues that the LBGQT population must face as they age. Issues with the provisions of health care also hinder queer older adults. According to The Gay and Lesbian Medical Association (2008), homosexual older adults are more likely deal with issues pertaining to being overweight, use of tobacco, abuse of various substances, and HIV/AIDS. As a result health care services are paramount to the LBGQT senior. Therefore, homophobia among medical providers and the long term care and supportive services providers can be most harmful to this population (Van Dam, Kohn & Dibble, 2001).

Cohorts of the past lived without disclosing their sexual orientation in order to shield themselves from the discrimination, isolation, hatred, and alienation brought on by societal norms (Gelo, 2008). Given the historical struggles of the LBGQT population, it is no surprise that these individuals live in fear of rejection from their family and friends, religious communities, and the work place (Hebl, 2002). This sensitive population of older adults is great in number and also may hold more than one minority status.

Due to societal norms and values, sexual orientation and aging are regarded with prejudice. As a result, aging LBGQT individuals are described as a being a double minority. Some members of the aging LBGQT population are also a minority when considering other factors besides sexuality and age. Once race and gender is included in this equation, some may be even more vulnerable to society's detrimental perceptions toward aging and the aging process. The LBGQT community is more susceptible to the many different forms of discriminatory practices that are made against older adults. In addition, they are more likely to encounter and battle society's narrow view and judgments towards the aging process which may ultimately jeopardize personal dignity and satisfaction with life.

Overcoming the Challenges: The Meso/Micro Level

While the lesbian and gay community has endured discrimination and often experiences the negative side effects related to having this minority status, there are positive aspects of being a member of this population. Research suggests that the developmental task of negotiating one's sexual orientation in the heterosexual normative culture strengthens the gay and lesbian individual. Due to the many challenges associated with being a sexual minority, gay and lesbian individuals have enhanced their wellbeing through proactively responding to their life experiences. To with stand the pressures of holding this minority status, the gay and lesbian population establishes a community of social support, designs a family of choice, strives to be positive role models, and maintains strong connections with others.

Research demonstrates that there are benefits that accrue to those who negotiate a lesbian or gay identity within the heterosexual culture. Lesbians and gays proactively respond to their life experiences, and, in so doing, enhance their wellbeing. One of the ways this is accomplished is through establishing communities of social support.

The gay and lesbian community can be found throughout the country of the United States. The LBGQT community is created through a social process that is influenced by "gender,

sexuality, and power, from which people create identities, communities, and social movements (Nardi, 2000, pg 724). These unique communities are visible in neighborhoods traditionally in large urban regions. Within these concentrated areas, one can find the home of many gay and lesbian community organizations like bookstores, theaters, restaurants/bars, and community centers. These establishments cater to the political, social, and recreational agenda common to the gay and lesbian interest (Nystrom & Jones, 2003).

While these communities are clustered within cities throughout the country, it is important to note the extreme diversity that is present among the queer public. The gay and lesbian population is credited for being greatly heterogeneous. Diversity can be found in regards to gender, age, health status, socioeconomic status, disability, race and ethnicity, political beliefs, and religion (Herdt, Beeler & Rawls, 1997). Despite the diversity within the queer community, LGBTQ individuals unite in order to provide social support for fellow gay and lesbian men and women.

These communities nesting in the urban metropolis of the United States foster a sense of belonging and support among the queer population. The LGBTQ community is based upon the sharing of social support, legitimacy and identity (Nardi, 2000). This community composed of individuals who share similar experiences in terms of sexual orientation allows a social connection to exist in a domain separate from the majority. The social connectivity of the community provides LGBTQ individuals with the support needed to ease the burden of the coming out process.

Individuals going through the process of coming out can experience great psychological stress as they acknowledge, recognize, label, and disclose their sexual identity to others throughout the life course (Rosenfeld, 1999). However, with the aid of the gay and lesbian community, individuals coming out are more likely to maintain satisfied with life and feel the power of support (Weinstock, 1990). The LGBTQ community and friendships within the community play an important role in self acceptance (Stanley, 1996; D'Augelli & Hart, 1987). Furthermore, individuals who are able to lean on the community during this process of coming out are less likely to have feelings of isolation and more personal integrity (Cruikshank, 2008). Individuals active in the community have been found to be more adaptive with coping strategies, reported having less stress, and are more apt to adjusting to various environments.

In addition to establishing a community, gay and lesbians also assemble together, creating a family choice otherwise known as fictive kin. According to the text of Ibsen and Klobus (1972), "Fictive Kin Term Use and Social Relationships: Alternative Interpretations," fictive kinship allows for the replacement of unavailable or unsupportive kin. Establishing systems of fictive kin permits one access to the desired benefits found within familial relationships that they lack within their own biological family (Foote & Cottrell, 1955). The positive features that family brings within one's personal and social life may be achieved through the fictive kin. However, in order to gain the perks within these supplementary families, relationships within the fictive kinship must be somewhat mutually beneficial, requiring all parties to actively participate and give to the alternative family unit. As a result, creating fictive kin requires careful selection.

LGBTQ community is not the only minority population to have united together to act as a fictive kin. In fact sociologists and anthropologists explain that the African American and Latino communities have developed strong fictive kinships, offering a sharing of financial capital and other resources necessary to survive. Unlike many ethnic minorities, the LGBTQ population has formed systems of fictive kin in order to provide social and emotional support.

Many of the gay and lesbian populations have experienced rejection and isolation from their nuclear family unit as a result of disclosing their sexual identity. Queer individuals report that they traditionally receive more support from their friends than they do from their family unit. For example, in the lesbian community there is emphasis placed on the intimacy that fuels and maintain a supportive network of friendships (Wolf, 1978; Kickpatrick, 1989). The support that comes from these friendships is often times greater than what is produced from one's biological family. Aside from alienation of the genetic family unit, members of the LGBTQ population may also endure rejection and judgment from their heterosexual peers who operate within their own social hemispheres.

This rejection from straight family members, friends, and acquaintances has encouraged gay and lesbian individuals to create their own surrogate family comprised of partners, friends, straight allies, and select supporting family members (Sang, 1991). Due to this rejection and limited support there is a great need for surrogate families (Weston, 1991). Oftentimes, relationships and roles within the fictive kin mirror that of a traditional heterosexual family unit. Chershire Cahoun (1996) argues in his text "Family Outlaws" that the heterosexual normative culture has defined the requirements for what a family unit should include and how it should appear in society. Like the heterosexual family dynamic, there is an emphasis placed on intergenerational relationships encouraging and perpetuating the bonds between old and young queer individuals.

These intergenerational relationships add dimension to the fictive kin network, for the bonds constructed are parallel to the structure of the typical hetero family compound (Mallon, 1998). These created families feature relationships that mimic mother-daughter, aunt-niece, and big sister little brother type relationships. The multigenerational relationships established and nurtured within the LGBTQ community is an integral facet of the LGBTQ family. Dana Rosenfeld (1999) proposes that "within generations, groups of actors look to opposing ends of the generation's culture for guidance on how to interpret and react to specific events" (pg, 123). That is, within these intergenerational familial relationships there is a sharing of identity, perspective, and principle.

While there is a shared identity, perspective, and principle among lesbians of all ages, older lesbians are able to offer support and empower younger women. As lesbians age and grow more settled into their identity, there is less pressure to conform to heterosexual standards (Kirkpatrick, 1989; Loulan, 1991). As lesbians age within the community, they may feel free to be themselves. Older lesbians active in the community are willing to share their stories and support the self-development of queer youth (Loulan, 1991).

Gays and lesbians continue to fight the barriers of discrimination through their strong connections to and relationships with others. Due to the hardships and life experiences, gays and lesbians are found to be more insightful, able to empathize with others, and free from having to adhere to the prescribed gender roles of society (Rothblum, Mickey & Balsam, 2004). These traits allow individuals to create a strong bond or relationship with others. The gay and lesbian population is not without rich friendships with their heterosexual counterpart or with other queer individuals (Paz, 2007). The gay and lesbian culture is focused on the gay and lesbian community and the friendships that grow within this community (Weinstock, 2000). It is found that homosexual and heterosexual persons report having the same amount of casual and close friends. Both minority and majority population place a high value on friendship and spend approximately the same amount of time in their social circles (Druly & Nardi, 1994). The ability

to make and sustain these gratifying relationships on the same or a level as heterosexuals is a social capital gain for the well-being of the queer community.

Self-Made Communities in the LGBTQ Population

The many challenges and disadvantages brought upon the LGBTQ population have encouraged these individuals to self segregate and design their own social spheres. These individuals have created safe spaces in which they feel free to operate within their means. These self made communities preserve and encourage the culture and well-being of LGBTQ individuals (Boxer, 1997). While these unique communities share similar experiences dealing with their sexual orientation across the life course, each group is diverse and therefore is not generalizable to all LGBTQ self-made communities. This study examines one self-made intergenerational community and family amongst the LGBTQ population. Through examining this population, I hope to reveal the ways in which age impacts the dynamics and chemistry of the group known as Bitch*n*Bikez.

What is Age and How Does Age Matter?

In order to understand how age carries significance to this self-created and constructed community and family it is necessary to discuss the gerontological definition of age in addition to the group's socially constructed definition of age.

The gerontological community has quantified age through analyzing one in terms of chronological age, biological/functional age, psychological age, and social age.

- **Chronological age**

Chronological age defines age in terms of the amount of years lived. When discussing chronological age, one places emphasis on the number. For example, one maybe considered chronologically old when he or she has lived for sixty-five years and is thus eligible for Medicare.

- **Biological/Functional age**

Biological/Functional age references the physical changes that occur within the body through the natural progression of life. When evaluating biological/functional age one will examine the competence and functional abilities of one's organ systems in addition to one's level of physical activity. For example, one may be considered biologically/functionally old due to the fact that they are unable to complete certain physical activities.

- **Psychological age**

Psychological age explores the capabilities of the mind. Sensory and mental functioning, personality, and adaptive capacities are used to scale psychological age. For example, an individual who is highly functioning in these areas maybe deemed psychological young regardless of chronological age or biological age.

- **Social Age**

Social age is defined by the roles and relationships that one has over the life course; roles and relationships are age-normative. Roles and relationships commonly change with chronological, biological, and psychological aging, but are a product of social construction. As they age, individuals often experience loss or gain of roles and relationships. As these relationships change in a context of an age-normative society, one's social age is defined. The gerontological community views chronological age, biological/functional age, psychological age, and social age as indicators of age.

Research Question

This study explores the following research question:

- What impact does age have on the female intergenerational social group known as Bitchez*n*Bikez?

This qualitative exploratory study examines what role age plays and the significance it has in a queer female multigenerational social group. This study examines this research question through interviews with ten members of the social club known as Bitchez*n*Bikez. Bitchez*n*Bikez is a motorcycle club based out of a large Midwest metropolitan area. Interviewing this community of queer women helps gain insight into the aging experience and the intergenerational relationships that flourish among this unique minority population. From this research, I develop new insights into how age carries significance and plays out within the community, lives, and relationships of these extraordinary women.

Methods

In order to best answer my research question this qualitative study employs a grounded theory methodology. This research methodology created by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was designed to assist in the rigor of data collection, analysis of data, and through theory development and application. The data analysis of this study was done through coding all ten transcripts produced from the in-depth interviews conducted with my participants.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology is used in this study for I was interested in analyzing the personal stories these women were willing to share. Using a qualitative methodology allowed me uncover the significance these women place on age by studying their interpretations and experiences within the Bitchez*n*Bikez. These research methods include analyzing the stories of the ten participants, constant development of a theoretical model through data analysis and an ongoing brain storm of possible codes and categories, and shaping a hypothesis that correlates with the data set.

Sample

Demographic Profile

The research question was answered through analyzing the rich data gathered through interviewing ten women of Bitchez*n*Bikez who ranged in age from thirty to sixty-seven. The diversity in age of the target population allows the study to examine the experience of aging in the context of a social group among queer women of diverse backgrounds. Likewise these women are diverse in terms of socio economic status. There is also variability in relationship status (e.g., two of these women have been married and are now divorced). Also, eight of the participants are in a committed same sex relationship where as the other two women are currently single. There are similarities among the women. All of these women are openly queer and have been for a long time. The women of this study are all Caucasian. None of these women have had children.

It must be noted that the participating women are all openly queer individuals. There has been little work done on aging in the Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender, and Queer (LBGTQ) population. While this study is not meant to be generalizable to all queer women it will contribute to the collection of research done on the aging within the LBGTQ community. It will capture one specific group of women, revealing their experience as they relate to aging. From this subject population, the research can explore the experiences of aging as these women develop relationships inside and outside of their cohort.

Access

I was able to gain access to this group by becoming acquainted with two of the leaders of Bitchez*n*Bikez. The two leaders of the group were very much the gatekeepers of this club. It was through these women that I was able to gather participants for interviewing (Interview guide is available for viewing in the appendices). I met these two women at a benefit event and through an informal conversation the women indicated that they were interested in participating with this research. They then agreed that they would present the research to the other members of the BnB. The two leaders then announced at the next meeting the intent of the study. These two key informants were instrumental in distributing letters soliciting for interested participants. The letters were disseminated during meetings and rides (The letter is available for viewing in the appendices). The key informants openly discussed the research question of the study with group and assisted greatly in sparking interest and commitment to the study among the women of Bitchez*n*Bikez.

Consent and the Limits of Confidentiality

Women who gave consent and agreed to be contacted gave consent at the time of the interview. The consent form gave me permission to engage in the interview, with each interview lasting approximately from an hour to two hours at most. The consent form also gave me the permission to audio tape each interview and then transcribe the tapes verbatim. (The consent forms used are available for viewing in the appendices)

Another important aspect of the consent form was the section of confidentiality. In order to protect the women of this group, some confidentiality measures were put in place. This group has created a set of nicknames for all official members. Once an individual has gained membership they are given a nickname that starts with the letter “B”. For privacy purposes all of the “B” names have been altered within this text. Although the reader will not know or recognize the identity of the women, there is a potential risk that the women of the club will recognize who said what. In the consent form, I clarified that there is little chance that others outside of the group will recognize their identity, however members within the group might be able to distinguish who they are.

Ongoing Analysis

Grounded theory is used to build new theory or enhance existing theory in an inductive process of data gathering and concurrent analysis. Analysis is ongoing as it occurs during in the interviews and between interviews. The texts of the interviews are the data for analysis. Text analysis begins with the process of open coding, developed by Anselm Strauss (1990). Open coding requires one to explore the meanings behind the text by exploring possible meanings of individual words and sentences. Through open coding it is then possible to create conceptual categories that give light to the phenomena. The goal of this open coding is to create inclusive and comprehensive categories as the groundwork for ongoing analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In order to conduct open coding I used different color pens and highlighters on the transcripts as each level of analysis was complete. To organize the material analyzed on the transcripts, I put themes on sticky notes and constantly arranged and rearrange them until they fit into possible categories.

As the analysis continued, I proceeded with axial coding. Axial coding is the process in which codes and categories were re-examined, compared and contrasted, in order to produce complex and multi-dimensional categories (Hoepf, 1997). Axial coding helped define categories and in vivo codes, such as Newbie and Elder, were used for some category labels. After the process of coding, I then organized the categories in a way that would clearly tell the story of my data.

Data Collection: An Unanticipated Challenge

I ran into a barrier during the interviewing process, the group found themselves feuding with one another. Group tension and friction came as a result of the constant battle. At one point the group broke up entirely. For a brief period of approximately one month, there was an issue of whether or not the women were comfortable with me continuing the research. It was decided by the women that I would continue and still practice the confidentiality procedures agreed upon. When reading some of the quotes of the Bitchez, the reader may notice that the women use past tense when talking about the group. This is because the interview occurred after the group split.

Who Are the Bitchez of Bitchez*n*Bikez? A LOOK AT THE SAMPLE

This qualitative study explored the role and significance of aging in a self-made community within the LBGTQ population. The social club Bitchez*n*Bikez was the community studied for this research. Bitchez*n*Bikez was specifically chosen due to the diverse range of age among the women bikers, its level of civic engagement and interaction within the community, and the close bond that is present among the members.

