

CULTURE, STRUCUTRE, AND RACE IN PICK-UP BASKETBALL:  
EVERYDAY HOOPS INSIDE A PREDOMINANTLY WHITE UNIVERSITY  
STUDENT RECREATION CENTER

A Dissertation

by

KENNETH SEAN CHAPLIN

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Chair of Committee,	Reuben May
Committee Members,	Joe Feagin
	Sarah Gatson
	John Singer
Head of Department,	Jane Sell

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## ABSTRACT

When an observer looks at pick-up basketball in an integrated space it appears like groups of players are playing based simply on racial difference, but a deeper look reveals other factors that influence how these apparent racial dynamics play out. In this dissertation, I break down the types of norms and rules of pick-up basketball culture, analyze how those norms and rules are tied to structure, and demonstrate the influence of these factors on racial dynamics. I go beyond a simple understanding of race as it plays out in this particular space for pick-up basketball to show, using sociological concepts, the nuanced ways in which everyday people involve themselves in routine kinds of informal recreational activities. I found that players used norms as a way to make and enforce social rules and cultural customs, and that players used these rules and customs to informally organize large and small groups in ways significantly related to race. I also found that players used race in overt and covert ways, and as interactive strategies to structure particular games and to manipulate micro pick-up basketball cultures on particular courts and sidelines.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife (Sunaina), parents (Kenneth and Diana), sisters and brother-in-law (Charmaine, Erica, and Andrew), and my nieces and nephews (Jake, Ariel, Alexis, Joshua, and Caleb). Thank you for enduring my impatience, distance, and neuroses, while still continuing to love me. I also dedicate this dissertation to my grandmother Doris Granny-Chin, and my Uncle Lincoln and Aunt Pat; without you I could not have endure this process.

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# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

When an observer looks at pick-up basketball in an integrated space it appears like groups of players are playing based simply on racial difference, but a deeper look reveals other factors that influence how these apparent racial dynamics play out. In this dissertation I break down the types of norms and rules of pick-up basketball culture, analyze how those norms and rules are tied to structure, and demonstrate the influence of these factors on racial dynamics. I go beyond a simple understanding of race as it plays out in this particular space for pick-up basketball to show, using sociological concepts, the nuanced ways in which everyday people involve themselves in routine kinds of informal recreational activities. I found that players used norms as a way to make and enforce social rules and cultural customs, and that players used these rules and customs to informally organize large and small groups in ways significantly related to race. I also found that players used race in overt and covert ways, and as interactive strategies to structure particular games and to manipulate micro pick-up basketball cultures on particular courts and sidelines.

### **About this Study**

When I first began to study pick-up basketball players, I was a new graduate student to the discipline of Sociology. I was also a new resident of College Station, Texas, and a new student enrolled in a qualitative research methods course that required me to do field research, and to create and develop a short-term mock micro sociological

study. After a few weeks, I decided to commit to a ‘Grounded Theory’ ethnographic study of pick-up basketball players, social settings, and contexts inside of the Texas A&M University Student Recreation Center (Sachs and Abraham 1979, Corbin and Strauss 1990, and Glaser and Strauss 2009).

When I first arrived at the recreational basketball courts to study pick-up basketball players, everything looked like one big blur to me. I did not know what I was doing, and I was not sure of how or exactly why I wanted to study pick-up basketball players. What rescued me from academic confusion and intellectual alarm was my training in classical and contemporary sociological theories and research methods.

In my first year as a graduate student, one introductory text that stood out to me was Earl Babbie’s (1994) *What is Society*. This text helped me to make sense of how to approach a qualitative research study of specific social settings and contexts by looking at the everyday actions and interactions of actors/players. To be more specific, Babbie’s (1994) guidance in conducting qualitative field research helped me to understand and express my observations, and my research position from a sociological perspective. I used Babbie’s (1994) practical research approach to inquire about my research population. This led me to think about: 1) the cultures of individuals and groups of pickup basketball players; 2) the structured activities of pick-up basketball players; and 3) the complex racial dynamics taking place among players and groups.

Although this ethnography focuses on pick-up basketball players, it also reveals how everyday people routinely involve themselves in informal social activities in other contexts. I travel beyond the detailed reporting of pick-up basketball events, situations,



and experiences to show how the everyday social activities and interactions of people are rooted in complex webs of significance and meaning, and cultural constructions and representations that impact the social worlds in which people act and live (Geertz 1973 and Foiter 2002).

### **About the Literature and Research**

Sociological studies of pick-up basketball players and games are not new, but they are, and have remained, few. Many sociological studies of basketball have focused on formal basketball players and organizations, and on the prolific, high profile players and teams (Brower 1977). These research studies have explored some of the structural problems and social issues of players and games in broader formally organize basketball settings and contexts (Snyder and Purdy 1985, Adler and Adler 1991, Wilson 1997, Denham, Billings, and Halone 2002, Falcous and Maguire 2005, and May 2008 and 2009). Only a handful of sociology dissertations have explored a broader understanding of pick-up basketball players, games, or social activities. Of these few dissertations, only a couple have analyzed: 1) the social organization of games as constructed and negotiated by everyday players; 2) players perceptions and interpretations of pick-up basketball as social sites of racial pride and cultural expression; and 3) games as looselydefined day-to-day activities of diverse individuals and groups of players who seek to maximize the wealth and enjoyment of games via manipulating the social norms (Nagy 1973, Allison 1981, Hanson 1995, Jimerson 1995, Brooks 2004, and Chin 2012). The research on pick-up basketball is, and has remained, unique in sociology.

