




Spring 2017

# Claiming the Indomitable Wave: Masculinities, Sexualities, and the Realm of Surfing in Costa Rica

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# Claiming the Indomitable Wave: Masculinities, Sexualities, and the Realm of Surfing in Costa Rica

## **Abstract**

Examining the relationship between masculinity, sexuality, and the sport of surfing in the context of Costa Rica. Questions the nature of emergent counter identities in the hyper-masculine realm of the surfing subculture and the ways in which the emergence of counter identities changes the nature of the subculture. Focuses on the anthropology of sport, the anthropology of sexuality, and theories of territoriality.

## **Keywords**

Costa Rica, sexuality, masculinity, surfing, sport, identity

## **Disciplines**

Biological and Physical Anthropology | Gender and Sexuality | Latin American Studies | Social and Cultural Anthropology | Sports Studies

## **Comments**

Written as a Senior Honors Capstone in Anthropology.

**Claiming the Indomitable Wave:  
Masculinities, Sexualities, and the Realm of Surfing in Costa Rica**

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Gettysburg College  
Anthropology Honors Thesis

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### *Acknowledgements*

This project would not have been possible without the help, guidance, and support of a variety of individuals. Thank you to the anthropology department at Gettysburg College and the Provost office for aiding in the funding of my research. Thank you to Prof. Amster, Prof. Jones, and Prof. Perry for your guidance and advice throughout the research and writing process. A special thanks to my father for serving as my research assistant and breaking out of his comfort zone by traveling to Costa Rica with me. Above all, thank you to the participants of the study, without whom this work would not be possible. They greeted me with open arms and were open and willing to discuss difficult subject matters.

## *Introduction*

Whether the first break of dawn patrol or the last evening barrel, the well-chiseled body disappears within a wall of blue, gliding and emerging in glances. Driven by the indescribable feeling of stoke, the surfer reaches his nirvana before crashing back into the merciless water. Surfing has become a recognized lifestyle and a prominent characteristic in the formation of an individual's identity. The construction of the surfer identity, who can and who cannot be considered a surfer, is constantly in flux. As Steven Butts describes, "not everyone who tries surfing becomes a surfer. To become a surfer you have to be willing to take your 'licks,' come up smiling, and paddle back out again until you are able to 'drop in' and 'make' the wave that pounded you before" (Butts 2001, 3). Within Butts's explanation, being a surfer revolves around the physical activity of surfing. However, through my study of surfers along the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica, I found that the formation of such an identity is much more complex. Within Costa Rica, surfers possess a conditional identity, built within performative spaces and defined by societal expectations and standards. This conditionality of identity is well explained by the events witnessed in the line-up of a tourist-heavy surf town along the North Pacific coast of Costa Rica. Following the break of an above average wave set, an argument broke out in the water between a Gringo (White/European) and Tico (Costa Rican) surfer over right-of-way to the wave that had passed. In defending his right to the wave, the Tico surfer used an all-too-familiar argument heard in surf spots around the world; "respect the local!". The Gringo surfer met what would normally be a one line KO with resistance, also claiming to be a local. According to the man, he had lived, "right here in Costa Rica" for 5 years, and considered himself just as local as the Tico he was competing against. The confrontation continued in a heated fashion for a number of minutes, with other surfers gathering to observe. Finally, the Tico

surfer, having had enough of the argument, paddled towards his next wave shouting, “first rule of surf school, respect the locals, asshole!” In that moment, localism, a prominent piece of a surfing identity, became conditional to a differential understanding of locality.

How can it be determined which surfer is more of a local, or more of a surfer, or more welcome in the line-up beyond the breaking zone? Butts’s simple description of the surfer does not answer such complex questions. These questions become further complicated when one acknowledges the intersectionality of race, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Since Costa Rica was the first country to de-criminalize non-heteronormative activities in Latin America, sexual orientation has become a heavy factor of consideration when navigating the surfer identity. Because Costa Ricans still consider homosexuality as a taboo lifestyle, it is rare to find “out” surfers in Costa Rican locales. While studying in the country, I was told the story of a world champion surfer who had come to terms with his homosexuality, but had kept it secret during his surfing career. When the secret began to leak, instead of facing the reactions of the surfer community, the individual retired from the sport to pursue a quiet life. To be a Tico surfer and homosexual, according to the men who told me the story, seemed almost unthinkable to the sport champion.

The rigidity with which the surfer identity is constructed makes its study extremely interesting, especially as it pertains to the influence of sexual orientation. Such an interest laid the groundwork for my study of masculinity, sexuality, and surfing in Costa Rica, in which I draw on anthropological methodology and theories of sexuality, sport and territoriality. This study of Costa Rican surfing does not simply tell the stories and experiences of those in the study, but also examines resistance to an emergent queer culture in the realm of sport, and the way in which the interplay of gender, sexuality and athletic culture shape the local and global

notions of sport. In undertaking this study, I considered four main questions. First, how are LGBTQA individuals perceived and treated in Costa Rica, in both urban and rural locales, and to what extent do they form a rights-based community mobilized around sexual identity? Second, to what extent do culturally constructed views of masculinity in Costa Rica, what I will call the machismo mindset, lead heterosexual surfers to discriminate against or differentially treat LGBTQA surfers, and how does this affect the visibility of LGBTQA individuals in the realm of surfing? Next, is a masculinity crisis occurring in Costa Rica, and how do perceptions of such a crisis inform the actions of male Ticos in both the realms of the home and the beach? Finally, by entering the realm of athletics, have LGBTQA individuals led Costa Rican fans and players to reconceptualize “sports culture” at large and surfing culture in particular? Using these four lines of inquiry, I will attempt to prove that, although hindered by a lack of organization among the LGBTQA community and local understandings of sexuality, as well as the presentation of sexual orientation, the slow emergency of LGBTQA individuals into the realm of surfing in Costa Rica is creating a two-pronged process. The first process is of increased aggression and territoriality among heterosexual surfers faced with a threatened masculinity. The second process involves a reconsideration of what it means to be a surfer, and the possibility of new masculinities and sexualities in the embodiment of a surfer.

Sports are a dynamic social and cultural force with the ability to shape and reshape identities while also being informed by them (Eng 2006, 52). In examining the sub-cultural clashes of surfing culture with the LGBTQA community, it will be possible to understand not only the cultural specificity of sexuality, masculinity, and sport in the country, but also the ways these three factors interplay at the larger societal level and contribute to the formation of identity and sport cultures. The study also focuses on the relationship between masculinity and sexuality,



examining the role that current economic conditions in Costa Rica and the perceived “masculinity crisis” are having on the actions and reactions of heterosexual men to LGBTQA individuals in their country and their sport.

Presenting the study, I structured the paper in the following way. First, I provide definitions of important terminology for the study, followed by a description of the study with the accompaniment of a methodology of the fieldwork conducted in Costa Rica. Next, I present the results of the fieldwork, including observations during participant observation, the perceptions of surfers, and the perceptions of LGBTQA individuals. These are contextualized within a body of theory including the literatures of sport, sexuality, and territoriality. I then draw three sub-conclusions to answer the four main questions of the study. These sub-conclusions are: *Passing, Privacy, and the Slow Move towards Public Sexual Expression; The Surfer, the Local, and Whose Who Surf;* and *Misplaced Aggressions in Indomitable Space*. I analyze these sub-conclusions and use them to reevaluate the hypothesis of the study. In rounding out the project, I make connections to larger fields of study and give suggestions for future research.