Bitchez*n*Bikez is a social club created for lesbian and bisexual women to unite together and enjoy their common passion of riding motorcycles. The “Bitchez” of this unique club, while all sharing a love for motorcycles, do not share the same age. The founding members of Bitchez*n*Bikez are a group of women in their sixties. It was this group of women who came together four years ago and created a very structured club complete with an initiation process for new members and scheduled weekly meetings and motorcycle rides throughout the year. Since then they have opened their arms to women of all ages. The club does include two heterosexual women who are deemed as the allies of the group. In addition, they have also extended membership rights to two men, who are the husbands of the two heterosexual women. Furthermore, this social club does not require one to have their own bike nor does it demand any sort of membership fee. In fact it is said often that if someone wants to ride along with the Bitchez, they are more than welcomed to do so.

The club and its members are civically engaged and involved in the LBGTQ community. They are known throughout the LBGTQ population in the city in which they live. This group is responsible hosting various benefit concerts and other fundraising efforts throughout the city. Along with being civically engaged these women are socially prominent within the community. The women of Bitchez*n*Bikez are active in gay softball leagues, attend community functions, and participate in the LBGTQ bar and club scene.

In order to understand the complexity of the relationships and the structure of BnB it is necessary to explore the characteristics of the women who make up this group. These women are all unique and it is their distinctive personalities and the roles these women fulfill that contribute to the dynamics of this community. The following text offers a short biography on the ten women interviewed. This information allows one to gain insight into the dynamic of the group by understanding the women who make up the group (Please also view the chart located in the appendix, featuring the biographies of the Bitchez).

The Elders

The Elders in the club are considered the oldest members of the group. There are three women in the club who are classified as an Elder. They are the oldest in terms of their bike age (bike age refers to the amount of years one has spent riding a motorcycle), membership age (membership age refers to the amount of years one has been a member of the group), and chronological age. In order to be considered an Elder within this group one must be aged in all of these domains. For example, a woman maybe be older chronologically and may have years of experience on a bike but if she is young in terms of membership age she will not be deemed as an Elder.

The Elders of this club are regarded with great respect by the women of the club. They are at the top of the hierarchy, meaning that they have the most power and authority over the rest of the women in the group. This authority allows them to schedule dates and routes of rides, time and places of meetings, where the women will ride in the riding formation, and grants them the power to make any executive decision for the group. The women at bottom of the hierarchy, who are young in terms of bike age, membership age, and chronological age, follow the lead and direction of the Elders. This can be seen in a quote from the interview of Baby;

“The Elders are Boom, Boss, and The Mistress. They are the ones that were there from the start of the group. They are the guiding force of the group. They are the ones that guide where the group is going on our rides and where we are going as a club.”

The name “Elder” appears to have emerged organically. When asking the women how or when this nickname came into existence no one knew the exact answer. Each woman just shrugged her shoulders, explaining that these women were always their Elders. Boom remembers the first time she was called an Elder:

“I saw it on Myspace that I was being called “Elder” by the other girls. Probably because we are the oldest and the two leaders. Boss made this group and I lead it. We are the two that do everything and run everything. We make the rules. The name was just put on us and it just stuck. Oh it doesn’t bother me. Nothing bothers me. I don’t mind being called an Elder. Heck I am. Part of the Elder I get...how should I word it...I will make a decision, I will do whatever and they say that the “elder has spoken and now it is the law.” That’s fine by me and I don’t care.”

The following text describes Boom, Boss, and The Miss, who are known as the Elders of Bitchez*n*Bikez. These biographies are based on the information collected from their own personal interviews and the interviews of the other women.

Boom

Boom is described by the women of Bitchez*n*Bikez as the quiet, strong, and stoic type. She carefully thinks through situations before making a decision or speaking to the group. She is one of the leaders of the group and assumes the responsibility of First Bike. First Bike refers to the bike at the top of the formation who leads the group to the destination. The rider of First Bike is the protector of the group, and according to the others Boom definitely fulfills that role. She is constantly watching the bikers behind her and constantly worrying about the safety of the young riders behind her. At sixty-six, she is chronologically one of the oldest members of the group. She is also one of the original members of the group and is partially responsible for organizing and creating this group into existence. Additionally, Boom is very experienced on a bike, for she spent the majority of her youth riding motorcycles.

Boss

Boss is known throughout the group as the sailor. She is loud, outspoken, and full of spirit. Her passion for this group is illustrated by her utter devotion and commitment to all the

“girls” within the club. Boss rides the Back Door, which refers to the very last bike within the formation of bikers. As the Back Door, Boss is in constant communication with Boom. This relationship between Boss and Boom exists beyond the road, as together they lead the meetings and make executive decisions for the group. Boss is 67 and considers this group to be her “baby”, for it was her dream to create a motorcycle group for women. Boss is also very knowledgeable when it comes to riding bikes due to the many years she spent riding bikes throughout her life time.

The Miss

The Miss, in the hierarchy of Bitchez*n*Bikez, is placed just beneath the Elders. She is the feminine energy providing balance to the masculine Elders. Boom, Boss, and The Miss make decisions together. But often times when Boom and Boss disagree, it is The Miss who is able to make them compromise. She is 45 and one of the original Bitchez. Most of the women describe The Miss as the information keeper. It is her job to make sure everyone is informed and updated on upcoming rides or event. In addition, The Miss is the keeper of secrets. The women of this community seek the advice and counsel of The Miss, trusting her with their secrets; trusting she will keep them confidential.

The Bitchez

After getting to know the characteristics and responsibilities of the Elders it is now time to learn of the other women in the group. From reading the biographies of the Bitchez, one should observe the diversity in the ages of the women, the unique personalities and the roles these women carry and perform for the group.

Britches

Britches is a spunky 47 year old woman who dates Boom. She is opinionated, strong willed, and passionate about bikes. She describes herself as being a natural leader but many of the women refer to her as being “bossy” and always “demanding control”. She recently endured group friction as her relationship with the Elder Boom has not been well accepted by the others. She rides behind Boom and this contributes to the disapproval by the other women, for that was where The Miss used to ride. Despite group drama, she admits to loving this group. In the last six months, Britches has been fighting cancer and claims that it is riding with the group that makes her feel alive.

Baby

Baby is one of the youngest members of the Bitchez. She is 32 and very much invested in the group. She is new to the area and is happy to have finally made friends in the community. Her job requires her to work long hours and she feels that this group is her relief from her heavy work load. Although she does not drive a motorcycle, the Bitchez have made a place for her on the backs of their bikes. She openly talks about her love and admiration for the women in the group and explains that this group means everything to her. She is not afraid to voice her opinion

and insight even though she feels that she is young in bike age, chronological age, and membership age.

Bella

Bella is one of the few femmes in the group. She is 62 and is very close to the Elder Boss. She is not considered an Elder for although she is older, she is young in terms of bike age and membership age. Although she does not drive a motorcycle she is still an active member of the group and rides on the back of Bishop's bike. Bella talks excitedly about the rides and her experience on bikes. She is very invested in the lives of the women in the group and does her best to keep track of what is going on with whom. She knows a lot of people within the lesbian community and is very much a social butterfly.

Bounce

Bounce is a new motorcycle rider who most recently had an accident while being on one of the Bitchez's rides. The women of the group flew to her side almost immediately and took care of her. Although Bounce is forty, the women of Bitchez*n*Bikez look after her as if she was one of the younger ones. She is a very shy individual, making it somewhat challenging to become a member of this group. She explains that it takes her awhile to get comfortable speaking and trusting others. Now she claims that she feels like she is protected by the Elders. She loves this community and claims it is one of the best things she has in her life at this moment.

Bliss

Bliss is an adorable source of happiness. She is in her 42 and always wears a smile with her trendy outfit. Bliss is a new driver who just completed the motorcycle class with the other newcomers of the group. She had to take her bike test twice but claims that it wasn't a big deal with the support of the group behind her. Currently she does not own a bike, but she still attends the rides on the back of her girlfriend's bike. She is a friend to everyone and remains successful at staying away from group tension. She is known to be a very independent woman.

Bionic

Bionic is in her late 50s. She views the Elders as her peers and feels that she is closest to them because they have similar interest and experiences. She owns the bike shop which serves as the club house of the group. Bikes are her love and she is shocked to have finally found a group of women riders who are invested in the bikes as much as she. She is loud, funny, and full of spirit. Bionic rides second bike behind Boom and feels like it is also her job to keep track of the younger girls. She also claims that she wouldn't mind being called an Elder and would like the title and responsibility of being an Elder.

B.E

B.E is the girlfriend of Bionic. She is also a new rider and went through the motorcycle classes with the rest of the younger women. She currently rides on the back of Bionic's bike and

explains that she will get a bike one day but in the meantime she likes being a passenger on the rides. B.E is one of the younger girls and explains that she enjoys being one of the newcomers and one of the youngest in the group because she feels that the others look out and take care of her. B.E is very social as well and can talk to just about anybody. She is a friend to everyone within the group.

FINDINGS

Through qualitative interviewing with a grounded theory approach, I am able to shed light on the impact age has on this community. Together, role theory and social aging comprise a useful lens.

The significance of age is found within the relationships and structure of the group. The analysis of data identifies that age impacts the roles that the women assume in their relationships with the Bitchez. In some situations, women play the role of sisters, where as other times they may become a mother/father figure or may play the role of a child. The findings of this study also reveal that age bears significance in the rituals and organizational structure of the group, as women are delegated to and perform roles based on age. This strongly suggests that social age matters.

Beyond social aging as expressed in roles and relationships, the community of Bitchez*n*Bikez has created nuanced and group-specific perspectives with which they view age. In this community chronological age, bike age, and membership age are most salient.

- **Chronological Age**

The Bitchez*n*Bikez recognize the significance of chronological age. Chronological age is often referenced by the women of the group when discussing whether someone is old or young.

- **Bike Age**

In this community bike age is very important. The members of the group categorize one another as young or old based on the amount of years and experience one has driving or riding on the back of a motorcycle.

- **Membership Age**

Membership age refers to the amount of time one has been apart of the group. New members are considered “young” regardless of chronological age and bike age. “Young” members are given names that recognize their youth in the club despite how long they have ridden or how old they are. Likewise, members of the group who have been participating the longest are deemed as being an old.

To a lesser degree, the participants discussed the salience of biological and functional age as they reflected on and sometimes worried about their futures as motorcyclists. Biological and functional age was mentioned when the women discussed the possible future physical health issues and how that would impact the strength required to ride a bike.

Role Theory

My analysis suggests that age matters in roles and relationships in Bitchez*n*Bikez, but not in every role and relationship, and not consistently within each role and relationship. Age can impact the type and function of the roles the women of Bitchez*n*Bikez fulfill. In order to best understand how role theory provides a lens to view the value of age in this community, I discuss the definition of roles, role allocation, and socialization of roles and age norms. After understanding social roles, I then present why social roles are of value on a micro and macro level.

Roles give purpose and identity to individuals because they describe their function within the social world. Social roles describe status and expected behaviors of an individual (George, 1993). Throughout the life course individuals fulfill various roles according to one's chronological age. Chronological age is instrumental in social roles for it is used to "determine eligibility for various positions, to evaluate the suitability of different roles, and to shape expectations of people in social situations" (Hooyman & Kiyak, 2002). It is the variable of age that determines the roles one may carry and fulfill. It is also age that determines the behaviors and expectations that are associated with one's roles.

The impact of age is seen when examining role allocation. Role allocation can be defined as the process that one experiences as he or she enters and exits roles throughout the life course (Briddle 1979). When examining the significance of age in social roles and role allocation it is necessary to further explore the concept of age norms and socialization of roles.

Our community enforces and abides by age norms. Age norms can be described as the unwritten social code (some age norms are codified, such as driver) that mandates when one must embrace or retire from a social role. Norms provide a guideline that serves to clarify the appropriate conduct, time schedule, and position an individual should carry (Elder, 1975). These norms are the basis for society's shared expectations about role behavior and role allocation (Clausen, 1968). Age norms are shaped by socialization. According to the research of Brim (1966), socialization refers to the impact that society has on the process in which people develop skills and attitudes need to execute a role (George, 1993). Socialization of age norms sets a standard for the behaviors that are expected of individuals of a particular age. For example, an individual in their late sixties is expected to retire and an individual in their early thirties is expected to get married.

After an understanding of the definition of roles, role allocation, and socialization of roles and age norms, I now look at the importance roles have for the individual. The roles we carry throughout the life course hold great importance on how we age and adapt in later life (Crosnoe & Elder, 2002). Gerontologists have examined the power social roles have on one's experience of aging by evaluating the transitions and timing of social roles (Hagestad & Neugaten, 1985). Role theorists have found that the roles we carry in terms of family, friends, work, and in other organizations contribute to happiness and well-being (Menaghan, 1989). Likewise the loss in one of these roles can strip one of their perceived identity and result in loss of self esteem and purpose (Marks, 1977 Menaghan, 1989).

Through this research design, one may view the power and relevance of role theory as these women of Bitchez*n*Bikez discuss their roles within the club and the impact that these roles has on their relationships and structure of the group. Throughout the interviews, the women describe how they fulfill the role as sister, mother, daughter, caretaker, leader, follower,

protector, and guardian to the others in the club. It is these roles within the Bitchez*n*Bikez that are assigned and governed through the culture of the organization. Although these roles might not be parallel to what is typical within mainstream based on age norms and age appropriateness, in this community these roles are deemed acceptable and are valued greatly among the women of the group. Therefore, role theory is used as a lens to view the significance of age by analyzing the roles in which these women perform.

Although role theory provides a lens in the analysis of this study, this theory has limitations in its application. Role theory argues that roles and life transitions occur through the progression of chronological age. It does not account for possibilities of heterogeneity and the power of social context (George, 1993). In the findings of this study, chronological age is significant in the delegation of roles. However, bike age and membership age also determine the roles the women assume. My analysis illustrates the limitations of this theory. Chronological age is not the only determinate in the social roles.

Rebels and Loners

In this section, I explore the shared identities of these women as a context for examining the roles and relationships of group members and the significance of age that informs them. Understanding the complex identities of the women of BnB, enables the reader to better appreciate the sample studied. Studying why these women share a rebel and loner identity will give insight into the community that age impacts.

The Rebellious Nature of the Bitchez

First, I explore the rebels of Bitchez*n*Bikez and how these women came to adopt this persona. The rebellious nature and character of this group of women is nurtured and affirmed through the positive connotation and perceptions of the “rebel” identity, the Bitchez’s constant defiance of the gender rules and expectations of women and women riders, and how this identity serves as a tool for protection.

When discussing their rebellion and edge, the women speak with a hint of pride and self respect. Many of the women believe that this identity is a shared quality among members of the group and it is this quality that makes the club work so productively. Being a rebel is regarded as a positive characteristic; it is respected and honored. Bella proudly discusses how she came to be a rebel and how the group is empowered by their strong rebellious nature and force.

“I am a rebel. I have always been a rebel, still a rebel. I have always been on the streets. When I was younger I was in a gang. We had this women gang and then there was this gang for the boys. Oh it was funny, we had so much fun. That is why I get a long with the girls in the group. They are all rebels. You have to be one if you are a woman rider. I don’t know why, we just are. I don’t anyone in the group who isn’t a rebel. Maybe that is why we are so strong. Hahaha. That is why we are so so strong.”

Bella reasons that the secret behind the cohesiveness of the group lies within this identity. Many of the women share her same thoughts but associate their rebellious character with their ability to proudly break the mainstream gender norms of society.