Some sociologists have explored pick-up basketball games and contexts by identifying and explaining how and why pick-up basketball systems are embedded within specific cultural milieus (Allison and Lueschen 1979). Allison and Lueschen (1979) illuminated some ways that southwestern U. S. subcultural ethnic groups of pickup basketball players adopted, incorporated, and transformed dominant AngloAmerican versions of basketball into distinct Navajo cultural entities. Allison and Lueschen (1979) also made specific cultural distinctions between the form and content of pick-up basketball games, and then identified and discussed several elements of how the form of pick-up basketball games significantly impacts the content, actions, interactions, and the social organization of players (Allison and Lueschen 1979). Allison's (1981, 1982a, 1988) works, in particular, found that although Navajo and Anglo-American adolescent players lived within the same school district and frequently participated in pick-up basketball games with one another, their social practices and cultural orientations towards differed: a) teammates and opponents, b) competition and cooperation, and c) the outcomes of games were quite distinct, chiefly because the Navajo players changed the basketball rules of the game to reflect the valued characteristics of the broader Navajo culture (Allison 1981, 1982a, and 1988).

Like Allison (1981, 1982a, and 1982b), Allison and Lueschen (1979), and other sociologists who have examine various cultural forms of pick-up basketball games, I also explore and explain how different pick-up basketball forms are specifically related to cultural meaning, power, and the rewards that players give and take away from one

another on the pick-up basketball courts (Jimerson 1996 and 1999 and Atencio and Wright 2008).

Atencio and Wright (2008) studied the pick-up basketball culture of a small group of players at a local park. They found that players' practices reinforced a restricted range of masculine hierarchies that narrowed a range of black masculinities (Atencio and Wright 2008). According to Atencio and Wright (2008), many of the young black men in their study used pick-up basketball as a way to obtain and perform narrow versions of masculinity that were linked to cultural positions of power that enabled them to have access to select neighborhood parks (Atencio and Wright 2008). In my research, I also examine various versions of masculinities, and how these masculinities operate in culture and competition (Alexander 2004).

Some chief works I use to help me to examine the everyday social activities and interactions of pick-up basketball players are Jimerson's (1996) study of wealth maximizing norms, and his study of team selection (Jimerson 1996 and 1999). Jimerson (1996 and 1999) used an ethnographic approach to study pick-up basketball players and games specifically the entrance norms, the mid-play norms, the exit norms, and the on-the-court everyday ritual practices of players (Jimerson 1996 and 1999). Jimerson's (1996 and 1999) work demonstrates how players play in pick-up basketball games void of referees and coaches by using social norms: 1) to regulate and coordinate their actions and social interactions with one another, 2) to maximize in a democratic way the quality and quantity of pick-up basketball games, and 3) to construct order about who plays when and where. His works also illustrate how players optimize the quantity of their

playing time and the quality of their games by trying to play as much as possible, as well as possible via following the ritual social norms of getting onto the courts (Jimerson 1996 and 1999). In my research, I also explore how pick-up basketball players use social norms to manipulate games, social settings, and contexts (Babbie 2004). I pay close attention to how players enter the recreational basketball courts, search for particular others, and play in games all-the-while working to bend and shape the normative practices and values of other players (Bykhovskaya 1991). The ideas from the literature help me to explore practices that play out in pick-up basketball culture, the structural factors that impact team selection, and how these practices are impacted by racial dynamics.

### **About the Text**

This study is divided into six chapters exploring culture, structure and race in pick-up basketball. In chapter one I provide a comprehensive sociological description of pick-up basketball. First, I discuss what pick-up basketball is, and what it is not. Next, I tell about the creation and development of pick-up basketball from organized basketball. After that, I elucidate who some pick-up basketball players are, and then I explain how some sociologists of sport have demonstrated the importance of sport, studying sport, and studying particular sports like pick-up basketball. I conclude the chapter with a description and discussion of how pick-up basketball is a contested social activity that takes place in contested social space.

In chapter two, I provide a micro sociological description of pick-up basketball players and games inside of the Texas A&M University Student Recreation Center.

First, I describe the broad social setting and context of Texas A&M University in College Station, Texas, and then I discuss the Texas A&M University Student Recreation Center. After that, I tell about some of the players on the recreational basketball courts, and then I tell about how players socially organize games, and how players make meaning and negotiate meaning of spaces and cultures. I also tell about how players discuss the recreational basketball courts inside of the Texas A&M University Student Recreation Center as similar and different to other social settings and contexts in which they have played. I end the chapter by explaining how games are routinely contested social activities.

In chapter three, I discuss how players formulate and situate themselves into large and small groups. First, I describe how players make and maintain small groups and group cultures. After that, I discuss how players make meaning and negotiate meaning in relationships with one another. I conclude with a discussion showing how players who are part of large and small groups use their social groups as markers to make and negotiate boundaries.

In chapter four, I define micro-level structures and then discuss how those structures impact players and groups relationships and social relations. Networks that frequently develop outside of the gym proper often shape the social relationships inside of the gym. Players draw on these networks to structure access to the courts. I also show how players erect an informal hierarchy based on the influence of leadership and norms. Players defer to informal leadership and conform to the established norms.

In chapter five, I discuss how individuals and groups of players negotiate

meaning about race through social interaction. First, I describe how players use race to organize and perpetuate social boundaries. Next, I show how players use race to include and exclude other players, and to both maximize and minimize cultural differences in players' approaches, styles, and dispositions. Then I show how players use race to make sense of other players' natural athleticism, aptitude and attitudes. Finally, I explore how Black American players, who are students and non-students, negotiate race and class.

## CHAPTER II

### A SOCIOLOGY OF PICK-UP BASKETBALL

#### **What a Sociology of Sport Is**

Sociologists assert that part-time and full-time employment is an increasingly important part of many college and university students lives (Bozick 2007, Lehmann 2009, and Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2009). Sociologists also assert that participation in recreational games, sports, and informal athletic activities is also an increasingly important part of many college and university students' lives (Azzarito, Munro, and Solmon 2004). What college and university students do with their free time is important because students' free-time activities is telling of broader student life, collegiate recreational lifestyles, and campus cultures (Zuzanek and Mannell 1983, Parker 1983, Frey and Dickens 1990, Snir and Harpaz 2002, and Veblen 2007).