Before delving into the main body of the work, it is important to establish a bank of terminology used throughout the study. There is difficulty in categorizing individuals who do not fall within the heteronormative standards output by Western society, as the differentiations are vast and ever expanding. Still, there is need for some form of categorization, and therefore, this study used the dominantly accepted “LGBTQA” label, an acronym standing for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Asexual. Although these categories do not encompass all identities contained within the community, they do offer an overarching umbrella. In the same fashion, the term “queer” was used as a blanket term to describe any individual who does not identify as heterosexual, and at times in place of the larger LGBTQA title.

Other identification terms that were used throughout the study include Latino/a, Tico, and Gringo/Expat. Latino/a refers to any individual of Latin American heritage and/or who hails from a Latin American country. Tico is more specific, as it's a sub-category of Latino/a, and the identity title which Costa Rican's have placed upon themselves (Biesanz 1999, 1). Gringo serves as the contrast to Tico in Costa Rican society, a slang term used to describe White individuals, whether visiting or residing in the country. Those who do reside within Costa Rica have a more specific title: Ex-patriots, or expats for short. These individuals have left Western nations and taken up residence within the Costa Rican territory.

Finally, it is importance to ground an understanding of what this study considers “machismo” and the “machismo mindset”. Machismo, by dictionary definition, is associated with a form of strong or aggressive masculine pride. In the Latin American context, machismo represents an uncontrollable sexual appetite and a tool for maintaining a hypermasculine status through physical and sexual dominance (Chant 2000, 200). Although told that machismo is on the decline in Costa Rica, it is still a prominent factor of this study, and during the study I did observe actions that fit within the machismo framework.

### ***Methodology***

The research period of this project spanned two visits to the field in Costa Rica; the first for 29 days in July of 2014 and the second for 12 days in January of 2017. During the first visit, my research took me up the Pacific coast of the country from Bahia to Roca Bruja, gathering general data on surfing and tourism in Costa Rica. My second period of field study focused in three specific locales, and examined more closely the relationships between masculinity, sexuality, and surfing. I used participant observation and formal and informal interviews, worked

with multiple groups of people with varying ranges of intersectionality, and drew conclusions based upon multiple sources of data.

This study utilizes a unique set of research methods. As Blanchard, an expert on the anthropology of sport notes, sports are traditions of cultural importance, needing to be studied in their overall cultural context; “By definition culture is componential, but isolating any of its components so that it stands clearly in a distinct category by itself is often difficult, if not impossible” (Blanchard 1995, 35). Surfing cannot be studied outside of its cultural context. Through participant observation, data was collected by taking part in the daily activities of the communities being studied, including daily surf outings. When employing the method of participant observation, I used observation journaling, which involved the recording of scratch notes as significant events occurred followed by reflection upon these events in order to draw full observational understanding. These observations were compared with the observations of others, or information gained in interviews. This allowed for the discovery of similarities or inconsistencies between what participants said about their lives and what is actually occurring on a daily basis. This was especially important for this study, as what participants said often did not match with the realities being observed.

A second main method of research used throughout the study was structured and semi-structured interviews. The double aspect of the interview allowed specific questions to be asked and answered, but also gave the opportunity for participants to add any input they felt would be important to the study. Using interviews and participant observation allows for a comparison of the perceptions of daily life by the participants and the actuality of their circumstances as observed through participant observation. Throughout the second research period, nine interviews were recorded among surfers, shop and hostel owners, and queer individuals. In order

to ensure academic integrity and the protection of participants, I obtained informed consent, both verbally and through consent forms, and used pseudonyms to represent the participants.

The first period of research in Costa Rica was under a month's time in the summer of 2015. This research consisted of short stops — no more than 3 days maximum — in surfing communities dispersed throughout the Pacific coastline of the country. I generally conducted participant observation among surfers at surf breaks and within local hangouts. The second period of research spanned 12 days in January of 2017 and focused more specifically on three groups of individuals in three chosen locales. These three groups of focus included surfers, shop and hostel owners, and LGBTQA individuals and activists, although the three were not mutually exclusive. Of the interviews conducted, 8 individuals identified as male and 1 identified as female; 3 considered themselves members of the LGBTQA community, 6 did not; all individuals described themselves as having participated in surfing at one point in time, although only 7 identified themselves as surfers. Interviews occurred in surfing-heavy and non-surfing-heavy communities, as well as in rural, suburban, and urban settings

### ***Study Observations and Results***

#### *Fieldwork*

To understand surfing, one should ideally be able to surf. I strongly hold the idea that my research would not have been possible if I did not possess the ability to drop in on the same waves as my participants. Interactions in shops, hostels, and the town environment paint a large part of the story, but combined are still incomplete if the element of in-sport research is lacking. The study of sport is not simply its study in prehistory, history, and the contemporary world, but also, “the understanding of the social and cultural dynamics of sport” (Blanchard 1995, 205).

When approaching fieldwork in Costa Rica, especially participant observation within the surfing line-up, I was hesitant to display my own sexual orientation, identifying as a bisexual male, for fear of attracting unwanted attention. However, for the sake of authenticity and respect for the openness of my participants, I entered fieldwork embracing my own identity.

There are multiple ways to claim a wave at Costa Rican breaks, though some are more outward and aggressive, such as the argument of localism with which this paper opened. Localism is an aggressive form of territoriality; an informal network of claiming and guarding space without true ownership. Theories of territoriality make it possible to understand the ways that spaces are claimed and given meaning. Territoriality is defined as, “the attempt by an individual or group to influence, affect, or control objects, people and relationships by dominating and asserting control over a geographic area” (Sack 1983, 56). In the realm of surfing, territoriality takes on formal and informal structures, such as localism and surfing etiquette. An impressive day of breaks off the suburban surf town brought a variety of surfers into the water, ranging from first-day learners to much more experienced professionals. Around mid-afternoon, as the surf began to swell, two young, Tico, male-surfers paddled out among a surf class of predominantly young women. Instead of surfing through a wave and then yielding the next to one of the individuals in the class, as is proper surf etiquette, the two surfers used hop surfing, a common form of more aggressive showmanship, to dominate the wave session. This practice involves bouncing wave to wave on short boards, performing elaborate maneuvers in an attempt to both impress the female surfers and intimidate others in the water. As Gordon Waitt, a scholar on surfing culture, describes:

waves are ‘killed’ from successfully performing a range of shortboard manoeuvres which themselves are deadly: the ‘rip’, ‘slash’ or ‘cut’. Seemingly,

amongst many shortboard-riders, nothing is more pleasurable than defending access to a surf-break that enables possibilities to maintain a strong sense of self, through the pleasures of 'killing waves' (Waitt 2008, 75).