A number of the women in this group claim to be rebels due to the fact that they are devout female motorcyclists. Some of the women perceive riding a motorcycle as an activity created and meant for men. Participating in such a masculine activity breaks the laws of femininity. Infringing on the boundary of femininity enables these women to own their rebel identity. In today's culture a woman is seen on the back of a motorcycle; not often is she the driver. The Bitchez proudly hop in the driver's seat and wear their rebellion with pride. Bliss admits,

"It is not something that the normal population does. You know what I mean. It is exciting to do things a little differently. There is still a stigma with women riding motorcycles. We are breaking the rules. We are the rebels. I used to love it when I saw a woman on a motorcycle. I use to say 'Mom look at that chick on that motorcycle.' She would just roll her eyes but I would get so excited. It was so cool."

Bliss holds great respect for the fact that they are women riders and speaks with passion when discussing other women who ride bikes. It is true that these women are doing something outside the norm simply by being female motorcyclists. But not only are they defying the gender roles of mainstream society; they are also disobeying the unwritten rules of female motorcyclists. Within the culture of women riders there are social norms that command a sense of femininity from women who ride the roads on bikes.

Women riders are expected to ride motorcycles clad in femininity. The women of the BnB explain that the culture of women riders suggest that just from looking at the motorcycle one should be able to identify the gender of the rider. Additionally, they are expected to wear feminine bike attire. Bliss contrasts the Bitchez*n*Bikez with the Chrome Divas, a heterosexual female motorcycle group within the area.

"We look so much different than the Chrome Divas. They roll up in their leathers and in their pink shirts. Their bikes have rhinestones lining their bikes and stuff. We roll up in our jonnie tough guy outfits with our bad ass bikes. We look like dirty rebels compared to them. Rebels for sure. We would never fit into how they are. We are just hard core rebel riders."

B.E echoes her thoughts as she explains the reaction they receive from people who pass by the rebellious Bitchez*n*Bikez on the road.

"I don't know. You should see people stare at us. We pull up and they look over and then do a double take. It is like they realize that we are all women. I think it is pretty cool seeing a group of women all on bikes. And we are not just any kind of biker chicks though. There is a difference between lesbian bikers and straight bikers."

While being a rebel is discussed with a sense of pride and power by breaking gender and sexuality norms, it is also used by the women as a method of protection. These women are social deviants due to their sexual orientation and often times they feel hatred and disapproval from

their heterosexual counterparts. Although riding motorcycles offers a place for these rebels to be themselves, some of the women acknowledge that there is danger present when out on the road. The rebel image is used as defensive mechanism, like armor protecting and warning others to stay away. Boom articulates this idea:

“The thing about me personally is that when I am on my bike I want to look as mean and as nasty as possible. We are rebels and I want to look like one. When you are on a bike you don’t have any protection. You don’t want to piss off anybody. You don’t want someone to say “I think that’s a woman driving that bike, lets scare her.” I want to look very hard, very nasty, very mean to alleviate that from happening. I try very hard to never cut someone else off especially with the group. I would never pull out in front of a car. A car can hurt you bad. I don’t want to piss off a driver. I don’t want a driver with road rage to come up behind me. But I don’t want them to feel real safe around me either. I want them to think I am a dangerous rebel without a cause. So I want to look bad. I want the leathers. I want them to think before they act. I want them to wonder if I have a gun. Just for those reasons. I don’t want a guy to pull up and think that I am some little old lady on a bike that he can scare the shit out of me.”

Boom recognizes the dangers associated with riding motorcycles and explains why this rebel image is so paramount to the well-being of the group. Another Elder also spoke of the need to look and behave as rebels in order to protect the group from any intentional harm.

“Some of us look harder than others, butcher, tougher whatever..... We got to look like that, fierce, rebel, dangerous. Especially if you are a lesbian. Trust me. There are people out there who would love to wipe us off the earth. And here is a group of bikes that they could just simply wipe out.” - Boss

The women of Bitchez*n*Bikez take pride in their rebel identity for it empowers, unites, and protects the women of the group. However, the rebel character is not the only identity shared by the women of Bitchez*n*Bikez. Along with being a rebel, some of the women admit to feeling at times like a loner or misfit.

The Loners of Bitchez

The women who share the “loner” identity speak with passion when discussing the Bitchez*n*Bikez. This club gave many of these women this club an outlet where they could break through their loner status and cultivate meaningful friendships. This is illustrated in the following quote as Bounce speaks with a sense of acceptance when discussing the challenges she has with social interaction and how she was able to build bonds with the other women.

“It’s not that bad. Being a part of the group makes you feel like you fit somewhere too. Makes you get those bonds that maybe you don’t have with many people. For some people it is easy to make friends. For some people it is hard to make friends. I have a really hard time meeting people. I am most definitely a loner and I feel like I have always

been one. I don't make friends easy at all. I am shy. Believe it or not I am very shy. I have always been that way."

Bounce is not the only woman who spoke about her struggles with meeting people and attempting to cultivate meaningful relationships with others. In fact, six of the women also spoke of their experiences as they struggled to build a network of friends. During the interviews some of riders explain that before they became a part of Bitchez*n*Bikez they had a small or nonexistent social circle which contributed to their loner identity.

"I moved over here ten years ago. Probably the first nine years I knew no one. Maybe I have been here for twelve years. I don't know. This is a hard place to meet people. Terrible. I felt like such a loner. Gosh you know I was one for so, so, so long. I joined a golf league because I played golf. I met a few people that way. But the Bitchez is probably where I have met the most interesting people. The people I want to be friends with. The BnB are the people that I like that I get along with. With the golf group I saw them once a week and that was it. But with the bike group, the friendships grew to a point where we talk to one another each day. It meant a lot to me because that is my group of friends that I never had before. I am probably way far from being a loner now though." - Boom

Boom illustrates the power that this group holds on one's identity. Boom admits to feeling like a loner for nine years until she found the Bitchez*n*Bikez. In her quote she discusses her limited social network and how it contributed to her self-perceived loner status. However, after finding the group and connecting with the women, she openly confesses that she is no longer a loner. The Miss shares her similar story,

"When I came here everyone was new to me. So for me it was a new group of friends to hang out with. But it seemed like.....I don't know where everyone came from, from before the group or who they had been hanging out with. But all the sudden this group became the focus of everyone's world.... I guess some people had to let go of others in order to make so much time to be a part of the group. I don't know. I secretly think that we were all loners kinda coming together. But I was new to the area so it was perfect for me. Before the group I was just hanging out with myself. I had no one really. No big deal. It was cool."

It appears that The Miss feels that she is not the only one in the group who was more or less a loner before the group came to life. From her perspective it is almost as if the women in the group bonded so closely due to the fact that they had little social capital before becoming such a strong group of bikers. To demonstrate her point she speaks of her own life before the group, clarifying that she had few friends and no support system. Although she brushes it off as if it is not a big deal, her interview was full of love for the group for according to her, this group gave her a place to shed her loner identity.

Although many of the women talk about the Bitchez as a place where they instantly felt that they fit in and could abandon their loner status, some did not share this sentiment. When asked about her first impression of the Bitchez, Britches states,

“That I didn’t fit. I never fit in though so it is okay. I have felt like that so many times in my life I can’t even tell you. It is not a big deal. I am use to being a loner so it really isn’t a huge deal. It is either they are going to like me or they are not. I am fine with that. I don’t care, I have nothing to lose. It is all cool. And then it just developed from there. Pretty soon I had a place and I was part of all of it.”

From this text, it must be noted that the Bitchez*n*Bikez has the power to change the lives of the members. But this change does take time. Some women are careful and aware of their loner status and as result can be very guarded. These women will eventually find comfort and a place within BnB but it will take time.

Through looking at the personalities of the women, assessing their limited social network, and shy mannerisms it is apparent that these women are somewhat loners. When analyzing the data collected it is obvious that to a degree many of the riders feel that there is some inner part of themselves that can be considered a loner or a rebel or possibly both. Together the women unite on bikes to form this remarkable community.

Rebels and Loners Fighting Together

It does not matter if one claims to be a rebel or misfit/loner, for the women all proudly own these identities. However, many of the members report the struggle associated with being a deviant of society. While bearing the rebel, loner/misfit status requires strength, a quality these women value, it also can be very challenging and tiresome. When discussing who they are as a person and what makes them “tick”, the women explain that every day they are forced to work, live, and adapt to the heterosexual normative culture. They are required, despite their rebel and loner status, to conform to the images and personas of what society deems as acceptable. It is this motorcycle club that gives these women a relief from the pressures of heterosexual norms and assumptions.

In one interview, the Elder Boom spoke of her struggle to comply with the heterosexual standards of today. She talks about the energy it takes to complete such a task and how the club offers a break from such exhaustion.

“I work in a straight world and a man’s world every day of the week. I play the role, I try to wear the costume, and pretend that I am not so gay. It is exhausting being only some of yourself. But on the weekend I don’t want to have to be careful of the things I say, how I act. I want to be a lesbian, I want to ride my bike and do *me*.”

It is not just the Elders who speak with frustration about their perceived obligation to blend in with the heterosexual paradigm. Another woman of the club explains,

“I am so tired of being half of me. If I didn’t have a Monday through Friday my hair would be this short. My pants would not be this tight. I would look so different you know. I would look like me. Like how I look on the weekends on my bike. I have energy and spirit then cause I am not so weighed down and tired of putting up that front.” – B.E

While the more masculine “butch” women have the obvious fight with fitting into the everyday world, the feminine women of the BnB explain that they share the same struggle. One of the more feminine Bitchez, Britches, also claims that she is tired of having to adhere to the heterosexual dominant culture of today. She too explains that it is her weekends that allow her to escape from the struggle associated with being a deviant.

“I am girly, way girly. I wear the pink and I love the princess stuff. It is not hard to blend in that way like most of the other girls. But just because I look like this doesn’t mean that I am not a lesbian you know. And I am tired of having to defend that. On the weekends I don’t have to. They make fun of me sometimes, but they love it. They do. They love me.”

These women, young, old, feminine, or masculine all wrestle with adhering to the standards of the heterosexual majority. Bitchez*n*Bikez serves as a brief retreat from the challenges these women face in the outside world. It is on the rides, group outings, meetings, and other activities where the women of the club are valued for who they are, surrounded by others who share a similar identity.

The women of the club recognize the value of Bitchez*n*Bikez and acknowledge the significance that this community has in their lives. One significant theme that surfaced from the interviews was the importance of community. These rebels or loners express their needs and desires to be a part of some community. One of the younger woman, Baby, explains this.

“I was in a place in my life where I needed some community. It is hard to meet people and make friends in the community because everybody has gone to school together, works together, or dated each other, or whatever. It is very cliquish. It was really hard for me to work my way into the community. I really needed an outlet for stress, sadness, and frustration and everything. Riding did that for me. To be around a group that was diverse in ages and gay and straight. It is very like...I don’t know. I can relax, I can be myself, and I can joke around. They take you at face value. There is a lot of joking around. It was a combination of needing the community that the Bitchez brought me. If I don’t hang out with them every so often I really start to miss it. I start to get an itch, not just because I miss riding, but I miss the camaraderie that they all had.”

From this text, one can better understand why a community is important to these women. Baby reports that she did not have this community before and felt a loss due to the void of a support system. According to this young woman, a community offered her a place to not only find support through rough times but also receive acceptance and closeness from others. Other women of BnB also communicate that without a community they felt that they did not have a safe space in which they could go to feel accepted for who they are. The Miss puts into perspective as she states,

“I think we are all emotional beings, sensitive beings, loners, rebels. So finding a unit where we fit in. It was so cool. There was no pressure. If you wanted to ride, ride. But if you didn’t it was okay. People let you be you and do what you wanted to do. It was okay and respected. That is my view though. That is how I see them.”

This quote gives outsiders a great insight into the dynamics of the community that is created here. Her quote demonstrates the unconditional love and support that is given to each woman in the group. This text is not the only one that demonstrates the affection and support given to the women of Bitchez*n*Bikez. Boss shares a story of how they were able to take in a woman who did not have any social capital before joining the group.

“We all take a conscious effort to take the time to get to know each other. We have one rider has said that our group has challenged her life. She is just so excited to ride. She is vital part of our group. She has such great input. She is smart, she is fun, and she is intelligent. It is justTo know that we brought her from never going out to going out a lot. She says “Boss I don’t think I can make myself do this tonight” but then she goes out and has a good time. It’s pretty awesome. It is a good thing.”

Regardless of whether one is a rebel or loner in the outside world, here they are valued for person they really are. These women are all unique and although they may share similarities they are all very different. Many of these women feel that they have multiple identities, multiple roles they fill in the work place and among friends and family. But still they are able fit into this group and enjoy the perks of community. Bella speaks of her many identities and what the club offers her in terms of identity and role.

“It gave me another form of identity besides my work identity, besides being a rule breaker, besides being misfit. It was fun to be a part of something. It was fun to be apart of a click, a community. That I never had before this group. I never knew that I was missing out on such an amazing thing. It is the one place where you really can be you without judgment.”

In addition to being without a community the Bitchez of Bitchez*n*Bikez reveal their cravings for freedom. These women are individuals who live on the outside of normal. They are the women who are breaking the rules every day and endure the consequences of their lifestyle Monday through Friday. As a result, many of the women express that they long for a sense of freedom. Freedom to escape their alternate identities which they use to survive in the daily grind is craved by many of the women within this group. The concept of freedom arose during the interviews when the women spoke of their bikes. When asked why she rides motorcycles, Bounce smiles, saying:

“It (riding) is mainly about freedom and having fun. Being able to enjoy life. Pushing that limit. I think everybody likes the feeling of pushing a limit. Being on a bike pushes that limit in some accept. So does being gay or looking like me (butch). Being on a bike makes you feel free from all of it. It’s not a role, it’s who you are. That freedom kind of part. Being on a bike is who you are. It’s part of you. It is that daring part, that exciting part, the rebel in you.”

The theme of freedom surfaced in many of the interviews. When asked the same question about her love of bikes, The Miss responds,

“It is like freedom. We live so closed in. We live in our houses and cars. I like to be outside. I like to sleep outside, I like to be outside. I like my head facing up to the sky. I like it. It does feel that way when you are on a bike. It does have that thing that makes it feel like freedom. In that moment you are free from everything you have to put up with from everyone else.”

It is clear that these women are looking for a place where they can embrace their inner rebel and shed their loner/misfit image and just be them. It is a place where none of the stress from the days past and ahead looms about. Here in this community the women are able to band together and escape the tiresome constraints of society, enjoy the social support of one another, and embrace the vigor of freedom.

The Road

It is who these women are, their character and struggle, which calls them to the road. It is their rebellious nature, the feeling of being an outcast of society, the emotional hardship of being a loner, the hunger for freedom and yet the need for community, that sends these women to the road. The road is able to offer each woman something different, something that she feels is missing in her life due to the status she holds and the life she leads. The road is a place where the group dynamics and social roles develop and a symbol of freedom.

Throughout the interviews, the road serves as a place where these women are able to gather together, no longer simply seen as societal outcasts but rather valued for being them. The road can be viewed as Alice's looking glass; once a woman steps through onto the road she may find herself in a community where she is finally an equal part. This community is formed through the road and it is the road that has provided purpose for the Bitchez*n*Bikez to exist.

The danger of the road and the risk of riding a motorcycle cause these women to come together in a way designed to protect each other and fight for the safety of one another. During the interviews with the women they explain that the purpose of Bitchez*n*Bikez is to protect and be there for each other.

“With women there is a cattiness and all of that.....but you are on that bike and you know it is a sisterhood. You are riding with your sisters. You are protecting your sisters while on the road. With me being on the front bike it is my job is to watch the mirrors and watch out for our sisters.” -Britches

Besides coming together for protection purposes, the road holds value for it is the source that unites the Bitchez. The adventures and planned destinations of Bitchez*n*Bikez require the women to perform tasks, set goals, and fulfill their roles within this community in order to safely execute their journey together. While the planned excursions give the club an agenda and mission, it is not destination that is most important to these women. Baby offers an explanation of the significance of the Sunday rides.

“You go towards this destination and I realized it is not even about the destination. It is not about the destination it never is. It is about the feeling the wind on your face, sunshine, and watching out for the other riders. It is being apart of that feeling.”