How and why many college and university students informally (but routinely) congregate to play recreational games and sports during their free time is of special importance to sociologists of sport (Goodger and Goodger 1989, Featherstone 1991, and Rojek 2000). The various ways that college and university students act and interact with others during free time athletic activities is telling of the multiple manners in which college and university students make meaning, sense, and decisions about who they are, what they like to do, and with whom they like to spend their free time. In this regard, explorations and explanations of college and university students who routinely participate and involve themselves in recreational games, sports, and physical activities

during their free time is of central importance to sociologists of sport (McPherson, Curtis, and Loy 1989, Coakley 1990 and 2007, and Coakley and Dunning 2012). How collegiate recreational sports players and participants make and negotiate meaning, and make decisions about where, when, how, and who they play with and against, is especially important to sociologist of sport, sport and educational theorists, and sports scholars alike (Allison and Lueschen 1979, Jimerson 1996 and 1999, Hartmann 1996a, 1996b, 2001, and 2002, Ogden 2002, Ogden and Hilt 2003, Atencio and Wright 2008, Boyd 2008, Thangaraj 2010a and 2010b, and DeLand 2012 and 2013).

In the case of recreational basketball players, players will often use pick-up basketball games, social settings, and contexts to make meaning, negotiate meaning, and make decisions about other players on and beyond the recreational basketball courts. In many cases, pick-up basketball players will use pick-up basketball as a way and means of selecting players to be part of official sports teams and organizations, and will use their knowledge and experience with particular players to build (or not build) on relationships inside and outside of sports contexts (Melnick and Chemers 1974 and Duda 1988). In this chapter, I illuminate and explain why it is important to study pick-up basketball players across a wide variety of recreational basketball courts. I provide a comprehensive sociological introduction to pick-up basketball players, games, and social settings.

First, I discuss how some sociologists of sport have demonstrated the importance of sport, studying sport, and studying particular sports like pick-up basketball. After that, I describe what pick-up basketball is, and what it is not. Then, I explain some of the



similarities and differences between pick-up basketball and organized basketball. After that, I characterize typical pick-up basketball players. Finally, I show how pick-up basketball is a contested and negotiable social activity that occurs in contested social space.

### **Why Study Sports – What Is so Important about Sports?**

Sports occupy a unique role in society, even though they often times inhabit a separate and distinct space in newspapers and magazines and in syndicated T.V. shows and radio stations (Gieryn 2000, Washington and Karen 2001, and Gans 2002).

Sociologists of sport study sports for a wide variety of reasons; many sociologists of sport have found a wide variety of ways that sports is intimately connected to the lives and experiences of sports players and participants (Lueschen 1980, Loy Jr, Kenyon, and McPherson 1981, McPherson, Curtis, and Loy 1989, Nixon and Frey 1996).

Sociologists of sport assert it is important to understand and explain: 1) how sports experiences are understood and interpreted by players, 2) how sports worlds and subcultures are created and maintained in connection with other sports, and 3) how sports generically operate as insightful social sites and locations where dominant ideologies are expressed, reproduced, contested, negotiated, and changed (McPherson, Curtis, and Loy 1989, Frey and Eitzen 1991, Nixon and Frey 1996, and Coakley 2007).

Organized and informal sports players, groups, and organizations reveal much about broader culture and society (Boyle 1963, Daniels 1966, Lueschen 1967, Lueschen and Hammerich 1967, Edwards 1973a and 1973b, Snyder and Spretzer 1974). Sports are a microcosm of broader culture and society; as a microcosm, sports occur as social

phenomena in the form of athletic events that encapsulate in miniature the essential characteristics, the pedestal qualities, and the indispensable features of social structure and organization in society (McPherson, Curtis, and Loy 1989, Frey and Eitzen 1991, Nixon and Frey 1996, and Coakley 2007).

Sociologists of sport have demonstrated how sports reflect society's broader social norms, values, ideals, and how sports are linked to the broader social structure, culture, and organization of particular societies (Washington and Karen 2001, Coakley and Dunning 2012, and Sage and Eitzen 2013). Sociological studies of sport are important because sports events and activities,

“fill stadiums and arenas around the world on a regular basis as people root, often maniacally, for their home teams; they spawned thousands of rotisserie leagues (i.e., sports leagues composed of fan-chosen teams) along with debates about the best players, teams, etc.; they occupy the weekends and evenings of parents and children; they receive massive expenditures of funds by schools and colleges in the United States; they occupy hours and hours of weekly commercial radio and television air time with accompanying astronomical advertising revenues; and they are increasingly the object of public policy as they engage the concerns of voters and politicians at the local, state, and federal levels”

(Washington and Karen 2001, p. 187).

Sports are derived and reflective of macro and micro social interactions and relationships in society; sports contain the dramatic performances and ritual activities of players that engage in cooperative competitive athletic activities (Cherrington 2014).

When sports players engage in playing particular sports, their athletic performances are telling of society's broader ideals, values, and beliefs about excellence, moral strivings, virtues, and ethics (Eitzen 2001 and Coakley and Dunning 2012). Sports performances are a slice of broader social life that occur as exaggerated athletic drama in episodic form (Eitzen 2001, and Coakley and Dunning 2012). When sports occur, sports players, participants, and spectators are given: 1) an outlet for emotion, 2) an outlet for violence, 3) notions of beauty via athletic performance, 4) notions of cultural ideals as athletic excellence, and 5) ethics related to discipline, hard work, success, honor, strength, talent, skill, courage, and grace (Frey and Eitzen 1991, Eitzen 2001, and Boxill 2003). Sports also provide players and participants with modes and means of selfexpression, selfconfidence, and self-assertion in cooperative competitive athletic activities.

Many sociologists of sport have found that although sports are commonly considered separate and distinct social activities in society, sports mirror the social structure and organization, the culture, and the formal and informal social interactions of people in society. Sports also mimic much of the dominant and subcultural ideals, beliefs, and values that many people hold in society. In this dissertation I am exploring this relationship focusing on the culture, structure, and racial dynamics as they occur in everyday pick-up basketball, emphasizing sports relationship to society.