The aggressive surfing displayed by the two Tico men was a form of wave-claiming through masculine dominance. De Alessi, a surfing scholar, warns against this type of territoriality, as "waves are not exhaustible resources, and so without some form of legally recognized access rights, attempts to territorialize surf spots will likely only increase conflict rather than decrease it" (De Alessi 2009, 88). Localism-based territoriality undermines other types of informal regulation such as surfer etiquette, an example of 'spontaneous order'; "rules and regulations that have evolved without conscious design... people come to believe that they ought to act in ways that maintain these patterns" (De Alessi 2009, 88). Localism denies access before surf etiquette can take hold, and, through this denial of entry, the meaning of surf breaks along with the identities of who can and cannot be surfers are constructed. Because waves are uncontrollable resources and truly unable to be claimed, territoriality through localism serves as a means of control. As Sack explains, "territoriality can be the most efficient strategy for enforcing control, if the distribution in space and time of the resources or things to be controlled fall somewhere between ubiquity and unpredictability" (Sack 1983, 58).

It is important to note that the surfing line-up is not the only setting in which this aggressive dominance is asserted. As I was preparing to leave the suburban surf town for the capital, I encountered the most aggressive display of masculine dominance I laid witness to during my fieldwork. Waiting at the bus stop around eleven in the morning, a woman across the street began to yell at a man that was following briskly behind her. When he caught up to her, the man grabbed her by the wrists and held her hands together, bringing his face close to hers and

yelling at a high volume. No one around us moved, which struck me as odd considering the publicity and the aggressive nature of the actions. According to Blanchard, “some social scientists have concluded that culture defines acceptable levels of violence and aggression and that violent incidents are defined in terms of what is consistent with cultural norms” (Blanchard 1995, 238). The lack of intervention seems to denote a culturally acceptable level of violence consistent with the machismo mindset. The confrontation continued and grew more aggressive. As the woman fought back, the man pushed her into the street, trying to take her purse and cell phone. The woman continued to fight back as she was pushed up against a car, but still no one moved to intervene. After many tense moments, the woman pulled away and briskly left the scene as the man shouted after her. The surrounding townspeople continued to go about their day, almost as if the confrontation had not occurred. As Biesanz described, “some men find no other way to demonstrate their masculinity except by means of blows and insults” (Biesanz 1999, 190).

Women were not the only victims of masculine displays ranging from showmanship to violence. A young male participant and member of the LGBTQA community described to me his experience with hypermasculine activity while attending a music concert at a small venue outside the northern rural town. He and another male friend, also a queer individual, subtly held hands throughout the concert. Although the young man described to me feeling uneasy, there was no direct confrontation to the pair’s actions. That was until, feeling daring, the two shared a quick kiss during a performance set. It was not long before another man, as the participant described him, “shirtless and ripped”, approached the pair, shoving the participant and ridiculing him for his actions. The aggressive man then grabbed a female near him and began to aggressively kiss her. He then shoved the informant once again, and walked away with his hand

around the woman's waist. This same participant, when describing his reasoning for not being out in surfing settings, explained that he feared the same type of violence in the water if he were to embrace his sexuality and his sport.

All three accounts show the visibility of hypermasculine attitudes and the machismo mindset, but what of the visibility of LGBTQA culture in Costa Rica? Less than surprising, although Costa Rica has decriminalized LGBTQA activity, there was little of it to observe in public settings, whether in towns or in the surfing line-up. In the touristy, northern, rural town, the visibility of LGBTQA individuals was present, but these individuals were predominantly foreign-born, free from the societal constraints that bind Ticos. My time in my first two participant communities confirmed what I was told by participants: it is rare to find an out Tico outside of the capital. This is because of the dichotomous order under which men in Costa Rica, whether queer or heterosexual, construct their lives. This divide, coined the *casa/calle* divide, separates the actions of men into the privacy of the home and the publicity of the street. As Kutsche note, "how a man divides his activities during the day suggests the classic *casa/calle* dichotomy, with his official sexual life playing out in the *casa*, his other lives in the *calle*... in the street defined literally, a man is a public person presenting a hopefully macho image" (Kutsche 1991, 8). Expression of masculinity in this context is based in the *casa*, a space in which men are to hold the tools of authority. A Tico hostel owner in the northern rural town whom with I stayed gave the following reasoning: because the town is both a rural town and a tourist town, there was no community for locals to be out in. Queer foreigners could come and go, embracing their sexuality as they pleased, but there was no space in which Ticos could do the same. Of course, placing Western standards of sexual expression onto the Costa Rican local is also problematic. Dominant, western notions of sexuality are based around the idea of living an



“open” or “out” life. However, to impose such perceptions of sexuality onto another cultural context would do disservice to the study. This is because sexuality, along with masculinity, is performative. Judith Butler’s theory of performativity holds that, “sex, gender, and sexuality are not stable, fundamental ‘facts’ underpinning our existence; rather identities are taken on through the violent foreclosure of identities that do not matter” (Sykes 2007, 22). Her perception of heteronormativity, based on the idea of denying unwanted identities to confirm a single identity, aid in understanding the cultural constructions of heteronormativity and masculinity:

Contemporary heteronormative culture is based on widespread refusing – or disavowing – of identifications with homosexuality. Identifications, in the psychoanalytical sense, contain what to all external appearances has been given up or refused. Gender identifications contain the echoes and traces of desirous gender attachments that the self, the family and culture have prohibited... heterosexual gender is melancholic. It is haunted by the traces of the homosexual other. So in a culture of gender melancholy, masculinity and femininity become stronger only by repudiating what they cannot grieve (Sykes 2007, 22).

In this sense, in order to construct masculinity, a culture must construct everything that is not masculine and enforce the denial of such aspects to reinforce the heteronormative, masculine standard. Each society, within its cultural and societal specificity, constructs standards of masculinity and sexuality that daily performance is based upon, and therefore the uses of Western standards of sexuality hold very little value to this study. As Boellstorff, an anthropologists studying homosexuality in Indonesia, suggests, “you are an open gay man not because your portents or co-workers know about you, nor because you go to rallies or write letters to the newspaper, but because you spend time in the gay world and particularly in parts of

that world considered open” (Boellstorff 2005, 133). In the Costa Rican context, the concept of being gay and “open” occurs in private settings, as homosexual men are held within the same societal *casa/calle* dichotomy; “the Latin male does in private what he is privately moved to do, and Latin public morality is largely quiet on the topic” (Kutsche 1991, 12). Within Costa Rica, non-heterosexuality does not have one stark opposition, but instead there culturally understood categories of men who partake in intercourse with other men:

The first has no name. It is composed of any males who have sex with other males, but identity themselves as lovers of women... Their relatively rare sex with men is not important enough to them to affect their self-identity... The second category labels itself *de ambiente*, which is the nearest Costa Rican equivalent to the English self-label “gay”. These men may be exclusively attracted to men or to both men and women, but they feel more comfortable with men... *Loca*, or *maricon*, is an effeminate man. His social role is swish... Both in his own eyes and in those of society, the *loca* has an identity separate from that of men... he is publicly put down, joked about, belittled (Kutsche 1991, 11).

Within Costa Rica, men who fall into the described categories may express their sexual desires in the private sector, but must maintain a public image of masculinity.