Not only does the road form the objective of Bitchez*n*Bikez, in the form of a thing to do or conquer, it is also a space where roles and relationships are produced. The road perpetuates the relationships and bonds as well as the structure and organization of Bitchez*n*Bikez. When speaking of the relationships within the group many of the women discussed the quality of their bonds by referencing the road.

“That is probably the best part of the sisterhood. We aren’t going to leave you on the side on the road. If you go down, we are going to get your bike one way or another to the shop. We are going to make sure everything is okay. Everything is cool.”
The road becomes a theater, a stage where the relationships and structure of the group take form. The road is the space that ultimately gives the group its purpose and meaning. This is the space where the women of the club assume many age-graded roles.

Relationships within Bitchez*n*Bikez

In this section of findings, I discuss age and how it affects the roles women play in their relationships with one another. This discussion examines the relationships of BnB and how the relationships are able to neutralize or intensify the power of age. Relationships where women fulfill the role as sisters/brothers are considered to be age neutralizing while relationships where women assume the role as parent or child is classified as age intensified.

Sister/Brotherhood

Based on the interviews collected, the sister/brotherhood of Bitchez*n*Bikez is an important entity of this group. Sisterhood/Brotherhood is often valued as a significant element within the subculture of motorcyclists. Motorcyclists/Bikers use the term “sister” and “brother” to identify members within the bike community. Looking at the literature that studies the relationships within these motorcycle groups, we learn that these types of relationships are common and valued. According to Schouten and McAlexander (1995), who researched all types of motorcycle communities, brotherhood is valued and respected, because ultimately these bikers share the experience of riding as a single unit in large formation with other bikers. The unity that emerges from this experience, coupled with the mutual love and loyalty for motorcycles, nurtures the brotherhood that many bikers hold dear (Hopper & Moore 1983; Reynolds 1967). While this also holds true for the women of Bitchez*n*Bikez, the sisterhood extends past the similar experiences and love of riding.

The bikers and their passengers of this community share many similarities in terms of sexuality, gender identity, and riding experience, making bonds of sisterhood based on commonality easy to establish. However, they do not all share the same chronological age. Bitchez*n*Bikez can be described as a community where intergenerational relationships are valued and a part of the group dynamic. When studying the role of age within the sisterhood I find age to be neutralizing. With such a presence of intergenerational relationships that are found within this community it is significant that the women still describe each other as sisters and

brothers. It is rare that individuals would use this language to describe an intergenerational relationship because “sisters” and “brothers” implies age peers.

It must be explained that throughout the interviews the women lovingly reference each other as their sister and brother. The women are careful to use the words “sister” and “brother” for although the riders are female bodied, not all fit and comply with the laws of femininity. Baby explains this perfectly,

“A lot of our members are very butch. Like Bam texts me sister-brother. I love that. I think that is right on because some of us are butch or feminine or maybe even both.”

With this understanding I research the sister/brother hood of the Bitchez*n*Bikez. The sister/brotherhood is best understood by exploring the meaning of community and the concepts of equality and protection.

Sisters/Brothers as Community

Through creating Bitchez*n*Bikez these women have designed their own community of sisters and brothers. With these findings, one must ask whether or not this is a community or a family. This section reveals findings that support the claim that the Bitchez*n*Bikez is a cross between a community and family. The women suggest that it is both and use the words “community” and family” interchangeably.

The value and significance of this community is a recognizable theme that has emerged from the interviews. The community of these LBGTQ women riders offers a place of social support where the women of Bitchez*n*Bikez are able to come together, despite the diversity in terms of chronological age, and unite as sisters. During an interview Bella put it in these words,

“The youngest one is 20ish and she rides with us as a passenger and then you have the oldest in her 60s. We have all different ranges. I guess we are very diverse when it comes to age. We are just a different kind of group. We got a community.”

As with any community, the relationships within Bitchez*n*Bikez vary in terms of closeness and level of familiarity. Regardless of the relationship and one’s chronological age, the women of this motorcycle group are confident that they are able to lean on one another as fellow sisters. One of the women explains the diverse relationships within the community and how the sisterhood still remains at the root of the community.

“Some people are the best of friends, some people are friends, and some people are acquaintances. But you know that you can go to any of them at any time and say I need help or I need this, or I just need someone to talk too. That to me is what the sisterhood is all about. That is what we are about.” - Bounce

Through the qualitative interviews it was communicated by the women of BnB that throughout the existence of the created community, there are many moments when the power of sisterhood radiated. The sisterhood that the woman explained previously can be seen through

many instances over the life span of this club. One woman recounts a time when she felt that the sisterhood within the community was visible to the naked eye,

“One prime example, the winter before last, someone had to move for personal reasons. They had to move fairly quickly. We all met, brought in trucks. One sweep. Their equipment, clothes, everything. One sweep. We didn’t have to go back for anything. We are a sisterhood. Those are the things we do.” – Boss

This was not the only example given to describe how this community of sisters was able to band together and take care of one another. Bounce tells a story of a time when she crashed her bike and found her sisters quick to help her with anything she might need.

“It was amazing to see that group of woman come together to take care of one of their own. It was just so quick. No time was wasted. It was taken care of. The ride was taken care of. They wanted to make sure I was taken care of. They didn’t leave me there. They were calling me and texting me in the hospital “What are they saying? Are you okay?” Constantly. They didn’t leave me there.”

Although Bounce does not say directly that this is a sisterhood as a community her story demonstrates a moment when the sisterhood was at its best. Furthermore, in her quote she states “take care of one their own.” This contributes to the understanding that this is a community, family, and sisterhood for they are each other’s “own.” This denotes inclusion and membership within the community.

While the sisterhood within the community of Bitchez*n*Bikez is described by the women as a strong force that guides the group, it must be acknowledge that not all of the women felt this way. In any and every community there will be outliers. This also holds true for a few of the women within the Bitchez. The community, while it encourages and cultivates unity, it also can be selective and exclusive. When asked about the sisterhood of the Bitchez*n*Bikez, Bionic reveals her feelings about the exclusion of sisterhood.

“I don’t want to say sisterhood. It is hard to explain. It is like a core part of your life. It is just something that is a part of your life. It is the people that have touched you one way or another, the people who have been there for you. The people who can help each other. It is an amazing bunch of women who are unique in their own way who are there for each other. Not everyone fits into that unfortunately. Not everyone fits in with us, the group.”

It is not just the selective nature of the group that might make a woman feel excluded from the community of sisters. Within the Bitchez*n*Bikez there is an expectation that all members of the community must fulfill certain social and political roles. These women are required to take an active role within club whether they serve as a leader or devoted follower. Additionally, they must take an interest in and be a part of the lives of the women in their community. When asked if she would call the Bitchez*n*Bikez a sisterhood, one woman cringes stating,

“I wouldn’t.....I mean with certain members I would say that they would say that. Not everybody accepts everybody. There is a group of people. Boom, Boss, Bella, Boo,

Honesty, The Miss, Bliss, Brick.....some others too. That's a sister. That is a sisterhood. You have other members who come and go. They just look at the group as something fun to do. They want to have they don't want to give or commit. It's not a community to them. They're not our sisters."

From this passage, it can be understood that although the relationships and bonds between the women appear to be strong there are some women who have a hard time developing these relationships. Likewise, this quote reveals that some of the women are not accepted into the sisterhood due to lack of commitment and dedication to the community. Therefore it can be reasoned that in order to be included in the community that is the sisterhood, one must give and contribute to the group. Lack of this behavior will result in exclusion. This small group of women who are excluded from the group does exist and must be recognized when talking about the sisterhood and the community that is Bitchez*n*Bikez.

Sisters as Equality

The sisterhood of Bitchez*n*Bikez is constructed on the basis of equality, and this has age neutralizing effect in some ways. Through the interviews, the women spoke of equality, claiming that each woman in the club is valued as an equal. The ability to see one another as sisters despite the large generational gaps comes from the fact that each woman views her fellow riders as her counterpart.

Many of the women recognized that the individuals who they call sisters/brothers are from various generations. In the text below one of the younger riders explains how this is possible.

"Everybody could hang out and joke and whatever. It wasn't like "Oh you are from this generation or you are from this generation." It was more of like an emersion of all different women from all different walks of life, all points in their life span coming together, as one. We were us, we were each other's equal. It just didn't matter." – Baby

From this text, we learn that these women are able to unite as equals, seeing beyond generational gaps that exist. From this quote the younger woman suggests that as a group these women share a good time together and fit well together regardless of age, ultimately making age unimportant. When asked about hanging out with the younger women of the club, the Boom chuckles as she says,

"Is it a problem? No! It isn't a problem because we old farts still know how to party. We party hardy. The 25 year old doesn't know how to yet. I am sure there are a lot of people my age who act a lot older than me. But I still like to after a ride go to a bar and dance, carry on, and act crazy. We all do and it doesn't matter who is young or old. It sounds like all we do is drink and that maybe. But it doesn't have to be a bike thing. We get together. That is a good part of the group even if there is nothing going on we still get together and go out. We meet up and get together as friends and have fun."

In this quote Boom clarifies that she is not only an equal to the younger women of the club in terms of her "party skills" but possibly better than the younger ones. Here the Elder is

demonstrating that although she might be older she is still capable of being equal to that of the younger women. Additionally, this quote reveals that the interests of the women are for the most part parallel. Whether the woman is young or old, these riders are in pursuit of a good time and share this common interest. This common interest allows the women to feel as if they are similar in spirit and therefore they are able to see each other as their peers.

It is remarkable that all of the women, young and old, spoke of equality when referring to the sisterhood of the Bitchez. The emphasis of equality is a great part of the group design. In fact, one of the Elders responsible for dreaming up this group reveals her thought process for wanting and creating this type of club where women could form this bond through equality,

“How it actually started is probably maybe ten years or so I had a vision, it would be so wonderful, of a group of women that you could totally be yourself around, not have to stay in the closet. And we could just motorcycle and have a nice sisterhood.”

In this quote the Elder discloses her desire to form a club where women could join and be respected for who they are. This club offers a place, a sisterhood, where one is not any less of a person due to their sexuality but rather that of an equal together. Therefore, women of the Bitchez are no less of a person but rather all equal due to their mutual love of riding and shared LBGTQ identity. It is because of this shared identity that there is the emphasis on equality forming the sisterhood.

It is not just the Elder who is responsible for creating this club who speaks of equality. Bliss puts it in her own words:

“We were a sisterhood. I really loved everybody. It did feel like there was always someone to have your back if you needed something. It was like an extended family. I miss that. I miss the fellowship we had. It is not like these friends are untouchable. That door is always open to communicate with each other. But I don’t know. We all worry about each other. It is like “I want to make sure that you are okay. Why don’t the two of us get together?” And we do that with each other. It was this unspoken bond too you know.”

Many of the women interviewed shared the same sentiment as above. Most of all the women felt bonded through equality and shared their thoughts on this aspect of the sisterhood. Bounce describes the strong bond of sisterhood through equality in the following text,

“It is just a good group of women that have amazing qualities. Those qualities in them make such a great bond. It is these qualities that make such a strong bond. It is hard to describe the group because the group is made out of many but we are all equal together. I mean you know, one reflects right off the other. They are who we are, it is what makes us. When we come together we are all one.”

As can be seen, equality is valued greatly and contributes to the sisterhood that survives in the heart of these intergenerational relationships. It is through equality that these women are able to see past chronological age or one’s bike experience and value each other as peers and counterparts. In addition to equality, mutual protection on the streets and on the road is an integral part of the sisterhood.

Sisters as Mutual Protection

When talking about the sisterhood of the group, many of the women reference the element of mutual protection as an important feature of the sisterhood. Despite the generational gap that exists between some of the women, the sisterhood is explained in a way that suggests that there is a deep sense of similarity and commonality present among the intergenerational group of women. The power of the sisterhood shared among members of various generations and birth cohorts is restated through the willingness to protect each other in an unconditional manner.

During the interviews, many of the women describe the unconditional protection they provide and receive from their sisters. “Defending a sister” is one of the many ways in which these women fight to protect each other. The Miss tells her favorite story about how the sisterhood is ready for anything.

“Or when crazy bitches want to fight or something. You know what I am saying. I remember one night one of the Bitchez had this crazy person after her. I don’t even know if she remembers this. We are inside Rosie’s and we are all looking out. We were all like “If we see one physical assault, we are all going to pile out this door.” None of us are fighters we are all grown women. We are not like that. We are not fighters but we could not see one of our girls going down. I am anti violent. I won’t hurt anybody but I will hold her back. I am not going to fight her but I will not let her hit a sister. I am not going to hurt her but you know. It is just things like that. We all felt like, we all knew that anything could happen and we would all have your back.”

It is clear that once one becomes a member of this club she has gained the full protection of her sisters and brothers. But her sisters and brothers are not just willing to throw down in a bar fight for one another. These women are constantly making certain that their sisters are safe. When asked to tell a story about the sisterhood of the Bitchez, Bionic recounts,

“Say so and so wants to ride her bike home and she is obviously toasted. No it is not going to happen. We will do whatever possible to not let that happen. Like one of the other members, I won’t say her name, drank way too much and insisted on driving. We were like ‘Ummm....No’. So another one of the Bitchez said “I will take her back in the bar and you guys can work it out.” Well Boss rode her bike back to her house and I drove my car to get her there. Then we went back to the bar to get her and took her home. That is what you do. Even if it takes you not getting home till an hour and a half later. That is what you do for a brother.”

Another way in which protection is offered and received occurs on the road. On the road, regardless age, the sisters come together and watch out for one another. The road holds threat of hazard and risks fostering a sisterhood built to protect one another from the dangers of motorcycle riding. This element of protection on the road is highly valued in this group. The women all feel responsible for paying attention to the others, making certain that every one is okay and on two wheels. In this quote, one of the Elders summarizes this point perfectly,

“When they found out I was sick they really took care of me, especially while on the rides. We have Baby Doc that rides with us. I know at the beginning they would watch my fatigue level. “Are you doing okay” They watched over me. They would protect me and constantly watch over me on the road. I am getting better but still they watch over me. It was always ‘How are you feeling? You look a little tired.’ I always felt that they are taking care of me.”

However, it is not just the Elders who speak of protection on the road when identifying the strength of the Bitchez*n* Bikez sisterhood. Throughout the ten interviews both Elders and the younger women of the group describe the sisterhood in terms of protecting each other on the road. Britches states,

“With women there is a cattiness and all of that.....but you are on that bike and you know it is a sisterhood. You are riding with your sisters. You are protecting your sisters while on the road. With me being on the front bike it is my job is to watch the mirrors and watch out for our sisters.”

While protecting each other in the streets and on the road illustrates and gives purpose to the sisterhood, the bond of sisters is also identified through the feeling and creation of community.

The Intergenerational Sister/Brotherhood

Throughout the interviews the women discussed the sister/brotherhood of the Bitchez, referencing the importance and significance of equality, community, and protection. When a majority of the women explained the sisterhood in these terms they spoke of one another portraying their sisters and brothers as peers. Seldom did they mention the diverse chronological age, bike age, or membership age of their fellow riders. However, when asked to describe the sister/brotherhood of the group, a few women did speak of the generational gaps that exist between one another and how it contributes to the close bonds of sister/brotherhood. This section examines the perceptions of the small amount of women who identified the generational gaps when talking about the sister/brotherhood of the Bitchez. The intergenerational sisterhood and/or brotherhood are explored through an examination of intergenerational closeness and the significance of having mutually beneficial intergenerational relationships.

When the women made mention of the generational gaps, they spoke of the intergenerational closeness and the benefits of having a sister/brother whose age varied from their own. It was found that when the women mention the level of intergenerational closeness within the group they immediately compare it to what is true for the lesbian community of this Midwest metropolitan area. When asked about the intergenerational closeness of the Bitchez*n*Bikez The Miss explains,

“I think basically in the lesbian community that is the way it is. The 20 something’s can roll with the 50s-60 year olds and we are all sisters together. There is a community. This is where you go, these are the (LBGTQ community) events, and this is the thing. And everybody from all ages goes there.”