### **Why Study Particular Sports and Sports Players like Pick-up Basketball and Pickup Basketball Players**

Social science researchers approach pick-up basketball games and players as unique sports forms that are derive and reflective of broader culture and society (Blount

1995 and Boyd and Shropshire 2000). Pick-up basketball games and players reveal much about the different approaches and ideas players have towards recreational sports, the different types of ways in which players' play recreational games, and the different kinds of social interaction that occurs among individuals and groups of players. Studies of pick-up basketball games and players also reveal much about broader recreational settings and contexts, specifically how athletic phenomena in informal recreational settings and contexts are related to broader social structures, cultural patterns, and the everyday recreational practices of particular groups of players (Alexie 1996).

Much of sociological studies of sport stress binary paradigms; in this regard, many organized basketball studies are no different. Most of the sociological research and literature about basketball has focused on organized basketball forms, and very little research or literature has described, discussed, analyzed, or explained recreational forms of basketball like pick-up basketball (Naismith 1941, Rains 2011, and Rains and Carpenter 2009). Of the little work that has explored or explained pick-up basketball games and players, sports scholars have worked to develop careful characterizations and cautious theorizations based on in-depth analyses of how pick-up basketball games work, and how these kinds of informal recreational games have a significant influence on the lives and experiences of players. Many studies about pick-up basketball games and players have provided unique insights, understandings, and explanations about players' goals and purposes for playing, players' motivations and attitudes in games, and players' self-perceptions and athletic aspirations in informally organized basketball (Allison and Lueschen 1979, Adler and Adler 1985 and 1991, Jimerson 1996 and 1999,

Hartmann 2001, Launder 2001, McLaughlin 2004 and 2008, Atencio and Wright 2008, Bishop 2009, Thangaraj 2010a and 2010b, and DeLand 2012 and 2013). Based on the literature, forms of basketball are made up of a few distinct elements:

- 1) the minimal materials/equipment employed within games that include hoops/baskets, a ball, and a playing surface,
  - 2) the shared goals/objectives of players via placing the ball through the hoop,
  - 3) the means utilized to get the ball into the hoop that requires certain collective behavioral tactics and skills,
  - 4) the code of agreement of cooperative competition via the association of players to play within the parameters of particular rules,
  - 5) the meaning orientation toward the game, specifically, the meaning for the actors that are drawn to participate and interact within a game's system (without the meaning element the entity would not continue to exist whether it be fun, mastery over self and others, or aesthetic attraction)
  - 6) the power orientation, specifically the types of relationships that flow from the association (i.e., two groups sharing in a contest for dominance), and 7) the rewards orientation, specifically the types of benefits which victors receive from a structure that ranges from intrinsic rewards to extrinsic rewards (i.e. monetary, symbolic-medals, ribbons, transferred status, etc.)
- (Allison and Lueschen 1979, p. 84-85).

These forms of basketball reveal much about how culture operates within the context of pick-up basketball.

The sociological research and literature has also theorized and developed ideas about the relationship of players in informal sports organizations that are largely leisure based, and about the cultural interactions of players across varied social terrains. Some researchers have looked specifically at the context of sports socialization, and specifically at players' involvement in large and small social groups. Other researchers have focused on players' relationships to race and crime, gender and deviance, and violence and prevention in schools and community recreation centers (Chappell 2002). Some researchers have focused on racial and ethnic stratification on particular courts and in particular contexts, and some have illuminated how social class and gender discrimination emphasize sexism and the everyday sexists' practices of players (Jimerson 1996 and 1999, McLaughlin 2004 and 2008, Atencio and Wright 2008, Bishop 2009, Thangaraj 2010a and 2010b, and DeLand 2012 and 2013). This study shifts the focus to emphasize the ways in which racial dynamics are subject to macro and micro-level cultures and structures.

### **What Pick-up Basketball Is, and What it Is Not**

Pick-up basketball is a recreational game and sport that is a modified derivative of organized basketball (Jimerson 1996 and 1999, Bishop 2009, and Phelps 2011). By modified derivative, I mean that pick-up basketball is a creative resourceful imitation of organized basketball. Pick-up basketball occurs as a recreational game and sport when recreational basketball players mimic the formal organization and the social interaction of organized basketball players (Snyder and Purdy 1985). Pick-up basketball, however, has no formal organization or structure for social interaction among players; pick-up

basketball has no coaches or officials to enforce the social organization or to structure the social interaction of players (Snyder and Purdy 1985, Jimerson 1996 and 1999, Bishop 2009, and Phelps 2011).

Pick-up basketball operates as a recreational game and sport void of formal rules and regulations - this makes pick-up basketball a fundamentally different form and game from organized basketball (Snyder and Purdy 1985, Jimerson 1996 and 1999, Bishop 2009, and Phelps 2011). The lack of the formal organization of recreational players, the casual configuration of recreational basketball teams, and the absence of the controlled interaction of recreational players constitutes what sports theorists and scholars refer to as informally organized recreational games (Hepbron 1904, Bunn 1939, Slack 1985, Snyder and Purdy 1985, Bach 1993, Jimerson 1999, and Pope and O'Sullivan 2003).

The absence of the formal basketball structures, the scarcity of official enforcers, and the insufficiency of authorized governing bodies like in organized basketball games and leagues makes much of the pick-up basketball rules and regulations contestable, malleable, negotiable and struggled over social activities (Hall 1981 and 1996, Messner 1988 and 1995, Hartmann 1996a, 1996b, 2001, and 2002, Chen and Morley 2006, and Atencio and Wright 2008). When pick-up basketball games occur, players have full knowledge that the games are without formal organization, official structure, and official social interaction.

What especially complicates the social organization and structure of games is when players focus on maximizing their own personal involvement, enjoyment, and fulfillment (Blanchard 1974, Galtung 1982, Lane 1997, Kingsbury and Tauer 2009,

Godwin 2010, and Gassman 2010). Some sociologists of sport assert that many pick-up basketball players approach games in predictable ways (Jimerson 1996 and 1999, Kernan and Greenfield 2005, and Godwin 2010). Some of these sports scholars assert that recreational players approach games in ways designed to enhance their interactions and relationships with like-minded players, and to improve their own personal involvement, enjoyment, and fulfillment. When players approach games with an individualistic orientation, their approaches are routinely contested and negotiated by other players.