Queer Tico visibility in the surfing lineup was even more scarce, if not publicly non-existent, due to the societal need to maintain public masculinity. In leaving the rural town to surf a nearby, more secluded beach, I decided between sets to pass out a shot survey to assess what Tico individuals viewed as the “ideal surfer”. Three of the individuals who agreed to take the survey broke out in laughter once they reached the section about a surfer’s sexuality, and saw that homosexual and bisexual were options. Although not outwardly spoken, the reaction

illustrates the humor, possibly humor of disbelief, with associating any sexuality other than heterosexuality with surfing. This unspoken response was supported by other responses I received when explaining my research, most notably one individual who asked, “how could surfing and homosexuality have anything to do with each other?” Sport, by its own nature, is an extension of the cultural norms and understandings of a society. As Blanchard expressed:

As a rule, sport always reflects the basic values of the cultural setting within which it is actually performed and thus functions as ritual or as a ‘transmitter of culture’. Even a sport that has been introduced from a foreign source is very quickly redefined and adjusted to fit the norms and values of tradition (Blanchard 1995, 53).

The taboo nature of sexuality in Costa Rica makes “being out,” especially in a rural local, an almost humorous impossibility, extended to a completely absurd thought when applied to being out in the surfing lineup. Sports are also built upon and reinforce the gender binary of bodily identity. Therefore, “sport continually provides ‘new editions of old conflicts’ and new exclusions emerge even as sport appears to become more inclusive” (Sykes 2006, 25). In surfing, the “mythical norm,” a concept popularized by category theory, consists of being male, young, fit, and ultimately masculine. This reinforcement is achieved by “reinforcing a single-track version of sex, gender, and sexuality. Sports are a near-total institution in which athletes find it difficult to escape a single-minded, exclusionist view” (Coad 2008, 10). Surfing bodies in particular are, “constantly self-policing, managed by a surveillance informed by the gender scripts” (Waite 2008, 79). To be openly queer in the surfing lineup would undermine both the mythical norm reinforced within the surfing subculture as well as the *casa/calle* standard of masculine expression.

The described observed events are only a few that were witnessed during the research in Costa Rica, but provide a basis off of which to proceed with further presentation of data collected, specifically that collected through interviews. Responses from participants both shed light on the reasoning behind events I observed during participant observation, as well as showed the contradictions between what is said and what occurs in reality.

### *Surfers' Perceptions*

Interviews with surfers sought to understand what it truly means to be a surfer, and what drives the desire for such a sport. As Butts described, “a surfer who has not been surfing for an extended period is like a smoker in need of a cigarette. Both are ‘jonesing’, or in need of a fix for which nothing else is an adequate substitute” (Butts 2001. 5). What is it about surfing and its addictive quality that is able to transform a sport into a lifestyle? Surfers who were interviewed were asked this question as an opener to describe the importance of surfing. Although there were some variation in answers, general themes such as economics and lifestyle importance did emerge. Gustav, a 9-time Costa Rican surf champion, summarized the sentiments in one simple sentence; “All what I got I owe to surfing”. Early, a surfer and instructor, echoed Gustav’s sentiment; “Everything. Life is surfing. Life is surfing to me”. Other responses of interest included that of Juan, who saw surfing as a way to deter young men from more dangerous lifestyles such as drugs and violence, and Grett, my lone female interviewee, who saw surfing as a channel for a spiritual connection to nature. As described by Lazarow, a surfing scholar, “It is clear that surfing’s influence extends beyond recreation and tourism, and it can bring a ‘social fabric’ that helps define communities and people. Surfing, as an activity and as a culture, can link generations, bring people together, provide an avenue for outdoor-based physical activity, be

good for business, and help build towns and communities” (Lazarow 2009, 146). Although Gustav’s sentiment on everything in life as surfing served as the perfect summarization, the longer life story he shared truly highlights the importance of surfing in the lives of Costa Rican’s like the former champion. In his own words:

I started 36 years ago, motivated by a Costa Rican champion to learn. Now I surf every day, two-three hours minimum....Surfing has changed my life. I did competitions around the world; I was the Costa Rican champion for six years. Now I’m old, but I started surfing when I was young and it changed my life. Now I opened a school. All what I got I owe to surfing.

Many interview participants also expressed the economic importance of surfing to Costa Rica. Not only do Ticos build their lives around the sport, but also their businesses. Javier, a middle-aged surf shop owner, expressed this importance in the following way; “It is a lot. The reason most people come. It [surfing] is an important income for the country”. The unity of the economics of tourism with the lifestyle of surfing was well summarized in one of Juan’s statements, “If you do something you love, and you love it every day, why do you even call it work?”

Interviewees were asked if they felt that anyone could be a surfer. The responses were strikingly similar; they overwhelmingly claimed that anyone can be a surfer. The main standout response came from Grett, who took a very similar stance to that of Butts, expressing the requirement of commitment; “No, it takes a lot of commitment and a lot of sacrifice. So a lot of your time will go to that... to be a surfer you have to dedicate most of your life; do it seriously”. Aside from Grett, no other individual who identified himself or herself as a surfer gave reasons — excluding a small comment on able-body-ness by one Javier — that anyone could not be a

surfer. However, Javier's comment on physical ability was accompanied by his, "enjoyment of diversity in the water," showing no ill intent in his previous statement, and almost a welcome to the water. These open and welcoming statements, however, will later be called into question.

For those participants who mentioned surfing as important to the economy, further inquiry was taken into the Costa Rican economy's current state. Unlike the succinct answers to who could be a surfer, opinions of the economy showed notable variation. Grett described a booming trend, at least pertaining to the surfing economy, with others, such as Javier, giving statements of correspondence. However, Luis and Gustav shared an outlook of a negative trend on the overall economy. Gustav explained that the economy had been better ten years ago, but that the international financial crisis and Costa Rica's reliance on tourism both contributed to the downfall of the economy. He noted that "Costa Rica is dependent on tourism. If there's no money in America, there's no money in Costa Rica." Accompanying economic shifts towards tourism, the *casa* aspect of masculine expression has come under threat, resulting in a perceived "masculinity crisis" within the country. Chant explains, "the expansion of tourism in the coastal part of the region, in which women are now able to get more regular, high-paid employment, and are often recruited in preference to men" (Chant 1999, 210). As men lose employment opportunities and their status as breadwinners, they lash out, either in violent, machismo manners, or through the abandonment of the family. As Chant highlights, "with economic crisis and labour market restructuring having narrowed employment opportunities for men at the lower end of the occupational spectrum, the stress and/or loss of self-esteem associated with failure to meet normative familial expectations are identified as having contributed to precipitating conjugal breakdown" (Chant 1999, 203). Luis provided insight into the possibility of getting ahead in the current, tourism-based economy; "it [the economy] is difficult. If you are poor it's

difficult to go up, but you need to work hard”. Luis’s words were exemplified by the life story of a wood carver and surfer whom I met while eating breakfast in the suburban surf community.