She was not the only woman to compare the unique intergenerational relationships within the Bitchez to what is typical within the lesbian community. Bounce shares this point of view as she explains,

“Well you know. We are all gay and there aren’t much of us out there or around here so we all got to stick together. That’s how the community is. It doesn’t matter how older you are if you are gay then you are going to come out to stuff because what else are you going to do. We all share that. No matter what age we are brothers.”

These two passages give light to the lesbian community of the area in which these women thrive. According to these women, due to the limited activities and resources provided to the lesbian community in addition to the small population of lesbians, the community can not afford to exclude one another on the grounds of chronological age. Bliss puts it simply,

“Sure we could say you are too young or too old to go here or do this with us. But then we might have like four people show up. Now really where’s the fun in that.”

Regardless of why intergenerational closeness exists between the bikers of BnB it is undeniable that these women treasure the great relationships they have with one another. When asked to describe the relationships the women have with their younger or older sisters/brothers, the majority of the women were quick to identify that these relationships were so enjoyable because they are mutually beneficial. Many of the women trust the strength of the sister/brotherhood due to the mutually beneficial intergenerational relationships that exist. This equal exchange of capital and resource among the women of diverse ages promotes a level of equality, allowing the women to view each other as sisters. This can be seen through analyzing the text abstracted from Bionic’s interview.

“It is like having a little sister who follows you around and wants to do what you do. At first when you are young young you are annoyed but when you get older it is kind of nice. You have more patience and appreciate people. I sometimes live vicariously through them. They teach me too and keep me young. It goes both ways and we are both giving.”

It is not just the older women of the club who admit to loving the mutually beneficially relationships they have developed with the younger women of the group. During the interviews, many of the younger women report feeling the same way. One of the younger women says,

“They are totally the big sisters. They watch out for you on the play ground, they share their toys, and every once and a while they pull our hair. But we give it right back to them. We look up to them, we tell them we love them, and we spend our time plotting how are going to bug them next.”

The intergenerational closeness and the mutually beneficial relationships that have emerged from these bonds are recognized by some of these women and included as being an

important part of the sisterhood. To some, these intergenerational bonds of sister/brotherhood are valued because it is all one has.

“My biker girls. My sisters and brothers, I don’t care how old they are, they are all I got. Really they are my support.” - Boss

To others the intergenerational relationships not only serve as social capital but also have the power to offer one a ticket into a world to which otherwise they would not have access.

“With our group I just think that certain people get along better with younger people and certain people get along better with older people. Some people who are older like to run around with younger people because it makes them feel in control or even just young again. We are all sister and brothers so we are able to go back and forth between worlds. In our group we have the best of both worlds.” - Bella

Whatever the reason maybe, the sister/brotherhood of the Bitchez is undeniable and it is the element of intergenerational closeness and the exchange of capital that adds to the dimension and quality of the relationships.

Age-Based Parental Bonds and Roles

While the sisterhood of the Bitchez*n*Bikez dictates many of the intergenerational relationships within the group, it must be understood that it is not the only kind of relationship found among the women of the club. Many of the women describe their relationships within the group as being more comparable to that of a mother/father-daughter/son type of bond. In these relationships the significance of age is amplified. In the following quote, Baby attempts to describe the complex relationships of the women as she focuses on the bonds of sisterhood and parental relationships that thrive.

“But not just a sisterhood but almost like a motherhood too. Especially the older ones were kind of like mom or maybe an auntie. They really look out for the younger ones and look out for each other obviously. I know that they are looking out for me and if I needed anything they would be there for me. I often got advice and went to the Elders; you know advice on life and stuff like that. But definitely a sisterhood. “

From this text, it is understood that relationships and roles within BnB may blend and blur from sister to daughter/mother. Therefore, it is essential to explore the parental bonds that are present and the role and significance age has on these relationships. This is done through investigating the characterization of younger riders as children and Elders as their parents, aspects of the riding formation, the significance of potential protection within parental bonds, the element of discipline, and caregiving and taking.

Characterization of Children

The parent and child relationships between the younger and older Bitchez can be understood through analyzing how these women view the roles they play in their relationships with each other. The data from this study supports the claim that parental relationships exist among the women. Through the interviews oftentimes the younger women in the club were characterized as children while the older women are personified as mothers/fathers. Throughout the interviews most of the women spoke of their relationships, describing and depicting themselves as children or as parents in relation to other group members.

The women share stories during the interviews which reveal the roles they fill in the relationships they have. Baby recounts,

“Britain proposed in front of all the Bitchez. We were all in a circle and Britain was in the middle and she proposed to her girlfriend, Bachelor. They are getting married in a week and half. It is really exciting. Britain use to be a big a part of the group. She was like the kid to Bishop and Boom and she really wanted them to be there and to do in front of them.”

Britain valued her Elders as parent figures to such a degree that she wanted to include them in her marriage proposal. Her effort to include her “parents” in this moment closely resembles what would be typical in traditional heterosexual parent to child relationships.

The younger women in the club are not the only ones to talk of the parent-child relationships that have blossomed. The Elders speak with pride when discussing their “children.” In the quote below, Boss shares her feelings on being a mother figure to the Bitchez.

“Yea that’s fine. It’s good. They are our children. We are their mothers, to some we are their grandmothers. I can not change how old I am. You can’t change it and I wouldn’t for anything. I love my babies. My line to everybody is that if you get to be my age and do what I do, then you are a good woman.”

Boss most definitely clarifies the parent-child relationships that thrive. But it is not just the Elders who feel as if they are the mothers/fathers of the girls. Some of the more experienced riders also personify the younger, less experienced women as children and characterize themselves as the adults. When asked about riding with the younger women of the club, one of the older Bitchez laughs as she explains the concept of “adult swim.”

“Actually we do have what we call the adult swim where the older ones, the more experience riders, go out and the younger ones are left at home because they can’t do the roads that we do or the long trips we do. But that is what we call the adult swim. I think it’s funny.” -Britches

In this quote emphasis of age is not necessary placed on the riders’ chronological age but instead it is their bike age (the amount of years spent riding) that is more important. Those who are younger in terms of their bike age are seen as children and it is the more experienced riders that are characterized as adults. This quote allows us to understand that there is a difference between one’s bike age and chronological age. However, both prove to be significant within the Bitchez*n*Bikez, for an individual is characterized as a child if they are young in terms chronological age and bike age.

The women of the club, young or old, are not hesitant to render each other as grandmothers/fathers, mothers/fathers, daughters/sons, auntie/uncles. The parent-child complex identified through the interviews clarifies that age has great impact on the relationships that holds this group together. The impact of protection created by the Elders and the younger women also illustrates the impact age has and once again places emphasis on parental bonds.

Age Graded Non-Mutual Protection

When riders of the club spoke of the sisterhood, mutual protection served as a significant role requiring the women to care and look out for their sisters on and off the road. The theme of age based non mutual protection was found when the women spoke of the parental bonds they felt that they had with other women in the group. Although protection was discussed and described in terms of sisterhood, its appearance and meaning changed in relationships where women felt connected with each other in a parent-child way.

For example, many of the younger riders looked to the Elders as their mothers/fathers, confident that these women had the power to protect them from harm. In an interview with one of the younger women shared a time when she felt that her Elders were capable of protecting her from any harm,

“Being the family that we were, I felt that the older girls watched out for me. I remember that it was Julie and I’s first date. I got to meet some of the girls. Boom was there and I got to sit next to her. I was nervous because we were sitting in this motorcycle bar and I was scared about how these other people there would feel about lesbians in their bar. Boom said to me “You are taken care of here kid.” And we were their kids. I never felt like I had to worry because I knew that our Elders were taking care of us.”

The Elders offered the younger women protection but it was reciprocated in return. The younger women in the club feel that it is their job to protect the mothers and fathers of the group. One example of this can be found through looking at a situation that emerged as one of the Elders embraced a new romantic interest. As the Elder entered into this new relationship with a woman outside of the community, the young women of the group felt deeply concerned and tried to protect their Elder from heartbreak. The love interest of the Elder comments,

“Yes the girls were so protective of them (Elders). I think that was part of it maybe. They just didn’t like me coming in there. I don’t know. They were their dads, I guess. They wanted to see her taken care of.....But the group is very protective of them especially while being on the road.” -Britches

Role of Disciplinarian

In any parent-child relationship, the parent is obligated to fill the role of the disciplinarian. This is illustrated in the intergenerational relationships that have a parent-child structure. In the Bitchez*n*Bikez, the Elders of the club care and protect for the younger ones, but are not afraid to discipline them either. One of the youngest members of the club laughs as she tells how the Elders would correct them for a dirty bike.

“If your bike wasn’t clean, shoot. You would definitely get reamed for not up keeping your bike. They would rip you for that for sure. Buzzy hates it when you leave your keys in your bike because it runs your bike down. It is more like up keep and stuff that the Elders would tease the younger ones about. But it was like they were mothers telling us to clean our rooms.” -Baby

The Elders instructing the girls to “pick up their dirty rooms” and make certain that everyone is in check is a simple action but further cements and reinforces their roles as parents and places the younger women into the position of their children. These bonds have been shaped so organically that some of the women did not even recognize the extent to which they existed. One of the younger women admits that she did not notice this until recently,

“There is a lot more undertones of the group that I didn’t realized until later. There are certain people who don’t pay attention as much. They (Elders) put them in a certain spot on purpose because they know that they are a little rowdy, a little less safe. See they can’t put them at the point because they will be way up or put them in the back where they will be way behind. They keep them in the middle so they watch out for them for the whole ride. I didn’t know about this until later.”

This text allows one to understand that the Elders assume the parental role with a level of subtlety. The discipline enforced by the Elders is done in a way that may be less obvious to some. The Elders’ role as disciplinarians remains essential to the chemistry of the group and the parental bonds that underlie within the intergenerational relationships. In addition to discipline, care giving and caretaking is another subject where one can see the parental bonds between the Bitchez.

“Parent-Child” Age Graded Care Giving and Receiving

Within family structure, it is typical to see multiple generations caring for one another. The family that is Bitchez*n*Bikez is no different from the traditional kin unit and therefore within the intergenerational relationships there is emphasis placed on caregiving and caretaking.

Caregiving and caretaking is exchanged equally among the Elders and the younger women. According to the majority of the women interviewed, the relationships are mutually beneficial, meaning each woman contributes in terms of giving and taking caring of each other. When asked about the relationships she has with the younger women, The Miss explains,

“When you are younger you seek out people who are there for you. It is what we do. Like who do we go to when we are young, we go to our parents. That is the way that it is. We are their parents and we take care of ‘em like we are. It is kind of your role whether you like it or not. It is something that you gain in your later life. That is the way that it is.”

In this text it is evident that The Miss assumes the role of “parent” and as a result acknowledges that this role requires her to take care of her “children.” She accepts the responsibility of caregiving as she accepts her age. This quote reveals that she associates her role as caregiver and

parent based on her life stage and how it differentiates from the life stages of the other women. While the older women of the club proudly state that they are caregivers to the children of the group they do not expect to be the only caregivers. They also count on and rely on their “children” for the future support and care. One of the older women of the group jokes,

“Age does not matter. State of mind. I have to have those young ones in my life so they can take care of me. When I get to old to do anything I have to have them around, that is who I can rely on. They are going to have to wipe my butt.”

While the older women of the club hold the position of “parent” with pride and eagerly assume caregiving responsibility, they admit to needing future and present care from their young “children.” However, what makes this relationship work so well is that this need is promised and ensured by the younger women of the BnB. In the following quote, one of the younger bikers, B.E, shares her promise to take care of her older members.

“The Elders, you can not beat them. I would do anything for them. I would be there in a minute. I would do anything for those women, for either one of them. All of us would to be honest. They take care of us we know that. But we have their backs too. We do and they know it. Either one of those women. We would be there.”

This declaration of care not only strengthens the bonds between the women of diverse generations but proves that care is equally distributed among the women participating in parent-child relationships.

Structure of The Bitchez*n*Bikez

In this section of the findings, I now discuss the role age has on the structure of the club. Here I examine the structure through analyzing both the leadership of the group and the organization of the club. Through examining leadership and the organization of the club, the role and significance of age may be identified.

Leadership

Understanding the culture of any group is very challenging. The Bitchez*n*Bikez were very protective when it came to revealing the traditions that make up the culture of their club. However, little by little throughout the interviews the women opened up, sharing the significant events and characteristics that contribute to the culture of the BnB. The tradition of the purple bandana and the distribution of bike names, “respecting your Elders,” the feelings of belonging, and the relationships between the Newbie and Elders are just a few of the specific quirks that frame the culture of the group. It is also within the culture of this group, where the role and significance of age is seen.

Purple Bandana/Bike Names

Literature regarding the culture that exists within motorcycle clubs/gangs/groups all agree that new members of the group are instantly thrown at the bottom of the hierarchy system in place. New members must work to prove their loyalty, devotion, and willingness to adapt to group expectations. Schouten and McAlexander (1955), conduct a complete study on various biker communities. From their research they found that all motorcycle communities have some sort of initiation process for new members. This also holds true for the Bitchez*n*Bikez. Bitchez explains the BnB initiation process of becoming part of this group and the importance of the initiation process,

“You know you really do have to earn your spot. You just don’t show up one day and then you have a name. You have to ride with them. You have to prove yourself. You have to ride with them and prove to them that you are a good rider. You have to know what signals are being thrown by the first bike. You have to fit into the formation and you have to be a safe rider. You have to understand and watch out for you fellow riders.”

After “earning your spot” is accomplished, the new member is then introduced to the group and gains entrance to the club through a traditional ceremony. In the Bitchez*n*Bikez, new members gain full admission into the group once they receive the purple bandana and are given their bike name. It is with these two traditions in which age plays a role and becomes a focus for the women.

It is the responsibility of the Elders to name a new biker into the club. The Elders allow members of the group to assist in the naming process but it is often the Elders who have the final say when the biker has properly earned her bike name and purple bandana. The Elders assume this age-graded role of power. Boss shares a small insight on these traditions and the role in she plays in the initiation of Newbies.

“All of the Bitchez have B names. That is a must. We talk to you a little bit and try to figure out your personality. We have the rest of the girls help us come up with a name but for the most part we are the ones who make the decision. It is also us, well the Mistress, who gives out the purple bandana. None of the girls have a problem with us doing it. I guess since we made the group and have set the traditions they let us kinda run with it. I think they like it though, us leading them. They do.”

The initiation process of the Bitchez conducted by the Elders is greatly respected within this community and also by the LBGTQ community. One of the woman interviewed shares her experience as she watched her best friend receive her bike name and how she felt being able to witness such an event even though at the time she was an outsider to the group.

“And actually the first ride that I went on was the ride where she had earned her name. She got named at Ripley’s. It was a big, big deal and it was so cool that I was there for that. She is my best friend. It was just a really proud moment to be a part of such a big group of woman who ride. It was the individuality and stuff. This was something that I just found it to be so very special. I was not a part of the group yet so I just kind of took all the pictures and stuff. Just to see her face when she got her name. She had chosen a

name and they said “Nope we are not calling you that. We are not calling you that either.” Then they all toasted her and said “Here’s to Barracuda” and that is how she learned of her name. It was just a very proud moment.”- Britches

This story demonstrates how important the traditions of this club are to the group, to the women in the group, and even to the outsiders of the group. This quote reveals the power and significance of these rituals have on individuals inside and outside the community.

Once a bike name is given to a new member, it then becomes her identity in the group. However, until then the young new member of the club works hard to gain her official status and role. In the following quote, a new member talks about the moment she got her bandana and how it made her feel. This quote gives voice to the excitement of the new members and demonstrates how it may feel to earn membership into the group.

“A few weeks after I was with the Bitchez I got my bandana. I worked so hard. I didn’t know I was going to get it, I just showed up and there they were and said here is your purple bandana. The Mistress gave it to me. I was so excited that she gave it to me. I really couldn’t wait to get that thing. I always wear the bandana when I ride. Even now. That will always be our color.”- Baby

The enthusiasm of new members radiates so bright other riders in the group can see their passion and devotion for the BnB. In the following text, The Miss explains what the process of entry is like for new members.