Although many players play pick-up basketball for a wide variety of personal reasons, some play for cooperative exercise, social enjoyment and cultural inclusion. As a team game, pick-up basketball requires players to have physical action and social interaction with teammates and opponents. Contention that routinely occurs among individuals and groups of pick-up basketball players exists because of the players' divergent ideological approaches, social attitudes, and distinct cultural practices.

Pick-up basketball is typically played outdoors in the streets (Palmer 2004, Ceglinsky 2006, and Chidester 2012), in local neighborhood parks (Jonsrud 2011), and in community school-yards and recreational playgrounds (Telander 1988). Many modern pick-up basketball games occur indoors inside of modern state-of-the-art community recreation centers, in private sports clubs, and in large university student recreation centers (Axthelm and Telander 1982, Dalgarn 2001, Batchelor 2005, Kampf 2010, and Rec Center Wars 2011). Like in the calculated selection of professional players onto organized teams by scouts, pick-up basketball players also scout other players all-



thewhile following similar draft-like rules for selecting choice players they believe are the best from larger groups of eligible players (Dufur and Feinberg 2009). This process of selection is key in the interaction of players with respect to culture, structure, and race and is a key part of my analysis.

### **Some Significant Similarities and Differences between Pick-up Basketball and Organized Basketball**

There are some significant similarities and differences between pick-up basketball and organized basketball based on the social organization, culture, and micro social interactions and behavior of players. Most of the similarities between these games are based on the interlocking pattern of social arrangements emergent from, and determinant of, the actions and interactions of players. Both pick-up basketball and organized basketball occur based on the socioeconomic division and stratification of players that play. Both games are also occur as social institutions at the meso-levels, whether players are derive and reflective of particular cities and/or towns, or whether players and/or spectators envision themselves as national and international representatives. At the micro levels, both players in these games come from specific subgroups and subpopulations that are associated and related to specific social ties and networks that manifest themselves in the day-to-day actions, interactions, and behaviors of players.

Some significant differences between pick-up basketball and organized basketball are that pick-up is void of formal organization and administrative forces. In pick-up basketball, the social and cultural norms are subject to particular social settings

and contexts; this significantly influences how players make meaning of and negotiate norms and values, and how players think, act, interact, and operate together (with and against one another) in the day-to-day cultural practice of pick-up basketball.

Pick-up basketball is player-run, player-controlled, player-dominated recreation that is internally contested and negotiated by players, void of formal structure and organization of games (Rees and Miracle 1984, Jimerson 1996 and 1999, and McLaughlin 2004). In pick-up basketball, players seek to maximize their involvement and mastery of skills within the acceptable negotiable rules and norms of games with balancing their desires to break away from the rules and norms of games (McIntosh 1979, and Rees and Miracle 1984).

On a micro level, pick-up basketball differs significantly from organized basketball because of the players' motives and structure of play. Pick-up basketball occurs as a voluntary informal activity by players who play primarily for pleasure, enjoyment, and self-interest, and act and behave in relatively autonomous and unaccountable ways. With pick-up basketball players play ambiguous and negotiable basketball positions in an effort to play good quality games, and to play as much as they can to have good times (Jimerson 1996 and 1999). Pick-up basketball is played without a unified team strategy for winning games; whereas organized basketball is played with a team strategy typically advanced by a coach. The fact that players are negotiating strategies of play in pick-up basketball means that their own cultural backgrounds, their places in broader social structure, and their understandings of race and racial dynamics often influence their interactions.

## **Who Some Pick-up Basketball Players Are**

There are many different types of pick-up basketball players. There are also many different ways that pick-up basketball players make meaning, negotiate meaning, and make decisions about other players, games, and social settings. Many similar players will often make complex decisions about who, when, where, how, and why they play on a given occasion. Sociologists of sport consider these various decisions of players as important for studying the actions and interactions of players during games.

Many times players will play in warm-up basketball games before they are picked by someone (or before they pick other players) to play in what is universally understood by many regular players as 5-on-5 full-court pick-up basketball games (Wielgus and Wolff 1986, Ballard 1998, Jimerson 1999, Bishop 2009, Robertson 2010, and Phelps 2011). Before playing a full court 5-on-5 game, some players warm-up by playing other kinds of competitive basketball games like: 1-on-1, 21 (also known as Hustle, Rough, or Cutthroat), Around the World, H-O-R-S-E, Knockout, and Tip (Strand and Scantling 1999, Krause, Meyer, and Meyer 2008, Shanburn 2008, and Phelps 2011). All of these games are informally organized, and none of these games constitute a sport.

Many players use warm-up games as competitive activities for reasons besides warming-up (Zurcher 1982, and Snyder and Ammons 1993). In many cases, regular pickup basketball players, and some of the new and unknown recreational basketball players, will play in warm-up games in a friendly and competitive manner to make meaning, sense, and decisions about known and unknown players they want to select (or not select) to be on teams. Warm-up games often operate as games within games that: 1)

help players to meet and greet one another, and 2) help players to select known and unknown players as teammates from a larger pool of willing recreational basketball players (White 2006). After players are selected onto pick-up basketball teams (by other players), winning pick-up basketball games usually becomes a top priority (Wissel 2011). Losing pick-up basketball games usually means that the players on the losing team have to vacate the court if other players are waiting to play. In many cases, some of the players on the court will be repeatedly picked-up by new teams comprised of players that are waiting to play (Jimerson 1996 and 1999, and McLaughlin 2004 and 2008). Not all recreational basketball players have an opportunity to play in 5-on-5 games in highly competitive and constrained recreational basketball settings (Atencio and Wright 2008, and Thangaraj 2010a and 2010b).