The man approached, set his two children at a table near mine, and began to show me his carved necklaces. The man carved on mango wood, which, as a protected wood in Costa Rica, made the practice illegal. Despite this, the man said he continued to use the wood because it was the most beautiful. It was clear that carving was the man’s passion, as he displayed surfboards, sea turtles, and other items that he had brought along. As I looked, he explained that, prior to 2008, he had had his own shop and practice. However, because of the economic downturn, he had lost his shop and had to resort to selling his carvings on the street. Seeing that I had interest in the surfboard necklace he was wearing, the man removed it from around his neck and placed it on mine, and then replaced the missing one around his neck with another. He expressed that he wore the necklace at all times, unless he was surfing, where he had his real board. Showing his true passion for both surfing and carving, the man told the painful story of having to take off two months from both activities due to infected cuts on his hand that he sustained while carving on the street.

Finally, in closing interviews with surfers, I asked each about aggression in the sport of surfing as well as what machismo meant to each of them. Some participants felt there was very little aggression in the sport of surfing, offering a simple, “no” or “not really”, when asked if surfing was an aggressive sport. Others, such as Gustav, noted the dangerous aspects of surfing as its aggressive component; “It’s an aggressive sport yes, like an extreme sport. I guess it is dangerous. A nose or a fin can kill you. Broken noses. Broken bones. I’ve seen it.” Early placed the blame of aggression on individuals, but not on the sport overall; “sometimes it can be. Crazy people, local people don’t want others to surf at their beaches”. Javier offered interesting insight

into the relationships between aggression, surfing, and machismo. He first said that he felt that surfing was not an aggressive sport. Then, when asked what he thought when I said “machismo,” he responded with the following; “I don’t think about surfing when you say machismo. I think about some drunk guy beating up his girl, but not in surfing, not in the water.” Other participants corroborated the Costa Rican understanding of machismo, expressing it to be a man who thinks he is better than women, does not allow women to do things, or is physically or verbally abusive towards women or other, “lesser,” men. Some of these so called “lesser” men belonged to the LGBTQA community, and, although fewer interviews were conducted among these individuals, I collected significant results.

### *Queer Individuals’ Perceptions*

While it is true that the status of criminality has been removed from LGTBQA activity in Costa Rica, the public embracing of such identities is still highly taboo. As stated in *The Ticos*, “gays and lesbians have long been subject to discrimination even though private homosexual acts among consenting person over seventeen are legal” (Biesanz 1999, 171). Luckily, three individuals who identified as queer were willing to give interviews for the purpose of this research. Just as it was asked of surfers, members of the queer community were first asked the importance of surfing and who could be a surfer, followed by perceptions of aggression and surfing, and finally of the queer experience in Costa Rica.

Koen, a European foreigner who owns a hostel and surf shop with his partner, offered the first round of insights. He shared the same opinion of many of the surfers I interviewed; surfing was an important appeal for Costa Rica and an economic asset. When discussing who could be a surfer, Koen described his definition of surfer as a category, just like the category of a college



student. There is not one type of college student, but everyone that goes to college is considered a college student. In the same way, anyone who surfs can be considered a surfer, but there are types of surfers. He continued:

There is not one stereotypical surfer. If you look towards the diehard surfer, whether guys or girls, though it's mainly guys, just like any other "addicts," they are very close minded. They seem to only be able to talk about surfing, about waves, about boards, about locations. When interacting with other people in the hostel they are not as open. They are not here on holiday, they are here to surf. The locals here surf everyday. They tend to be a bit more aggressive in the water when it comes to tolerance of people who don't know how to surf, tolerance to people who don't know etiquette, or tolerance to other people in their waves.

Koen also noted that, although he considered surfer as a category, if I were to ask diehard surfers, they would only consider other diehards to be surfers. Koen took a similar, some but not all, approach when giving his opinions on aggression in surfing. He stated, "In general surfing is not an aggressive sport. Even though it's an individualist sport, the social aspect is still important. There are very few people who do not interact when they go surfing. Yes, there are always people who try to get the most waves and try to push boundaries, which makes it look aggressive, but that's with most sports. Some people make it aggressive."

Being keyed into the local LGBTQA community, I asked Koen if he knew of any local homosexual surfers. Even someone inside the community struggled to find an example; "No. I don't know any die hard gay surfers. Homosexuality is still pretty much a taboo, so even if I would know the person that person probably wouldn't be out of the closet." Although there was not an available example, out of curiosity I continued the line of questioning to get Koen's

opinions on what he predicted would occur if an out local surfer came onto the scene. He responded with the following:

The real diehard surfers lives for surfing, and they want to be the best, so if someone happens to be gay and better than them that would be interesting. I'm not sure if it really has to do with the fact that it's a gay guy because it's just a reason to try and find that a guy couldn't really be the best.

The interview with Koen, as well as more informal conversations with him and his partner, Alex, provided an outsider's perspective on the status of queer life in Costa Rica. Legally, the pair explained that civil unions are recognized and gay marriage does not exist, and although queer activity is not criminalized, it is still very rare and taboo in rural areas. The pair shared a story of a surf camping trip that their hostel had led with local teens. The couple was chaperoning a camping trip and over food around the fire, the teens first asked if the two men were brothers, friends, and finally roommates. After the questioning, they explained to the group that they were a couple. The group went quiet for a few minutes before one individual asked, "Like a couple?" When they nodded in agreement, a few tense moments continued until the group came to a somewhat unanimous decision that they didn't care, as long as it didn't involve them. Following this story, in a somewhat comic manner, Koen stated that the number one pastime in Costa Rica is cheating, and that this works to the advantage of homosexual secrecy. He continued, "Where we live there is a trail that goes into the forest and daily you see a car pull up and then there is a motorcycle going in and twenty minutes later coming back. Here with the social pressure it is very difficult to be out of the closet." Queer individuals obey the *casa/calle* dichotomy, keeping their private lives secret and away from the public eye and familial standards.

Koen's interview provided a queer outsider's perspective, but did not shed light on the Costa Rican mindset. However, my interview with Gus, a 22-year-old queer man in the suburban surf town, offered me insight into the mindset of a semi-open surfer. The meeting was kept private at the request of Gus, who did not wish for our topic of conversation to be overheard. Gus began by describing his "openness" about his sexuality, explaining that he is open with some of his friends, but that, "I'm not someone who tells everybody about myself." To further illustrate the reasoning for keeping his sexuality semi-private, Gus shared with me the story of his coming out to his mother. Five months previous to my arrival in Costa Rica, Gus had brought his sexuality to the attention of his mother, whose initial reaction was a violent outburst of crying and a demand that he confess to his father. Later that week, his mother approached a family doctor for help, begging and offering the doctor any amount of money to "fix her son." Ultimately, Gus moved away from his mother and has since lived on his own.

Residing in a surfing-heavy town, Gus took to learning to surf. He described surfers as "looking cool" and the sport not as one of aggression, but of excitement, and possibly danger. Gus was the first individual to share that he, in fact, did know gay Tico surfers, but also gave reasoning as to why it is unlikely that other people know of them. He explained, "I know two or three, but I think they are shy because it is a sport where all of the people are straight. They gotta keep a role and not say that they are gay. They have to keep it closed and hide it." Since he had expressed interest in continuing to surf, I asked if Gus had any reservations because of his sexuality, or if he thought other surfers would treat him differently. His response offered an interesting insight into both the status of homosexuality and the nature of sports in general; "I think they do look down if you are gay in everything, no matter the sport you are doing. In the sports area, if you gay they will look you down. If you are not a professional or as good as other

people just because you are gay, they will come down on you.” Even with this potential for conflict, Gus continues to learn to surf.