“I think it becomes a focus for them. They are like “Wow this is really, really cool.” They love it and they want to be part of it. They really just want to be in it so they try really hard. They do, they really want to be part of it. Then they settle and become part of it. But, at first they are little ass kickers. Those tikes work so hard. I mean for real it is really funny.”

In this quote it must be recognized that The Miss uses the language “little ass kickers” and “tikes” to describe women who might be the same age or even older than she. Here it is apparent that age can be defined as years/time served as members. “Tikes” and “little ass kickers” includes all of the “young” members in the club whatever their chronological age maybe. In addition, it is evident that this concept of age is salient to the group for its traditions are created in response to the difference in new and old membership.

The importance that age carries within this group is illustrated through the significance of bike names and the tradition of bandanas within the culture of Bitchez*n*Bikez. The role that aging has in the culture of BnB is also evident through dissecting the significance of the popular phrases “Respect your Elders” and “Bow to your Mistress” that constantly appear in the conversations of these women riders.

“Respect your Elders” and “Bow to your Mistress”

The role of age and aging is undeniably a part of this group. The impact age has on this group is incredibly visible when studying the dynamic of leadership. The role of age can be seen

through examining the meaning of the popular saying “Respect your Elders” and “Bow to your Mistress.” These sayings are used frequently by the younger and older women when referencing how one should behave and interact with the Elders of the Bitchez*n*Bikez. The significance of these phrases will be analyzed through looking at the derivation of these sayings, the physical application of the group mottos, and exploring the outcomes of these group mottos.

When asked about the origin of these two sayings, the women concede that they more or less naturally emerged into existence within the early years of the Bitchez. In the following quote one of the Bitchez tries to remember when the group first started using these phrases.

“You know I am not sure when exactly we started saying those things. I think one day we just all did. Now we say it all the time. Sometimes it is just us kidding around with our Elders but you know other times we really mean it, Respect the Elders. The have earned it.”- B.E

While these mottos have materialized organically, there is meaning carefully constructed behind these group sayings. The expressions “Respect your Elders” and “Bow to your Mistress” both recognize that there is a difference in chronological age, membership age (amount of years one has been a part of the group), and bike age (amount years spent driving a motorcycle). These sayings demonstrate the socialization of roles for they determine how one should behave based on chronological age, membership age and bike age. The Elders are revered for their age and experience and the group honors them through constantly acknowledging their role in the order of hierarchy within the culture of group. This concept is better articulated through the words of The Miss. She says,

“I think there is a certain level of respect for the aged in any group, like in any tribe. I know this is irrelevant but I am part Native American, so for me the Elders mean the stages of life and how you respect the older ones in the group. It is about respecting the ones who have been around the longest and respecting the hierarchy. “

This thought reveals how greatly respect and age are interconnected within the culture of the group. Respect and honor are something that the younger women are willing to give to the Elders of the club, and it is something the Elders receive with great appreciation and joy. The Miss of the Bitchez then explains what it is like hearing the new/older members of the club say these things and also put these words into action.

“But they would say that you have to “Respect your Elders” or you have to “Bow down to your Mistress.” That was always the thing. “Bow down to your Mistress”. It just kind of happened. It was so funny how the Newbies would treat me. They would get on their knees and say “Oh Miss” or “Here is your drink, Miss.” They would kiss up to me and I would be like “Very good.” It depended on where we were and what mood I was in. But it was all funny.”

With this quote one can now understand that it is not just saying “Respect your Elders” and “Bow to your Mistress” that proves to be important. It is the application of these sayings into practice that truly defines the role of age within the BnB. Here it is evident that the women are not just tossing around these orders but actually enforcing and believing in the socialization of

roles according to the club. Likewise, it is the physical action of the new members demonstrating respect and honor for the Elders that accentuates the hierarchy of group. The younger members' willingness to "Respect the Elders" and "Bow to the Miss" reaffirms that the Elders are at the top of the hierarchy and the younger, new members are at the bottom working their way in. These sayings enforce and demand the women to respect the age norms of the BnB.

Demonstrating respect for the Elders of the Bitchez is an important piece of the leadership dynamic of the club. Many of the women, when discussing the respect and honor they have for the older riders, explain that the phrase "Respect your Elders" and "Bow to your Mistress" serves as a measure of accountability. It is almost as if these sayings are used to remind one another how to behave and interact with the older women of the group. It allows them to keep themselves and others in check. The women express that it is necessary to keep one another accountable because they feel that practicing this respect and honor will protect their beloved Elders. During the interview, Bella said,

"If someone was kidding around with the Elders, Boom or Boss, we would joke around with them and say "Respect your Elders." We always would joke around with them and say stuff like that. It was kind of like we protected them. It was our way to of showing respect and acknowledging that they were our leaders and our protectors. They are just ours and nobody will mess with what is ours. Hahahaha."

This quote further expresses the concern these women have regarding the wellbeing of their Elders. The outward demonstrations of respect and honor and the accountability measures all serve as methods of protection. The desire to protect the older members stems from the fact that the younger members are invested in the wellbeing of their Elders. The younger new members of the group are serious about protecting their Elders. Bounce puts it simply,

"We respect them. We protect them. That's just how it is. We care too much about them to not. God, I mean they are so important to us. "

The Elders are aware of the desire the younger girls have to protect them and guard them from possible harm. When asked about the how the younger ones protect the Elders, The Miss states,

"If someone would mess with me, she and the others would say, 'Don't talk back to the Miss' or 'Bow down to the Miss.'"

However, while the younger members care greatly about interests of the Elders, the Elders strive to make this possible. Through the new member orientation process, the Elders work hard to introduce the new riders to the other members and to the culture of the group.

The Elders have shaped the traditions and structure of the group. While they did not come up with the saying "Respect your Elders" and "Bow to your Mistress," they did design new member initiation activities to "teach" the younger women how to best treat their fellow Bitchez. Boom explains the motivation behind teaching the new members the importance and value of respect.

"To be in our club you got to be a good rider but more so you got to be a good member. You got to respect the girls and you got to respect us. We try to teach the girls that. It's

kind of selfish though we teach them to respect us but shit they are the ones who are going to take care of us. We might as well teach them how to now that now.”

In this quote one can see that the Elders rely on their new members and the younger Bitchez as their support system. These women are looking ahead and preparing for their future by building their social capital complete with women who are willing to respect them and care for them. The Elders of the Bitchez*n*Bikez are invested in the new and younger riders of the group for they are aware of the benefits that emerge from these intergenerational relationships. But ultimately, the relationship between the younger women and the Elders works so well because each party is willing to accommodate the needs of the other. They are willing to fulfill their role within the group. The younger women of the club are determined to provide the Elders with admiration and their service while the Elders greet the younger Bitchez with guidance and support through their troubles of youth.

After examining the meaning and significance of the expression “Respect your Elders” and “Bow to your Mistress” it is now possible to take a deep look into the dynamic relationships that exist between the Newbies of the Bitchez*n*Bikez and the Elders.

Relationship between the Newbie and the Elder

The relationships between the women in this group are all dynamic and unique. However, it is the relationship between the Elders and Newbies where one can identify the presence and implications age has on the special bonds that contribute to the energy of the group. The intergenerational bonds found among these women are truly unique. Even the women of the group are aware that the bonds that take place between the Elders and Newbies are exceptional. Bliss shares,

“It’s a special thing. You don’t normally see someone who is 20ish willing to love and adore someone who is 60ish. But here you can. Its isn’t just that either, I mean our new member whatever age they may be, they are the babies too and they too get close to their Elders. It’s a special thing, I think we are different. But our different works. Our different works for us.”

The Miss echoes this sentiment as she says,

“It is awesome. It is like any tribe. You have to have everybody. Everybody learns from everybody. The 20-30 year olds keep the 60 and up girls younger. It keeps your mind more open, it keeps you good. It keeps you at a certain level. And the 20 something looks up to the older ones because you have had more experience. That is how it works I think with any group. You can definitely see this happening when you look at the relationships between our Elders and Newbies.”

This “different relationship” between the Newbie and the Elder is explored through examining the instant connection between the Newbie and Elder, how one supports one another, and the treasured promise of legacy.

When interviewing the Newbies of the group, I asked each woman who they felt they instantly bonded with. Most Newbies took little thought to answer and almost immediately said that they were at first most connected with the Elders of the club. Although each woman may have a different reason as to why she felt this way, each woman regardless of age claims that the Elders were the first to welcome them to the group. In the following text the youngest woman of the group recalls who she first felt close with while being the new addition to the club.

“Probably Boom because I rode with her first and then Boss because she welcomed me with open arms. The Elders just really did do all they could to make me feel welcomed. That was nice.” -Baby

Baby portrays the Elders to be more or less the welcoming committee, the gate keepers, of the group. These are the women who “take in” the Newbies and make them feel like they belong and have a place within the group. One of the older members says she too instantly felt close to the Elders as a Newbie.

“I really clicked with the Elders for some reason. Maybe it was because I am older too. But they just made me feel like I belonged when I didn’t know any of the other girls. They did, they took me in and made me feel like I fit in. They also really wanted to help me with the shop and make the group grow. Really kind of go for it and get larger numbers for the group. So I hooked up with them. I felt really comfortable around them.” -Bionic

Although Bionic claims it was their shared age that was the cause of the instant connection between her and the Elders, she also explains that it was the Elders who made her feel at home with the Bitchez. Another young Newbie echoes this sentiment as she recounts the moment when she felt most welcomed into the club by the Elder known as Boss.

“I sat down after the ride and had a beer with some of the girls and thought “these guys are cool”. They were like ‘we love you.’ Boss was like ‘You are one of us now. You are one of the Bitchez. You belong to the Bitchez.’ I was like ‘yikes you are kind of crazy and scaring me but sure.’ From that moment on, as soon as they said to me ‘You belong to us.’ I can’t even tell you how much that meant to me. Boss says that to everybody ‘You belong to the Bitchez.’ It gave me a confidence and made me believe in something bigger. I really need it at that time.”- Baby

Like Bionic, Baby admits that the Elders were the source of comfort as she adjusted to the new community of riders. Another woman in the middle of the age spectrum, Bounce, echoes the same sentiment as she explains who she first felt most close to as a Newbie and her relationship between her and the Elders, Boom and The Mistress.

“I mean Boss and I just get along too. We just get along. She doesn’t even have to say anything and I already know what her thought is. We just look at each other and yeah we already got it, we don’t even have to say nothing. There are just people you can do that with and people you can’t. I can do that with the Mistress too. I mean these are the people

who took me into the group, who wanted me there and made me feel like I was wanted. It's great. We don't even have to say anything. She knows, I know. It's good."

Bounce reveals the complicated closeness that exists between the Newbies and the Elders. These intergenerational relationships have been carefully crafted by the community of riders as they work to develop a level of closeness despite whatever age gap (chronological age, bike age, or membership age) that may exist.

The special relationship between the Newbie and the Elder has been cultivated through the hard work of the Elders. The Elders embrace the Newbie with open arms and are determined to make certain that the Newbie feels as though she is cared for. Bliss shared her experience as she took the required motorcycle class and license test that the Elders made mandatory for all new riders.

"Everybody was texting me wondering how I was doing. Sunday was the day of test and it was hotter than it is now. You were on that black top with head to toe protective gear sweating. Every time we would take a break I would text Julie and tell her what we were doing. After it was over on Sunday no one texted me. I think they were afraid that I didn't pass. A few of them came by on the day of the test, like the Elders to see how we were doing. They would stop by and peek in on us. They made sure we weren't goofing off and that we were okay. I didn't pass and I was so upset. They all told me that it was okay and I would pass the next time around. They were really there for us Newbies."

While the Elders require the Newbies to do certain tasks in order to gain membership into the group, the Elders have taken a supporting role in the lives of the Newbies. They encourage and assist their new members as they gain full access into the Bitch*n*Bikez. As seen in the example, the Elders require all new members to take the state certified motorcycle class in order to make sure that their new riders know what they are doing on a bike. However, while the Elders require the Newbies to take this class they find it important to encourage them through their class work and test. When a Newbie is struggling it is the Elder who is first to help them through. The interest and care put forth by the Elders may be why so many of the Newbies report that they initially bonded with the Elders. However, these intergenerational relationships are mutually beneficial.

Through the interviews it can be seen that Elders adore the admiration that the Newbies have for them. The Elders strive to develop these relationships with the new members and in return gather respect and veneration from the Newbies. In this quote the Miss explains the Elder/Newbie relationship.

"We were friends with everyone in the group. It really didn't matter. And the girls really looked up to us. They treated us like we were their leaders. Like Body, she has her hair short with kind of a little Mohawk thing going and now she bleaches it so it kind of looks like mine. I would tease her about it and I called her my apostle. She liked it and would joke around that she was my fossil apostle. She called herself fossil because she said she is getting old. I don't know about that. I think she is going on 50 something. They would make all of the Newbies do stuff for us too. For example, like if one of the Newbies were out with us at the bar they would say to them 'Get the Mistress a drink.' It is funny and we love them so much the Newbies."

In this quote one can see that the Elders love the relationships they have with the women of the club, especially with the Newbies. Her first statement clarifies that the Elders are close to everyone in the group regardless of age or the age-based hierarchy.

In the quote above, The Miss then goes on to describe the close bonds that she has specifically with the new members. From this quote one can gather that the Newbies allow their Elders to have control during their initiation process, the process that is integral to officially becoming a part of this community. This quote reveals that the Newbies not only are eager to obey the demands of their Elders but are willing to be a part of this tradition. However, one of the most valuable pieces of information shared in this text is the fact that the love communicated here is mutual among these two groups of women. According to the Elder, the Newbie and the Elder are both dedicated to one another through love.

The Newbies demonstrate this love through their promise of legacy to the elders. The Newbies take the stories, their special moments with the Elders and their love for the Elders and promise to share this with the Newbies to come. This promise is treasured by the Elders, who cherish the idea of being remembered as the leaders of the group. Boom comments,

“I hope that if something happens to me they will remember me as a good leader.”

Although this quote maybe brief it captures the concern of the Elders and the value of being remembered by the women of the group. Boss then elaborates saying,

“I ride first bike. I am there leader. If there comes a day when I can’t, can’t ride I hope they will still talk about me. Shoot I hope they still call me to hang out; I would break out of that nursing home for those girls. The Newbies will carry our name out. I know it.”

While Boss maybe joking it is still visible that she does in fact care about her story living on within the BnB. Not only is she concerned about her legacy but also the legacy and vitality of the group. The Elder is dependent upon the Newbie for carrying out the group she created and does not shy away from admitting it. This concern of the Elders is comforted by the Newbies for they openly discuss their fondness for their Elders and promise dedication to the group. Baby says,

“I have talked to friends about the BnB and they are so jealous. They all say that there is nothing like it around them. I love it so much. They (Elders) have definitely left their legacy on me. I love them so much. Some day when I have to move, what am I going to do? I never doubted that I want to go back to California when I am done but now it is like “I can’t leave the Bitchez. What will I do?”

One can see Baby’s love for the group and the impact the Elders have on her life. The dedication to the group and promise of legacy is evident throughout many other interviews of the Newbies. Another Newbie, B.E, echoes a similar sentiment, as she speaks of her love of the Bitchez*n*Bikez.

“This group is everything to me. The girls are everything to me. I hope this club lasts forever; I will make sure it does....Hahahaha. I mean it has to. The Elders worked so hard to get it started we have to make it last, at least for them.”

While this quote distinctly speaks to B.E's desire to have the group live on due to the hard work and love of the Elders, some of the Newbies spoke solely of the legacy that the Elders have already left on the group. Bionic states,

“Boom and Boss are the energy of the group. They are the yin and yang. We need both of them around. You know the group won't feel the same without them, that's how you know they are a legacy.”