Many pick-up basketball players differ from one another in ways attributable to the broader social setting, context, and the ritual social interactions that they have with other players. From one player to another, and from one game to the next, pick-up basketball players must be approached and understood as a kind of generic recreational basketball player that brings a particular identity, belief, value, and normative disposition to pick-up basketball games. Many players' identities, ideas, beliefs, values, and norms are a product of the mass media images and the intimate face-to-face social interactions they have with other players. In many ways, players' attitudes towards other players, games, social settings, and contexts are subject to (and regulated by) the broader cultural ideas and images, and by the players who are most able to significantly influence particular pick-up basketball games and contexts (Carlston 1983, Derezotes 1995,

Jimerson 1996 and 1999, McLaughlin 2004 and 2008, Atencio and Wright 2008, and Thangaraj 2010a and 2010b).

Players generally desire to play in games because these games allow them the freedom to be creative and to develop their individual playing styles (George 1992). Players also usually choose to play in games because it allows them the opportunity to rely on the fundamentals of organized basketball, and to learn how to apply the rules and regulations of organized basketball to pick-up basketball games. Additionally, games offer players opportunities for social interaction and inclusion with other like-minded players. Interaction and inclusion with like-minded players may be based on players' thoughts about culture, structural location, and race.

Players routinely select their friends and acquaintances because they know them, they have some idea about their skills and abilities, they are present at the courts, and they are absent but expected to come and have confirm their attendance. Many times pick-up basketball players are willing to forgo selecting new, unknown, or unwanted players as teammates; in such cases, players are willing to reserve a spot (or spots) for friends, acquaintances, and/or other skilled players that are present who can help them to win games. The ritual selection of individual players to particular pick-up basketball teams is largely dependent on the ritual social interactions and the everyday customary practices of particular groups of pick-up basketball players.

On many pick-up basketball courts, the regular players—those who attend frequently, interact with known others, and can impact team selection—will know something of other players (i.e. recognize a player by name or recognize a player's face,

attire, etc.), or know something about other players (i.e. a player's skill set, a player's level of knowledge and experience with organized or pick-up basketball, a player's relationship to particular basketball groups or organizations, etc.) and use this knowledge to their advantage. It is common to find that most players come to play in pick-up basketball games with the idea that they will have to select or have to be selected to be part of a temporary informally organized team.

### **Pick-up Basketball as a Contested Social Activity that Occurs in Contested Social Space**

Pick-up basketball players amplify social problems and issues that exist in organized basketball because these players' socially construct and negotiate the rules and regulations of basketball without the authority typical in organized play. Many problems and issues frequently occur in single games and settings. Some of these problems and issues routinely arise as contested and negotiated socio-moral basketball activities (Jimerson 1996 and 1999, and McLaughlin 2004 and 2008).

Some problems manifest themselves in the actions and interactions of particular players during particular plays. These problems tend to become social issues because of the different perceptions and interpretations that players have about the actions, attitudes, interactions, and behaviors of other players concerning particular plays. Some players are unable to communicate their disagreements in efficient and effective ways. When disagreements plague and takeover games, players will often leave these games filled with strife, anger, and frustration. Yet many of these same players will continue to return to these same courts in search of playing games with the same players. It is within the

context of the Texas A&M University Student Recreational center were we can observe the contested nature of pick-up basketball courts, the players desires to return to those courts, and the negotiation of tension around culture, structure, and race.

### CHAPTER III

#### PLACE, SPACE, AND PICK-UP BASKETBALL

Most full-time unemployed college students have several hours of free time every day; many of these students report doing different kinds of things with their free time (Parkins 2004, and Leitner and Leitner 2012). Students report liking to relax, watch TV, drink alcohol, surf the internet, and sleep (Kim 2000, Ehn and Lofgren 2007, Sell, Lillie, and Taylor 2008, Leitner and Leitner 2012, and Mosonyi, Könyves, Fodor, and Müller 2013). Many students report spending free time with family, and socializing within networks of friends. These practices highlight a series of fixed social activities (on and off of campus) that fit into the structure of their everyday collegiate lifestyles (DeVault 2000, Southerton 2006, and Maher, Lindsay, and Bardoel 2010). In a generic way, many college students report spending free time in a wide range of activities they describe as productive and unproductive recreational events and leisurely ventures (Rojek 1999, Harper 2004, Balduf 2009, and Leitner and Leitner 2012, Grundy, Nelson, and Dyreson 2014). Although students are engaged in a number of activities, many simply report liking to spend free time playing recreational games and sports like pick-up basketball (Caldwell, Smith, and Weissinger 1992, Kilpatrick, Hebert, and Bartholomew 2005, and Kampf 2010).

In this chapter, I discuss some significant ways everyday pick-up basketball players make and negotiate meaning, and make decisions about their play on the recreational basketball courts inside of the Texas A&M University/(TAMU) Student



Recreation Center/(SRC). First, I discuss the broader social setting and context of College Station, Texas. After that, I describe TAMU and the TAMU SRC, focusing on the players and the courts where the games take place. I conclude by describing and discussing how pick-up basketball games and players inside of the TAMU SRC are routinely contested and negotiated.

### **College Station, Texas**

College Station is home to TAMU, and College Station is one of the largest cities in Central Texas even though it is only approximately 40 square miles of suburban and rural land (About College Station 2013). College Station is located in the Brazos Valley inside of Brazos County, which is located only a few hours between three of the U.S.'s Top 10 Largest Cities. Houston is the largest city in Texas and the fourth largest in the United States. San Antonio is the second largest city in Texas and the seventh largest in the United States. Dallas–Fort Worth and Greater Houston are the fourth and fifth largest United States metropolitan areas (“Top 50 Cities in the U.S. by Population and Rank,” Infoplease.com). To the southeast is Houston (which is about an hour and a half drive at 70-75 mph), to the north is Dallas-Fort Worth (which is about a 3 hour drive at 70-75 mph), and to the southwest is San Antonio (which is about a 3 hour drive at 70-75 mph).