One of the key aspects that both Koen and Gus noted was the difference of acceptance for queer individuals between rural communities and the capital city. While researching in the capital, I was able to meet with a major actor in the LGBTQA rights movement in Costa Rica, who, for the sake of his reputation, will remain nameless. Although he does not consider himself a surfer, the interviewee did offer his opinions on the masculine and heterosexual status of surfing. He expressed, “No, I don’t think it’s a masculine sport. What I believe is that, if you see the surfers, they never look masculine. They look full of vanity.” He continued by expressing the mindset of surfers towards their own vanity and those who observe it. He held the belief that surfers operated off of a “look at me and want me but you will never have me” attitude. He also expressed that, although the interactions are far from public, experimentation with other “straight” surfers is common among surfing communities. The man also highlighted the correlation between proximity to the urban center and acceptance and open-mindedness towards queer individuals.

Being active in the equal rights movement, the activist was able to provide insight into the organization and status of the LGBTQA rights movement, and broke it down into the following scenario:

There are different currents of thinking. There are people that want equal rights.

There are people that want not equal rights but some rights. These are people who start from the position that there should be a progressive approach on how to get rights. There is another group of persons who “ain’t got no time for that” because they see equal rights such as marriage to be reserved for certain sectors and are

only trying to survive. I would say that 80 percent of gay population are in the “aint got no time for that” group. And the other 20 percent, you can divide it 80/20 again with 80 percent who don’t want equal rights but want some rights because they feel that even though they can be openly gay, very very deep inside them they feel they are worthless. They have a hidden shame. And only the other 20 percent really believe in equal rights.

This scenario highlights the disunity of the movement and helps to explain the unavailability or unwillingness of activists organizations in the capital to partake in the current research project.

### *Analysis and Discussion*

#### *Passing, Privacy, and the Slow Move towards Public Sexual Expression*

Queer life in Costa Rica has made a slow crawl towards recognition since its decriminalization, but still remains fairly taboo and publicly invisible throughout the country, especially in rural areas. As the prominent LGBTQA activist who was interviewed explained, the queer community in Costa Rica is not a united front. Instead, the community groups itself around three separate lines of thought: wanting full rights, wanting partial rights due to internalized self-hatred, and not having time to even attempt to pursue rights. As he explained, “people still hid, still fear, still have this internal disappointment.” While LGBTQA activism in Costa Rica is specific to the country, the notion of equal and visible recognition is a very western understanding of identity, which has infiltrated the movement. Drawing on Boellstorff’s research in Indonesia, it can be seen that queer movements influenced by western ideals do not necessarily properly represent the interests of specific non-heterosexual identities in their specific cultural contexts. He demonstrates, “Most of the largest and longest-lasting gay

organizations are in Java, but substantial organizations have arisen in many other parts of Indonesia. While not representative of the lives or interests of most gay men, gay organizations have engaged in a range of activities" (Boellstorff 2005,140-141). It is possible to pursue the same train of thought in Costa Rica; that the LGBTQA movement has been disconnected from constructed understandings of homosexuality in Costa Rica, and therefore has not been as successful as desired by the "20 percent of 20 percent" pursuing equal rights.

In understanding this disconnect, it is important to remember that identity, even sexual identity, is constructed within the spaces that it exists. Queer identities do not stand apart from the cultural expectations of men and masculinity in Costa Rica. The *casa/calle* dichotomy dictates the ways in which sexual expression, especially non-heterosexual sexual expression, occurs in the country. As Kutsche denoted:

What a man does with that free time is no one's business but his own, so long as he conducts himself discreetly on the street and in other places where the public wanders in and out. Whether the publicly straight man is quietly gay during this time, or the gay man straight, is seldom a matter of gossip (the penalty for indiscretion, however, can be terrible) (Kutsche 1991, 8).

While they may do as they please with their free time, queer men, just like heterosexual men, are held to the dominant standards of leading a household and living within the values of the family. For this reason, "straight men marry women acceptable to their families, while gay men sometimes marry against their deeper wishes" (Kutsche 1991, 8). It is rare for men to act against the wishes of their families. This can be seen in the case of Gus, who, after coming out to his mother, had to move away because he could no longer live up to the value system his mother had in place.

One of the largest observable understandings for the disunity of LGBTQA movements with queer individuals is the misunderstanding of private sexuality as repression. As Foucauldian thought holds, “individuals do not have ‘free will’ to construct a sexual identity, nor is it merely a matter of finding a way to gain agency to ‘come out’ or to ‘be a queer on the team’ in the face of oppressive power structures” (Sykes 2006, 21). The western world has come to understand ‘doing homosexuality’ as a process involving discovery, coming out, and searching for a cause of sexuality (Sykes 2006, 21). However, this is not necessarily the case for all expressions and understandings of sexuality, and therein lies the danger of basing a non-western queer rights movement within a western framework. Concluding his study of sexuality and masculinity in Costa Rica, Kutsche highlighted the inherent difference in thought about homosexual expression between western and Tico culture:

As a gay, a Northern man hopes to become equally ‘out’ or public in all of his social guises. The Tico has no such compulsion. He neatly and without schizophrenia divides his life according to the rhythm of the day, the week, the year [*casa/calle* dichotomy], according to the imperatives of the family, the limitations of housing, and according to a widely shared view of public propriety (Kutsche 1991, 12).

Sexuality in Costa Rica can predominantly be understood as a private matter, and while the activist may be correct in the idea that this privacy is still driven by internal hatreds of the self, the *casa/calle* dichotomy still structures masculine life, whether heterosexual or queer. As observed by Koen in the backwoods meetings of men, and also commented upon by the activist, sexual exploration is extremely common in Costa Rica, and is actually an accepted tenant of private masculinity within the country. Kutsche agrees, highlighting that, “there’s a lot of

bisexuality in Costa Rica as there is in all of Latin America... Because of the machismo attitude in Latin America, men cannot be openly gay and function well in society or succeed in business. So a lot of them marry and have children, and also have boyfriends on the side” (Kutsche 1991, 12).