Through analyzing the data, it is evident that the Elders are concerned about their legacy and the legacy of the group. However, the strength of the bond and the quality of the relationship between the Elder and Newbie provides the Elders with the assurance of knowing that they will be forever remembered and the club will live on. This assurance comes from the outwardly love and devotion of the Newbies. This is what makes the intergenerational relationships of the Elders and Newbies mutually beneficial.

The relationship between the Elders and Newbies impacts and helps form the culture of the Bitchez*n*Bikez. Within these relationships one can distinguish the significance age has on the chemistry of the group. This is evident through examining the instant connection between the Newbie and Elder, how one supports one another, and the treasured promise of legacy.

Organization through Road

After examining the significance and role that age has on the culture of the Bitchez*n*Bikez, it is then crucial to investigate the organizational structure of the group. It is both the culture and organization of the BnB that makes up the overall structure of the group. In this section the impact of age is explored by analyzing the riding formation of the Bitchez, the significance of individual roles, the structure of meetings, and the importance of educating new members.

Riding Formation

The organizational structure of the group is vital to the safety of these female riders. The Bitchez have built their systems of organization to provide all riders with a sense of protection and care. One of the most important aspects of the organizational structure of the group is the riding formation. The riding formation is important to any group of motorcyclists. The formation of the group dictates who rides where in the cluster of bikes while out together in search of their destination. It is within this formation where one can view the role and significance that age has on the Bitchez*n*Bikez. In order to study the riding formation and the impact age has on these positions, this section analyzes the women who ride in the front and back door seats and the perspective the group has on them.

On a typical Sunday outing with the Bitchez, one of the Elders guides the group to their destination, as she rides in the very front of all the bikes. This position is known as and referred to by the Bitchez as the first bike or front door. The other Elder can be seen riding at the back of the pack, making sure everyone is safe and behaving. This position is known as the back door. There is also the side door position, which is given to the rider who is the oldest in terms of bike

age and membership age. The side door is positioned in the middle of the pack and it is her job to communicate to her Elders, reporting any problems that may arise during a ride. During an interview Britches explains the riding formation,

“When you are on the road you have your Elders. You have the front door that definitely has the full respect of the group because she is your protector.

You have your side door is in the middle of the pack and that is a sign of respect.

Then you have the back door in the very back. The back door is the one that is communicating up. So she would be like “We have gotten stopped at that light. We have people constantly looking over their shoulders and throwing signals to communicate whether or not someone got stuck at a light or if their bike broke down.

The age thing is how you treat anybody. You treat everybody the same. But you have your Elders and you show them with respect.”

In this quote, one can see that riding positions are directly associated with the value and significance of age. This text reaffirms that the riding formation of the Bitchez is designed based on one's age and status within the group. Britches clarifies that the two most powerful positions in the riding formation are filled by the Elders, who are known to be the oldest in chronological age, bike age, and membership age. Furthermore, this text reveals that the position of the front and back door are two deeply respected stations of the riding formation. They are respected, because it is understood by the women that the overall responsibility of the front and back door is to keep and maintain safety while on the road. The Elders hold close to their riding status, proud and confident that none of the other younger riders could fill their role to the extent in which they do. When asked why she fills the position of the front door, one Elder, Boom, explains,

“Probably because I am one of the most responsible people in the group. If I have ten bikes behind me I will worry about all ten of them. I don't know who else feels that way. On the Bitchez group there are some who do not know how to ride as well as others. I do not want to be behind those people. I would much rather be in front taking care of all 'em.”

This front door Elder, Boom, sees herself as being the most responsible biker and most capable of riding the front door for she cares about each rider and is able to keep a watch out for her group. She also implies here that some of the female riders are not as skilled on a bike and therefore worries about their safety and the safety of others who ride behind them. This is highlighted when she claims “I do not want to be behind those people.” To some extent, the Elder protects both the group and herself from the inexperienced rider by riding the front door. Regardless of why Boom chooses to ride the first bike, there is no denying that she loves this position.

Later in the same interview, Boom talks more about riding first bike. While she does not directly voice how important this position is, one could hear it in her voice as she said,

“I hear all the time the girls saying “I will follow you anywhere on a bike.” If there is just two or three of us that get together to ride on an evening or something.... it’s funny because if they are a part of the group and normally they are, I still am the first person to pull out. Whether it is the group or a couple people, I am the leader. I pull out and everyone will follow. Nobody will take that position even if it is not a group ride. I am the leader and I am expected to take off.”

It is evident that the Elder treasures her position of front bike. From her quote, it can be gathered that she loves the power and function that the others have given her and as a result values herself as a leader of this club. However, she is not the only person within the group to claim that she is one of the leaders of the group based on her front door status. The other women of the group also spoke of the Elder, the leader, guarding the front door. In the interviews many of the women first talk of Boom when asked about the position. Bella responds,

“What’s the riding formation like? Boom, leading the group and all of us clinging behind her. She’s the man. With her at the top you know two things. One the ride is going to be interesting cause you never know where she’s taking us. And two you are going to get there in one piece.”

Another one of the female riders laughs when asked about the riding positions of the group. Bounce says,

“You got Boom at the front door and she is always watching out. You can’t get away with nothing with her riding at the top. She watches you in her mirrors. I think she has eyes on the back of her helmet. She keeps us safe though.”

From these two quotes it is undeniable that the front door is a valued position. The meaning and responsibility of the positions within the riding formation carry more worth than simply where one fits into the pack on a Sunday afternoon ride. The positions are essential to the organizational structure. Likewise, it is not just the front door of the pack that is valued. The Bitchez also value the Boss, who fulfills the position of the back door.

“She’s the one who rides behind all of us kids. If one of us new riders are falling behind the Boss is right there with us. She always is.” – The Miss

The back door Elder is also praised and adored for her willingness to take care of the pack. Not only is the Elder taking care of the pack but according to this quote, she is especially focused on the well-beings of the new riders. The women of the Bitchez*n*Bikez communicate that with her leading up the back of the group they know that even the newest of riders will be okay.

“I haven’t been riding long so I take the turns really slow. They make me nervous. The Boss always rides behind me and she says take your time and I do. It’s nice to have her back there. I think I worry less with her back there. When I ride on my own it’s not the same without seeing her in my mirror.”- B.E

While the Bitchez talk affectionately about their back door, the Boss also openly admits to loving her place within the formation,

“Yeah of course I don’t mind riding in back. I have to make sure all my kids are okay. There are things that the front door doesn’t always see. That is why you need us both. I am good at rearing up the back.”

From this text, there is no denying that the Boss enjoys her position within the riding formation. She speaks throughout her interview on the joy she finds in caring for the women of the club. Guarding the back door enables her to do take care of her “girls” on the road.

Both the front door and back door riders of the Bitchez*n*Bikez regard their position as instrumental to the safety and security of their fellow women riders. The Elders of the club, the oldest members of the group, hop on their bikes every Sunday during riding season with the intent of taking care of the younger women who ride behind them or in front of them. But, it is these younger women who regard them with pride and allow them to serve as protectors, confident of their ability to shield the group from harm.

The riding formation is an important component of the organizational structure of Bitchez*n*Bikez. It displays the significance that age has on the group. However within the organization of the club, one can also see the significance of age through examining the teachings provided by the Elders to the new members and riders.

Educating

As with any club, the education of new members is mandatory for it is important that the new members not only learn the structure of the club but the mission and purpose of the group. With the Bitchez*n*Bikez, new members are required to work their way into the group through fulfilling the activities during the initiation process in addition to absorbing the teachings provided by the Elders and older members of the group. Educating the new members allows the oldest women of the group (oldest in terms of bike age, chronological age, and membership age) to pass down their knowledge of riding to the younger female riders. Age becomes salient in this issue for it distinguishes who is considered the student in need of teaching and who shall assume the role of teacher. This is illustrated through examining the diverse level of experience of the riders, and the Elders’ eagerness to school the young riders.

The Bitchez*n*Bikez pride themselves on being a community of riders who are eager to take in members of various riding experience and it is the Elders who are there to teach them the ways of the road. Baby discusses the topic of education as it is relevant to the Bitchez.

“We have people who have no riding experience at all. But also there are new-old riders who have grown up in the group. You know, people who had sold their bike years ago and got away from it, and are getting bikes now. They can look to the others for support. No matter how old they are. We all have something to teach or to learn. And the Elders, they are right there to help you learn what you need to.”

This quote allows one to gather an idea about the riders’ level of experience. Some riders are new to biking; others have ridden in the past but are getting back into it, whereas some have been

riding for years. However, regardless of one's experience the Elders are there to assist a rider in learning whatever she needs to in order to have a safe and fun time on a Sunday ride. One of the older women of the group just recently decided to pick up a motorcycle and start riding again. During the interview, Bionic explains who she consults if she needs help.

"I rode before in the past. I had a bike as kid. It's been awhile but if I have a question I go to the older girls. We are about the same age but they sure know more than me about bikes. I trust them."

This text shows that although she and the older women of the club are similar in chronological age, she still goes to them for advice and knowledge because of the Elders' credibility that comes from their years of experience owning bike. Therefore, it is not just the chronological age of the Elders that places them in the position of being teachers. Instead it is their in depth understanding of motorcycles that gives them the credibility and wisdom to teach others.

The Elders of the Bitchez*n*Bikez take their role as teachers seriously. The Elders make certain that the riders of BnB are aware of how to drive a motorcycle, how to be a good passenger, and the culture of riding. The Elders of the Bitchez have been riding longer than any of the other women in the club and have had their share of mistakes and crashes. The Elders talk of the mistakes they made in their younger years of biking and want to help the younger women of the club understand the dangers/realities of riding. They feel that this understanding will help the younger riders avoid making the same mistakes that they once made. Boom states

"In my 20s I thought I was invisible and nothing could hurt me. I thought nothing could hurt me. It proved me wrong. You get over confident. You think you can get through anything because you have been through a lot. I was lucky. It didn't hurt me minus a few sore muscles, a bruised hand, minor stuff. The best rider in the world, a deer comes out in front of him and kills him. It's that fast and that simple. It is a crap shot every time you go out. But that is how I drove in my 20s. I don't want my girls riding like that so I try to teach them not to. Not on my watch."

Boss shares this point of view as she speaks of her desire to teach the younger riders the ropes of the trade in hopes that it will spare them from possible blunder.

"I want to take my bad experiences and make them learning tools for the younger girls. The worst thing about an accident, especially in front of people is your pride. The biggest injury you have is your pride. It's the biggest thing to mend. You can repair your bike, good bless the doctors and what they can do, but it is your pride. I don't want the girls to go through that so we try to teach them."

From the passages above, it is undeniable the oldest women of the club so badly want to keep safe their younger "girls" safe. Educating the new members and riders has become another way in which they are able to do so. However, in order for these women to teach the ways of a bike they must have an audience willing to listen and absorb their lessons and instructions.

While the Elders care greatly about instructing the younger and newer riders, these women are interested in hearing what their leaders have to offer. The women of the club admit that they appreciate the time the Elders spend educating them and the overall concern the Elders

have for them. During an interview, Baby shares a moment when one of her Elders taught her the ABC's of riding on the back of someone else's bike.

"She gave me this stern lecture on being a part of the bike. I know how to ride from when I was little so I knew I was going to be okay but during that whole ride I concentrated so hard. I hung on to that seat for dear life. I was a part of the seat and I did what that seat did. At the end she was like "Oh my god I forgot that you were even on there. I couldn't even feel you on the back because you did such a good job."

From this passage it can be seen that Baby not only listened to the instructions given but carefully followed the orders with the intent to please her Elder. Bella shares similar story of a time when her Elders provided her with a lesson regarding the culture of biking. Here she tells how she learned the official biker wave,

"Body was like 'Boss, you need to teach your Bitch to wave'. I had no idea what she was talking about. I thought they know a lot of people because every time we passed a motorcycle they waved. I was like 'Oh my gosh, they know them too.' Then they explained that you wave to all the other bikes on the road. It is that two figure wave, down to the side. Even now when I am in my car I want to wave but I don't because I am afraid that they will think I am flicking them off. I learn something new every ride with these girls.

Whether it is a lesson on how to stay on two wheels or how to wave to your fellow biker, education is a great part of the organizational structure of the club. Age remains relevant because the older women of the club find themselves as teachers sharing their years of experience with those willing to listen. The Elders take advantage of the opportunity to teach their protégés how to successfully ride the road in hopes that it will protect them from harm and stupid youthful errors. Likewise, the younger women (younger in terms of membership age, chronological age, and bike age) listen carefully and work hard to demonstrate and apply their newly gained insight.

The subject of education demonstrates the significance and role of age within the organization of Bitchez*n*Bikez. But one can also observe the presence and power of age through analyzing the individual roles the members of the Bitchez fulfill.

Individual Roles

The roles fulfilled in the club greatly affect the structure of the Bitchez*n*Bikez. Each woman is assigned, formally or informally, a role she is expected to play throughout the motorcycle rides and social outings of the BnB. Throughout the interviews, patterns and trends identified that majority of these roles were given to individuals with consideration of their chronological age in addition to their bike age and membership age. For example, Bounce states,

"Well I don't really have a role I guess. I am the young one so it's not like I can lead the group, I haven't been riding that long for that. I guess I sort of have a role. I am the social butterfly. Every group needs one of those, right?"

In this text one can see that Bounce is aware of her chronological age and her bike age and how it influences the role she is able to play within the community. Bionic, who is considered “middle aged,” describes her role,

“I don’t know... I am kind of in the middle of everyone I guess. I have been in the group for awhile so I help make some of the decisions. But I am not like the Elders who have created to the group and been here forever. So I don’t do the kind of stuff that they do. We let the wise ones do those things. I like being placed in the middle though. I get enough responsibility but not too much.”

Bionic acknowledges her young membership age and briefly references chronological age as she reasons why she has been given her role and the responsibility that she has acquired.

Although the individual roles maybe given to the women informally, the women hold tight to the role expectations of one another. The women of Bitchez*n*Bikez place value on the individuals roles they have within the group. These women have created their own age norms for roles and socialize new members into their social roles. Furthermore, the women of BnB strive to keep one another accountable, making certain that everyone is following the expectations that the club has on them. Britches recounts a time when one Elder did not fully fill the shoes of the front door/ leader of the club and she and the rest of the group had to keep her in check.

“With Boom she is in that mode now. I will catch her looking out like ‘Isn’t that farm pretty.’ I am like ‘Excuse me’. You have to be checking mirrors. Like for example, we found ourselves coming back from Ripley and all the sudden we checked our mirrors and didn’t see anybody. Then we pulled over and waited. We were like ‘This is not good.’ Finally drove about 3 or 4 miles back and found all of them on the side of the road. One of the newer girls who was riding with us, she didn’t know how to switch her gas tank to reserve. We were like ‘Yikes do you think they noticed?’ And of course you have four bikes on the side of the road with their hands on their hips saying ‘You are supposed to be our leader?’ We give her a hard time sometimes. It is just an amazing, amazing thing.”

From this quote, one may see that these roles are taken very seriously by the group but also by the individual. In the Bitchez*n*Bikez, roles enable one to feel more a part of the group in addition to giving one an alternative identity. One woman explains how she stumbled into her role as The Miss.

“And then it just developed from there. Pretty soon I had a role and I wasn’t the stupid mascot for whatever reason. Now I am like the Mistress. Now I am like.....It happened. It wasn’t like they said this is your role and what you have to. I don’t know it just kind of happened. It just happened really. The more interest I had in the group.....I don’t know it just kind of happened. And now it is who I am. It is my place in the group and in my life.”

From this text it is obvious that The Miss adores her role within the group and due to her role in the group she finds herself more immersed in the group. Bionic talks about the role she carries in the group with a similar passion,

“In the group, I am kind of like the safety director. I look at the bikes and stuff and make sure everything looks right. I know a lot about bikes so I just started checking everyone’s

bikes one day and then it became a part of the ride. I like doing it. I like feeling like it is my job to watch out for the girls.