Education is (and has always been) a central focus of College Station, chiefly because College Station was erected around TAMU. Before College Station became an official city, it was essentially The Texas A&M College and a train-stop on the Texas Central Railway line. The sign on the train station depot read: College, which gave rise to “College Station,” and the train stop “College” was where exclusively white, male

only, college students disembarked to college just after the U.S. Civil War (Boykin 2009). Texas A&M College became the first public institution of higher learning in Texas in 1876, but College Station officially became a city in 1938 after citizens voted 217 to 39 to incorporate the city.

College Station currently has approximately 52 public parks that cover more than 1,400 acres with amenities like tennis courts, basketball courts, swimming pools, hiking trails, etc. The City of College Station also offers a variety of adult and youth recreational programs such as softball, basketball, volleyball, and kickball leagues.

In 2010, approximately 17% of the College Station population was between the ages of 15 and 19, and 33% of the total population was between the ages of 20 and 24. Together, approximately 50% of the total College Station population was between the ages of 15 and 24 (FactFinder: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau 2010). From 2007-2010, 83% of the total College Station Population was enrolled in the either Blinn College or TAMU, as an undergraduate or graduate student. From 2007-2010, approximately 27% of the total College Station Population that was 25 years or older obtained a bachelor's degree. Approximately 31% of the College Station Population either had a graduate and/or professional degree, and 96% of the total College Station Population had at least a high school degree. In 2010, 60% of College Station residents obtained a bachelor's degree or higher. These educational statistics show a high rate of academic achievement and educational attainment from the residents of College Station. College Station, indeed, is a college town and a college-educated town that ranks among the nation's best (Cook 2013). In 2006, CNN Money Magazine

named College Station the most educated city in Texas and ranked it as the 11th most educated city in the U.S. (Top 25 Most Educated Cities, 2006).

In 2010, approximately 72% of the College Station residents were categorically classified as White, 14% were of Hispanic or Latino Origin, 9% were of Asian Heritage, and 7% were Black and/or African American. In 2010, approximately half of all the residents were female (49%). Overall College Station has retained its small town feel, yet has amenities similar to those in larger cities. In some ways, College Station differs from its sister city of Bryan (Bryan-College Station Sister Cities 2009).

The City of Bryan is not just a neighboring city of College Station—Bryan is a twin city that borders College Station to the northwest, and together Bryan and College Station comprise the Bryan/College Station Metropolis (Twin City Church of Christ, 2012, and Twin City Mission 2012). In 2010, approximately 93,857 people resided in College Station, and 76,201 in Bryan (FactFinder: United States Department of Commerce, United States Census Bureau 2010). Bryan started out as a small-town at the end of the Houston and Texas Central (H&TC) Railroad System that soon distinguished itself from many of the other small towns on the railway stop. Bryan flourished as a vibrant center of business and trade, chiefly because it was a central distribution center for freight and for Confederate troops during the Civil War (Person 2012). Bryan was officially incorporated in 1871, and during the late 1800's a large number of German, Czech, and Italian immigrants settled in the Brazos River Valley. Many of these immigrants' children and grandchildren left the neighboring area cotton farms to move to Bryan to enter the business and trade world. Soon thereafter, a merchant class

developed and thrived in Bryan, chiefly because many businessmen involved themselves in the export of cotton, grain, oil, livestock, wool, and hides.

Historically, the north side of Bryan is home to Bryan's Black American community, and this is primarily because the newly freed Black slaves settled in North Bryan around the Orleans and Preston Streets known as "Freedmanstown" just after the Civil War (Person 2012). Black-American businesses and professionals traditionally operated at the northern segregated end of Main and Bryan streets. Today, Martin Luther King Jr. Street serves as a primary artery to Bryan's largest African-American neighborhood that has a mix of commercial, religious, and residential structures along its entire length. During the 1910's and the 1920's migration increased from Mexico, and in recent decades Bryan has seen more immigration from the southern parts of Mexico and from a few Central American countries like Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua. In recent times, Bryan has taken pride in the rich diversity of its residents (History of Bryan, Texas 2011).

In 2010, approximately 8% of the Bryan Residents were between the ages of 15 and 19, and 13% of the total Bryan Population were between the ages of 20 and 24. Together, approximately 21% of the total population of Bryan was between the ages of 15 and 24, which is relatively low in comparison to 50% of the College Station residents (FactFinder: U.S. Department of Commerce, U.S. Census Bureau 2010). From 2007-2010, approximately 40% of the total Bryan population was enrolled in college or graduate school, and approximately 12.5% of the Bryan residents that were 25 years or

older had obtained a bachelor's degree. In 2010, approximately 7.5% of the total Bryan population had a graduate or professional degree, and approximately 76% of the Bryan population obtained a high school degree or higher. Approximately 20% of Bryan residents had a bachelor's degree or higher which is much lower than the academic achievement and educational attainment of the residents of College Station.

Although Bryan and College Station are often considered sister cities or twin cities, they differ significantly from one another along demographic characteristics. Bryan's demographics reflect the general diversity of the residents across the state of Texas, whereas College Station does not. For instance, in 2010, the population of Bryan was more racially and ethnically diverse than College Station. Roughly, 64% of the total Bryan population was categorically classified as White, 36% were of Hispanic or Latino Origin, 18% were Black and/or African American and 1.7% were of Asian Heritage. Approximately 50% of the residents in Bryan were female. Some of these differences between Bryan and College Station residents are reflected in how players engage one another in the TAMU SRC. These differences will be explored in the subsequent discussion of the pick-up basketball games.

### **TAMU in College Station: Student Life and Campus Culture**

TAMU (also commonly referred to as A&M) is one of two flagship coeducational research institutions in Texas (Rizzo and Ehrenberg 2004, Texas Colleges and Universities). TAMU has several branches throughout Texas, and one international branch in Qatar (Facts about Branch Campuses, 2014). TAMU is a land, sea, and space grant university, and currently TAMU has an endowment of approximately 7 billion

dollars, which steadily increases annually (History of the University 2012 and Haynie 2013). Haynie (2013) says the 10 schools with the highest endowments have an average endowment of approximately \$13 billion, and all but two schools on the list –University of Michigan-Ann Arbor and Texas A&M University-College Station – are private schools (Haynie 2013). TAMU-College Station is the main branch of the TAMU System; TAMU is currently ranked the 4<sup>th</sup> largest university in the U.S. (Snider 2014).