An understanding of the lack of desire for public out-ness and the accepted balance of public and private presentation helps to explain the lack of queer visibility among the surfing subculture. As Javier expressed in his interview, “there have to be some gay surfers, we just don’t know about them.” Because of the dominant assumption that all men in the public space are straight, it is possible for gay surfers to enter the lineup undetected. As Brenmer explains, “gay men experience a ‘fluidity’ of gender between gayness and straightness according to social situation. This is made possible by the assumption that all men are heterosexual which enables most gay men to ‘pass’ as straight, something that is often necessary for gay male athletes” (Brenmer 2002, 9). Heidi Eng comes to a very similar conclusion in her study of queering sport, drawing on notions of expected heteronormativity and Foucauldian thought to explain the presence and role of queer athletes in predominantly heteronormative sports arenas. She concludes her study by stating:

Mainstream sport culture seems to exist through an understanding of homosexual love/desire as taboo, and/or a naïve blindness for the potential presence of homoeroticism and homosexual/lesbian desire. At the same time, findings from the study show that the interpretation of sport as heterosexual and empty of homoerotic elements, is a mere illusion that rebuilds itself based on lack of communicated knowledge about homosexual practice. Hence, homoerotic desire and practice in post, as knowledge this not unspoken, is an example of what



Foucault describes as silences underlying the permeating discourse of normality (Eng 2006, 59).

Eng's conclusion is extremely applicable to the Costa Rican context. Sexual expression is a private matter, and there is very little desire outside of the urban setting for open and public expression. Because of this understanding, public arenas such as surf breaks can be perceived to be purely heterosexual, and, if they are able to pass, homosexual surfers may participate under the veil of heterosexuality. In private, athletes may pursue their desires, but surf breaks are dominated by normality and its accepted underlying silences. Yes, it is very likely that there are homosexual Tico surfers, but because of the structure of sexual expression and sport, it would be extremely rare for them to be recognized. This accepted normality and underlying silence also helps to explain the lack of unity and lack of success of the LGBTQA movement. Queer men in Latin America have come to accept the idea of a dual life, one of public heteronormativity and private sexual expression. There is very little desire to disrupt this dichotomy, and, therefore, very little interest in pursuing a movement of equal rights.

### *The Surfer, the Local, and Those Who Surf*

The visibility of queer individuals in surfing lineups has been shown to be dictated by the cultural standards of masculinity and sexual expression present in Costa Rica. However, this does not explain the lack of queer visibility in the sport of surfing overall. Surfers interviewed during this study mainly expressed an open welcome to the waves and the water, highlighting the ability of anyone willing to put in the effort to become a surfer. Yet, there is still a lack of known visibility. It is important to note that in its transformative history, surfing has moved from a ritualistic sport to a main component of a subcultural lifestyle, and with this development comes

the development of specific standards that must be followed. According to subcultural scholars, a subculture consists of three components: “social worlds which are not tied to any particular collectivity or territory,” “explicit lifestyle which connotes a shared category and a commitment which may be potentially tentative and variable,” and “an action system in which a set of values and cultural meanings are conceived as making up a whole, with some measure of coherence” (Ford 2006, 60). The surfing subculture in Costa Rica is a cultural hybridity of the standards set forth both by the worlds of the Tico and the surfer.

Identity, as has been explored, is a performative process, constructed in space and time, and often relating to a specific territory and/or activity. As Waitt explains, “surf spaces are conceptualized as an outcome of a temporally, spatially, and culturally specific set of social relations that, in turn, help to contour the subjectivities of surfers” (Waitt 2008, 78). Within such spaces, individuals orient themselves and are oriented (Waitt & Warren 2008, 356). It is within specific spaces, territorialized by specific groups, that feelings of inclusion and exclusion are born. Localism is present in Costa Rica, and was seen in the Tico/local argument with which this paper opened, but there is a likelihood that this type of aggression is not as visible due to the economic importance of surfing to the country. As most participants noted, surfing is a major economic asset for the country, and to drive out participation would be a determinate to the surfing community and the country overall.

When determining who is a surfer and who simply surfs, a differentiation between local surf culture and surf tourists is necessary. Surf tourists in Costa Rica are viewed, as Koen described, as “walking bullets”: a source of income for the country that is only temporary in its presence. Krause, a scholar of surf tourism, found in his fieldwork a common feeling of local surfers and shop owners that was also seen in the current research; “In the costal communities,

all of the local business owners I was able to talk to agreed that, were it not for surf tourists, their towns would not be able to survive economically” (Krause 2012, 44). He further explains, “like pilgrims who are in a state of liminality all along their journey, the surf tourist going to Costa Rica likewise enters an enduring experiential state that lasts from the time they step foot off the airplane until they pass back through customs on their return home” (Krause 2012, 41). Foreign surfers perform within the surfing space, but it is not of their power or of the desire of local surfers for such individuals to play a role in shaping the space. This temporality does not allow, nor make acceptable, any attempts by a non-local to claim ownership of space within the Costa Rican context. Such an understanding may help to make more clear the welcome offered to anyone to be a surfer. It is a welcome to enjoy the sport, but not to interfere in the cultural boundaries being put in place.

In contrast, as Waitt and Warren explore, it is the interactions between locals in a given space, which shapes the localized surfing subculture:

Feelings derived from the habitual practices of surfing, besides being conceptualized as integral to both affirming/denying surfing masculinities, are also crucial to the multiple processes of boundary making that operate to territorialise surf-breaks by helping to forge commonalities among, and differences between, various groups of surfers (Waitt & Warren 2008, 356-357).

Their study further finds that it is the standard interactions of the locals with one another that has the power to set standards of masculinity and claim dominance over spaces; “How the young men... come to know, feel and perform like men at these breaks... is shaped by their strong commitment to caring for each other, their sense of ownership over a break and a surfing identity fashioned by big-wave riding” (Waitt & Warren 2008, 364). It could be understood, then, that

because open LGBTQA individuals would be seen as outsiders, just as foreigners are, any attempts to change the set culture of surfing would meet great opposition. As Gus expressed, it is likely that openly gay surfers would be looked down upon, and the research of Brackenridge supports this notion; “homophobic bullying is used as a weapon to encourage conformity to a hypermasculine sporting ideal and to vilify those who deviate from it” (Brackenridge 2007, 136).

### *Misplaced Aggression in Indomitable Spaces*

Aggression, while subtle, has been commented upon and observed in the realm of Costa Rican surfing. However, with such a lack of LGBTQA recognition, it is difficult to believe that aggression that would be directed towards queer individuals is truly based in a complete hatred of such individuals. However, this cannot be completely discredited. As Biesanz describes, there is an expected standard of queer individuals:

The price of acceptance has been conversation, total or halfway, to heterosexuality. This means that the gay politician must marry, the writer deny his theme, the poet conceal the sex of his or her lover, and the policeman persecute his own companions. All – without exception – must lie about their identity (Biesanz 1999, 171).

While this extreme, forced hiding was not observed during this study, the understanding that homosexuality should be private and not public was well and alive. Still, this standard cannot account for all aggression demonstrated in the surfing lineup. Most of this aggression appears to be misplaced, and by locating its true source, a better understanding of the dimensions of masculinity and sexuality can be drawn.