From these two quotes it is clear that the individual roles performed with the group are treasured by the individuals who carry them out. The willingness to fulfill one's individual role to the best of her ability, is one of the main reasons why Bitchez*n*Bikez has been successful functioning. The roles provide each woman with a sense of belonging and yet facilitate order within the group. Bounce explains,

“It was like when I wrecked my bike. I mean boom....Everyone was there and everyone had their own place. Brick picked up my bike, literally picked up my bike. And the next thing, bing, bang, boom, my bike was tied up and on its way to Hog Heaven.”

In conclusion, the age-graded roles in the Bitchez*n*Bikez are organized through one's chronological age, bike age, and membership age. These roles are valued because they give the women of the group identity and secure their placement within BnB. Additionally, these roles ensure organization within the group and provide order.

Meetings

Meetings are an essential part of any organized group. For the Bitchez*n*Bikez, meetings are a relatively new concept. The group of women just recently decided that due to their growing membership, popularity, and involvement within the LGBTQ community, meetings were necessary. The meetings of the Bitchez take place once a week at their “club house.” It was here where they made decisions regarding rides, various events that were up and coming, and other orders of business. It was during these meeting where one could see the social roles based on age play out.

The age-graded hierarchy in place leaves the oldest members (oldest in terms of bike age, membership age, and chronological age) at the top of the chain and the younger members at the bottom. When asked about how the meetings were conducted and scheduled, some of the women felt as if the hierarchy system in place was nonexistent because it did not matter one's age, everybody was entitled to an opinion and had the opportunity to voice it. Other women recognized that the Elders, at the top of the age-based hierarchy, had power but did not abuse it or even use it often. Baby explains,

“For the most part there was a lot of back and forth. There was no ‘We are the Elders and you must do as I say.’ There was no take it or leave it, everyone pretty much got a say. They were more like ‘We started this group and this is what we have in mind. What do you guys think?’ People felt comfortable sharing their ideas and thoughts.”

While this is one representation of how the meetings were conducted, it is not the only one. In fact, some of the women would disagree with this point of view entirely. Two of the women disclosed during their interviews that the Elders were given the sole authority to make decisions and run the meetings. These women felt that ultimately the Elders will always have the final say on an issue and did not appreciate this. While some of the women respected the authority of the

Elders, some did not agree with the amount of control they had on the structure of the group. Bounce recounts,

“Some people didn’t like it. Some people did not understand why it had to be like this or why it had to be like this. ‘Why did we have to pay a donation?’ Sometimes that did not sit well with people. ‘Why did they constantly have to give up money?’ It was not always a good thing I guess. If you are going to have an organization and organize rides and be in the pride parade, you have to have some kind of organization somewhere. But there are people who just wanted to ride and not worry about the rest of it. That is what happened. Some people just wanted to show up and ride. They didn’t like people telling them what to do. And they didn’t like the Elders doing it. Which ended up being a problem too but.....”

Bitchez shares her distaste for the amount of control that the Elders have on the “administrative” business of the group. When asked about how the meetings were conducted, she frowns and says,

“When we were the Bitchez, the Elders were like ‘This is mine and so on.’ It was like ‘excuse me, no this is the group’s.’ This is a group and it should not be lead by one.”

There is no denying that some of the members felt frustrated by the level of control that their Elders had on the agenda and structure of the meetings. This frustration of the members does not go unseen. The women did not attempt to mask their disapproval. In fact the Elders are aware that some of the women feel this way. When asked if she ever had any trouble leading the meetings or making the decisions due to her age and place within the hierarchy of the Bitchez, one Elder says,

“Well you know I get so sick of hearing about your age. They say ‘You need some younger people to switch it up.’ And whatever. People just do that. Whatever. If someone younger than me wants to step in and run the group....have at it. I will still be in the group. Have it. It’s a good thing.”- Boss

However, it must be recognized that not all of the members disagreed with the Elders having the administrative power of the group. Other members spoke differently about the power exercised by the Elders. These women admitted that the Elders had reign over the meetings but that it was not necessarily a bad thing. When asked about who leads the meetings of the Bitchez, B.E responds,

“The Elders were the ones who always made the final decision. Or we would do a vote. “How does everybody feel about....” You have people who don’t want it and you try to comprise but still there are rifts. But if we could not come up with a decision the Elders would do. If we couldn’t do it they would. But that is the way most structured things are. They would say if you don’t want to do it then don’t do it. But that is the way with any organization.”

This quote speaks on behalf of the women who feel that while the Elders use their power of authority during a meeting they do not attempt to abuse this reign.

There is no refuting that the Elders of the Bitchez are responsible for guiding and directing the group through their agenda-filled meetings. While the other women may or may not be bothered by the Elders' role as leaders, a majority of the women feel that this responsibility was given to the Elders due to the fact that they are the oldest women of the club. When asked why the Elders often lead the meetings, Baby says,

"I believe that it was the Elder's age. They had a lot of experience. They are the ones who came up with the idea and started it having everyone followed them. They are both natural born leaders. Since it was their idea nobody even questioned it. No one questioned them running the group. It is not that they made decisions without considering everybody. They made decisions for the group with the group. If someone had an issue, not necessarily a bad issue, which they wanted to bring up they would put it on the agenda for the meeting and stuff. They are level headed."

This was not the only response that expressed this sentiment. A majority of the women communicated similar points of view when asked about why the Elders are responsible for leading the meetings. In fact, Bliss states,

"Well in our group I think that by Boom and Boss starting the group and being the Elders it gave us a reason to look up to them. They had the vision and the dream. They have been around longer. It gave them an edge to the group. I think definitely that age played a role."

Discussions and Conclusions

Throughout aging and LBGTQ research, little studying the aging experience of older queer adults. This research captures the significance of aging within a small queer community by asking the research question- What impact does age have on the female intergenerational social group known as Bitchez*n*Bikez?

Through qualitative interviewing with a grounded theory approach, I was able to identify that age is significant within this intergenerational social group. The women of BnB place value on chronological age (the amount of years lived), bike age (amount of time spent riding motorcycles), and membership age (amount of time spent as a member of the club). Chronological age, bike age, and membership age all contribute to the social roles of these women. The impact of age is most visible when studying the relationships and structure of the BnB.

Using role theory and social age as a lens, I found that in some cases age proved to have influence in the familial roles that the women recreated. Some relationships among the women mirrored a parent-child dynamic. In these relationships the Elders of the BnB and the youth of the club interacted and felt as if they were a child or parent to another. However, at times age had no or little relevance to the relationships in BnB. In these circumstances the women viewed and referred to each other as sister/brother despite possible generational gaps. When the women spoke of their sister or brother, they regarded her as an equal despite the age-based hierarchy that exists within the culture of the club

In addition to relationships, the organizational structure of the group is also affected by the impact of age. Age impacts leadership roles and initiation rituals. The leadership roles of Bitchez*n*Bikez are delegated through the age-based hierarchy system in place. Responsibility is given to individuals who are the eldest in chronological age, bike age, and membership age. The significance of age is also illustrated through initiation rituals. Younger members of the group earn their place through obeying the demands of their Elders.

Limitations

The limitations of this study included the disbanding of the group and the participants' fear of others being able to recognize them served as the two main limitations of the study.

During the interviewing process, the group encountered some friction that caused the group to divide and split. This division resulted with the termination of the group known as Bitchez*n*Bikez. The women decided that the group should rest until the group tension has settled. The split of BnB revolved around the new relationship of one Elder and her new romantic interest. One particular Elder recently entered into a relationship with a woman who was not particularly liked among the rest of the club. The young women of the club argued that this Elder's girlfriend was not treating their Elderly properly. The rest of the Bitchez, including all Elders, supported the claim of these younger women and openly expressed their distaste for the new girlfriend. Drama also arose when the girlfriend joined the club without participating in the initiation process and then took the riding position of The Miss. The group did disband but now currently working to rebuild the club and their relationships. The Elder and her partner are no longer together which makes everyone willing to go back to the group.

After the group split, I was still able to interview four women who agreed to be participants. But observing group meetings and conducting follow-up interviews were no longer possible. Observing the meetings and conducting follow-up interviews would have been useful during the analysis process of the study. Follow-up interviews would have allowed me to check in with participants, making certain that my analysis correctly captured their story. In addition, observing the meetings, would have given me a further look into the structure of the club and the leadership roles that come to life.

Another limitation of this study was the fear that some had regarding the possibility of others recognizing their quotes in the final report. This is a close community and the women did worry about what they said when speaking about the others. This was a limitation for I must take into account that this affects the data collected.

Implications for Future Literature

This research brings a new perspective on the impact age has in a queer female community. This research raises awareness to the intergenerational relationships that exist among this queer social group. However more research still needs to be done in order to understand how age impacts such a diverse population. While communities of queer individuals

share many similarities like popular culture, social and political inequalities, not all of them resemble each other. For this reason, more research is needed to understand the many faces of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer population. Without research on these diverse communities we will have little resource and knowledge on what to expect as this population enters into old age.

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Appendix

Participant Interview Consent Form

Dear Participant-

My name is Brienne Sheehan and I am a graduate student at Miami University in the gerontology department.

I am inviting you to participate in a study that examines the organization Bitchez*n*Bikez and the unique personal experiences of the woman participating in this social group. I ask to interview you no more than twice. The interview questions will be in regards to the club and your experiences within Bitchez*n*Bikez. I am interested in learning how your time with the Bitchez*n*Bikez has or might impact your experiences as you age into the future.

I am excited to conduct the interviews. The first interview will range from an hour to an hour and a half hour depending upon you. This interview will take place in an environment of your choice whether that is in your home or in a public setting of your choice.

The second interview will be done over the phone and will last only fifteen minutes to a half hour. This interview will help me make certain I accurately captured what you shared with me during our first interview.

The interview will be auto recorded and transcribed verbatim for my analysis. The auto tapes from your interview will be destroyed after they are transcribed. The transcriptions of the interviews will be kept in the office of Dr. Kathy McGrew, stored in a locked filing cabinet for seven years after the research has been published.

In order to analyze/code the interview data from your interview I will be using qualitative software, Atlas TI, and also developing codes from grounded theory and previous research.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any time or decline to answer any questions that for any reason make you uncomfortable. This study offers great benefit, for little research has been done to capture the aging experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LBGTQ) individuals.

I also would like to caution that while I will protect your identity to those outside of the Bitchez*n*Bikez, there is likelihood that other members will recognize you by your unique stories and group nickname.

I want to thank you for your participation and time. I am very enthusiastic about this research and am grateful that you have agreed to participate.

If you have further questions about the study, please contact Brienne Sheehan at sheehabm@muohio.edu . If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 529-3600 or email: humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Please note that I will be the only one to have your contact information and at the interview process your contact information will be destroyed.

I agree to participate in the study of Bitchez*n*Bikez. I understand my participation is voluntary and I have the right to withdrawal at any time. Furthermore, I understand that my legal name will not be associated with my responses but there is likelihood that members within the group will recognize my identity. I give my permission for the interviewed to be audiotaped.

Participant's signature _____ Date: _____

Email Letter

Dear _____,

Thank you for expressing interest in my research! My name is Brienne Sheehan and I am a graduate student at Miami University in the gerontology department.

I am inviting you to participate in a study that examines the organization Bitchez*n*Bikez and the unique personal experiences of the woman participating in this social group. I ask to interview you no more than twice. The interview questions will be in regards to the club and your experiences within Bitchez*n*Bikez. I am interested in learning how your time with the Bitchez*n*Bikez has or might impact your experiences as you age into the future.

I am excited to conduct the interviews. The first interview will range from an hour to an hour and a half hour depending upon you. This interview will take place in an environment of your choice whether that is in your home or in a public setting of your choice.

The second interview will be done over the phone and will last only fifteen minutes to a half hour. This interview will help me make certain I accurately captured what you shared with me during our first interview.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any time or decline to answer any questions that for any reason make you uncomfortable. This study offers great benefit, for little research has been done to capture the aging experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LBGTQ) individuals.

I would like to schedule a time to interview you. Please email me at sheehabm@muohio.edu or feel free to call me at 614-915-2439 . If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please call the Office of Advancement of Research and Scholarship at 529-3600 or email: humansubjects@muohio.edu.

Please note that I will be the only one to have your contact information and at the interview process your contact information will be destroyed.

Thank you,
Brienne Sheehan

Letter of Recruitment

Hello-

My name is Brienne Sheehan and I am a graduate student at Miami University in the gerontology department.

I am inviting you to participate in a study that examines the organization Bitchez*n*Bikez and the unique personal experiences of the woman participating in this social group. I ask to interview you no more than twice. The interview questions will be in regards to the club and your experiences within Bitchez*n*Bikez. I am interest in learning how your time with the Bitchez*n*Bikez has or might impact your experiences as you age into the future.

I am excited to conduct the interviews. The first interview will range from an hour to an hour and a half hour depending upon you. This interview will take place in an environment of your choice whether that is in your home or in a public setting of your choice.

The second interview will be done over the phone and will last only fifteen minutes to a half hour. This interview will help me make certain I accurately captured what you shared with me during our first interview.

Please understand that your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the interview at any time or decline to answer any questions that for any reason make you uncomfortable. This study offers great benefit, for little research has been done to capture the aging experience of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LBGTQ) individuals. I would love to have you a part of this research.

If you are interest you may contact me at 614-915-2439 or email at sheehabm@muohio.edu

Please note that I will be the only one to have your contact information and at the interview process your contact information will be destroyed.

Thank you,
Brienne Sheehan

Interview Guide

Tell me about Bitchez*n*Bikez?

This section of the interview is about the organization Bitchez*n*Bikez.

I will ask this question making sure that the interviewee covers the following topics. If they do not mention one of these topics I will ask them specifically about the topic. For example, “Could you tell me more about how responsibility is delegated within the Bitchez*n*Bikez?” I am trying to understand the role of age (is it an actor within the organization) and the significance of age (how it does or does not influence the dynamics of the club).

Probes-

Leadership

History

Recruitment- including inclusion and exclusion criteria

Activities

Acts of Social Support

Other Functions of the Group

Communication Systems and Styles

What has your experience been like with Bitchez*n*Bikez?

This section of the interview is about the member of the organization.

I will ask them specifically about the topic. If they do not mention one of these topics I will ask them specifically about the topic. For example, “Could you tell me more about how you got your bike name?” I am trying to understand the role of age (is it an actor within their life) and the significance of age (how it does or does not influence their life).

Probes-

Bike Nick Names

Reason for Involvement

Role in the Group

Role in your Life

* I will be looking for the salience of age in each of the above probes. For example, if one individual has the Bike Nick Name of “Bishop” I will probe for underlying references to age.

Biographies of the Bitchez of BnB

Member Name	Chronological Age	Bike Age	Membership Age	Biography
B.E	30	Riding as a passenger since 16	4 months	Rides as passenger, girlfriend of Bionic, recently took the required motorcycle classes
Baby	32	Riding as a passenger through childhood	1 year	Rides as a passenger, new to the area, speaks her mind, this is her relief from her work
Bounce	40	Riding since 16	6 weeks	Newest member, recently was in a bike accident, closest to Boss, shy personality
Bliss	42	Recently learning to ride	1 year and 9 months	Rides as a passenger, optimistic personality, trendy and feminine, independent, recently took the required motorcycle classes
The Miss (Elder)	45	Recently learning to ride.	One of the first members	The female energy of the Elders, information keeper, keeper of secrets
Britchez	47	Riding since childhood	1.5 year	Girlfriend of Boom, Rides as a passenger on the front bike, center of group friction, loves being a leader
Bionic	56	Riding since 16	4 months	Owns a bike shop (club house of the Bitchez), very passionate about the group, loves motorcycles
Bella	63	Riding as a passenger through childhood	1.5 year	Rides as a passenger, close friend of Boss, active in community, gossip
Boom (Elder)	66	Riding since age 20	Started the BnB	Front Door Position Quiet, strong, stoic, patient, protector
Boss (Elder)	67	Riding since age 16	Started the BnB	Back Door Position Loud, quick to react, energetic, animated, protector, social, involved in the community