First, it is important to highlight the indomitable nature of the resource that surfers are attempting to claim. Popularized in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the notion of a Freedom of the Seas has persisted today; “the oceans and their resources were inexhaustible and demanded freedom of access from everyone” (De Alessi 2009, 85). However, in the mind of a surfer, “a well-shaped waved approaching a beach is a valuable resource, albeit a fleeting one” (De Alessi 2009, 85). Surfers have created informal networks such as surf etiquette to manage access to such a resource, but increased tensions brought about by localism and circumstances outside of surfing can cause aggression, even with the informal network in place. The ocean, while on one hand a fleeting resource, on the other has historically served as a zone of challenge and self-discovery. As Ford notes, “attitudes towards the seas include the desire on the part of men of honor and sensibility to leave the land and the city, to voyage on the seas as the true test of masculinity, the realm where the decisive events, and the moments of eternal choice occur” (Ford 2006, 12). The combination of the challenge of the seas with the sporting nature of surfing makes surf breaks the ultimate site for the reconfirmation of masculine identity; for men whose masculinity has been threatened in other aspects of their life, such as the workforce and familial realms, sport becomes a space in which such men can reinforce their masculinity (Bremner 2002, 7). If there is a need to reaffirm masculinity in surfing, this means that such masculinity has been threatened in other aspects of the male persona.

Many participants of this study, particularly Juan, described themselves not as family men or workers, but as surfers who worked to sustain their lifestyle. The study conducted by Sylvia Chant in Costa Rica showed the changing nature of the status of masculinity in Costa Rica and the ways the status has recently come under threat. As previously discussed, a move towards

a tourism economy and away from agricultural work resulted in the preferred hiring of women over men. As she explains:

The changing nature of work is deemed to have played an important role in the demise of the 'traditional' patriarchal family. More specifically, gendered dimensions of labour market changes, notably the increased participation of women in the workforce, and the relative loss of employment opportunities among men have been singled out as having particularly significant impacts on family organization... Given that breadwinning has normally been men's primary role in adult life, and that the decline of the patriarchal family is arguably more of a loss for men than women, there is increasing talk of a 'crisis of masculinity' within research on men, households, and familial masculinity (Chant 1999, 202).

As exemplified through interactions with the street wood carver and expressions of a volatile economy by participants, it is clear that historic and current economic trends have affected the status of masculinity within Costa Rica. Surfing, then, serves as a pivotal dimension of life in which this masculinity can be re-asserted.

It seems that it is not outright hate towards LGBTQA individuals, but the arrival of such individuals alongside women to the surfing realm in a moment of masculine tension that has allowed for the perpetration of aggression. As Bremner discussed, "an acceptance of women or openly gay men by this sporting culture would contradict the assumption that traits such as aggression, strength, and competitiveness are essential expressions of the heterosexual masculinity" (Bremner 2002, 7). The combination of the opening of surf breaks to new identities along with the threat to masculinity brought about by economic circumstances has created a powder keg of tensions centered on the surfing lineup. If a man, whose masculinity was already

under threat in other realms, was to be out-surfed by a queer individual, it would only pour salt into the wound of his masculinity. This is the point Koen seemed to be driving home; that it did not matter if an individual was gay or a women, but rather, if they were better than a heterosexual male surfer, these differentiations would be targeted and individuals would face aggression because of them. Non-conformity becomes a dual threat, both to the subcultural standards of surfing and to the wounded masculinity of Tico men. However, in a Foucauldian sense of anti-spaces, Bremner sees the possibility of queer presence in the surfing realm as a transformative force. She states, "Therefore, while sports are a sit of hegemonic gender reinforcement, they may also provide a useful site from which the ironic gay standpoint can be used to deconstruct and redefine meaning of gender" (Bremner 2002, 8). Still, such an attempt at subtly redefining a territorialized space and system of meaning could create deep subcultural clashes.

***Conclusion: Queering the Lineup***

"Queering," a transformational process, has come to the attention of scholars as LGBTQA visibility has become more prominent in sporting arenas. Queering is "used as a noun to describe a process where queer existence in a certain context challenges and affects heteronormative structures and/or acts, speech and identities, so that the heteronormative context, the culture, the discourses change over time (Eng 2006, 52). Although slow if not halted at the moment, the eventual emergency of LGBTQA individuals in the realm of Costa Rican surfing could begin to "queer" the subculture. However, it is likely, considering the current state of masculine stability and protectionism, that this process will be met with resistance.

Considering the three sub-conclusions together, this work returns to confirm its original thesis statement. Although hindered by a lack of organization among the LGBTQA community and local understandings of sexuality and the presentation of sexual orientation, the slow emergency of LGBTQA individuals into the realm of surfing in Costa Rica is creating a two-pronged process. The first is of increased aggression and territoriality among heterosexual surfers faced with a threatened masculinity. The second is a reconsidering of what it means to be a surfer, and the possibility of new masculinities and sexualities in the embodiment of a surfer. The taboo nature of sexuality in Costa Rica, especially in many rural coastal towns where surfing occurs, and the ways in which sexuality is culturally understood and expressed can explain the lack of representation of queer individuals in the realm of surfing. This lack of representation can also be accredited to the hypermasculine underpinnings of the sport itself, which saved little room for “alternative masculinities”.

It can be argued that the citizens of Costa Rica can be understood using a dual category assignment system drawing from three given categories: gay, Tico, surfer. While it is humanly possible to reside in and navigate all three possible realms of identity, within the Costa Rican context, most individuals, as least while in the public eye, will only claim ownership to two of the identifying categories. In coastal pacific towns, being Tico and surfer is the most prominent dual identity. These surfers are more often than not men, as surfing is still in the process of its gendered considerations and inclusivity. For most of these individuals, surfing is a major part of — if not the main component of — their lifestyle. Since the financial crisis of the early 2000s, men have found it increasingly difficult to gain employment, and some participants with whom I spoke described surfing as their escape from everyday life or even as their everything. This high importance placed on surfing makes it easier to understand the protective views of some Ticos



towards the waves, previously from women and outsiders, but increasingly from LGBTQA individuals, if these individuals choose to be publically visible. This protectiveness also coincides with the machismo mindset present in many rural towns in the country, a mindset that holds that men should be strong and emotionally unwavering, protecting and providing for the family, and serving as the main authoritative unit. Because this cultural mindset has begun to be upset in the economic world by the increasing employment of women and the difficulty of men to find jobs in the growing tourism industry, the belief system is redirected by these men towards their waves.

It is possible to be gay and be a surfer, but these individuals are most often foreigners or expatriates residing in Costa Rica. This category still held small numbers, and through interactions and conversations about this lack of representation both with surfers and queer-identifying individuals, it can be concluded that it is often the hypermasculine or aggressive attitudes and actions in the waves, combined with cultural stigmas toward queer lifestyles, that hinders higher representation of this identification category. Least visible is the portion of the population able to be categorized as Tico and gay. While individuals have become comfortable with their sexuality, they are far from being open about it in public spaces, and it is the cultural norm that sexual expression is to remain a private matter. Most have kept it from their family, and, unless living in the city, keep their sexuality out of their professional and social lives, and rarely venture into the realm of surfing without passing as heterosexual. There are surely gay Tico surfers, but if they are dropping in among the rest of the surf line-up, it is their best-kept secret.

In concluding this work, it is important to remember the following: the beach is a space between the civilized and the wild where identities are shaped and reshaped, just as the coastline

is by the rising and falling of the tides. If some queer individuals are willing to take the welcome offer to the waves, many participants in the study seemed to be opening to them, whether genuinely or not, the process of reconsideration of masculinities and sexualities within the realm of surfing will continue.

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