TAMU-College Station is located on the north side of the city, and borders Bryan to the northwest. TAMU opened in 1876 as the Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas with the mission of educating young white men in farming and military training. Almost a hundred years later (during the early 1960's) many changes took place at The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas. The Agricultural and Mechanical College of Texas underwent a formal name change to Texas A&M University.

Texas A&M University also underwent racial and gender desegregation in the 1960's, and the university consequently expanded its traditional student population to include women and minorities. Texas A&M University has expanded its research programs, its academic departments, its students' majors, and dropped the traditional requirements for participation in the Corps of Cadets. Currently, there are 10 academic colleges at Texas A&M University and over 120 undergraduate degree programs. There are more than 240 masters and Ph.D. programs to choose from at the university.

Although there are currently over 48,000 students who attend the university, only a fraction of the male and female students are in the Corp of Cadets (approximately 2,500 in the 2008-2009 school year). Besides having the 4<sup>th</sup> largest student body in the U.S.,

TAMU is geographically one of the nation's largest universities (approximately 5,200 acres). Most of the students who attend TAMU live in College Station—in many ways the residential demographics of the city mirror the racial, ethnic, and gender demographics of the TAMU Student Body.

In 2010, TAMU-College Station enrolled approximately 50,000 students, nearly half of which were female, roughly 48% (a&mfacts.com). In 2010, there were approximately 40,000 undergraduate students and 10,000 graduate students. Approximately 25% of the entering freshmen class was the first in their family to attend college. Typically, when the university semester is in full session, there is about a 65% increase in the town's residential population. Eighty-six percent of the students attending Texas A&M University are Texas residents. Although most of the students at TAMU are from Texas, the student body represents all 50 of the U.S. States and 130 foreign countries.

In the Fall semesters between 2008 and 2011, approximately 72% of the students were White, 13% Hispanic or Latino, 8% International, 4% Asian, and 3% Black and/or African (TAMU Enrollment Profile 2010 & 2011). In spite of the diverse representation of the student body, TAMU students are traditionally known for being racially and ethnically homogeneous, and religiously and politically conservative (Top 10 Most Socially Conservative Colleges, 2009). In 2012, the Huffington Post and the Princeton Review ranked TAMU-College Station as the most conservative college in the U.S. (The Most Conservative Colleges: Princeton Review List, 2012).

The social integration of students at TAMU is a major mission of the TAMU administration. Socialization and re-socialization at TAMU-College Station is an important aspect of understanding collegiate life, student achievement, and student advancement and success (Antonio 2001, and Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt 2010). I use the term re-socialization to describe the non-totalizing institutional influence of a large university campus on university students. Re-socialization at TAMU occurs through everyday involvement in campus life and culture with the learning of campus norms, values, and symbols that are different from those associated with the culture in which a person was raised (Astin 1984).

New TAMU students are likely to be exposed to alternative ways of perceiving and thinking, new cultural norms, and unfamiliar subcultures that promote rapid resocialization inside and outside of classrooms (Gurin 2005). Re-socialization at TAMU College Station often occurs before the start of classes for incoming freshmen, transfer students, and new graduate students. Student attendance and participation in recreation and intramural sports, and students' involvement and support of varsity sports are key ways TAMU students build and reinforce campus culture and a sense of community.

Students' collective sentiments and consciousness are largely due to the geographic regions that students come from, the similarity of students' social class and educational backgrounds, and the similarity in students' level of academic achievement and educational attainment prior to attending TAMU.



Most TAMU students live within a 200-mile radius of College Station. 75% of the Texas population resides within a 200-mile radius of College Station. Almost all of the students at TAMU are in the in top 50 percentile of their graduating high school class, roughly 99% (a&mfacts.com). Most of the TAMU Students are in the top 25% of their class (86%), and approximately 54% of all the students are in the top 10% of their graduating high school class (a&mfacts.com). Besides bringing similar social class backgrounds, educational achievements, and educational attainments to TAMU, TAMU students also foster a collective conscience via socialization into campus activities, customs, and traditions like Fish Camp (Fish Camp: A Freshman's First Tradition 2011).

Fish Camp is a 4-day freshman orientation program that takes place at Lakeview Methodist Conference Center in Palestine, Texas. Texas A&M University students ride buses from the Texas A&M campus to Lakeview, where they stay in air-conditioned, furnished cabins. Fish Camp welcomes freshman to Texas A&M University each year with the purpose of giving them an opportunity to have fun, make friends, and learn more about social traditions and campus life and culture.

There are over 800 social clubs and student organizations on TAMU's Campus that range from academic and service clubs to religious organizations and Greek Life; these organizations serve the interests of a wide variety of students. Many students become a part of social clubs and organizations, and many organizations often come together to play and compete in friendly recreational games and sports. When students attend varsity sports, and when students play recreational and/or intramural sports, they increase their opportunity for social interaction and integration into TAMU. There are

several sport-specific facilities on TAMU's campus, chiefly Kyle Football Field (Largest Crowd: 90,079), Reed Basketball Arena (Largest Crowd: 13,657), the Olsen Baseball Field/Stadium (Largest Crowd: 11,052), G. Rollie White Coliseum (Largest Crowd: 8,608), the Aggie Soccer Stadium (Largest Crowd: 8,204), the Anderson Track and Field Complex (Capacity: 3,500), the Mitchell Tennis Center (Largest Crowd: 2,339), and the Aggie Softball Complex (Largest Crowd: 2,341). All of these sports-specific facilities hold a large amount of people who are usually Texas A&M University students, alumni, friends, parents, and/or relatives that are committed to Aggie Athletics. TAMU administrators boast that 1 in 4 TAMU students play and/or participate in recreational or intramural sports; many of these activities take place in the TAMU SRC (Colleges Use Recreation Centers to Draw Students, 2002).

### **The TAMU SRC**

The TAMU SRC in College Station was built in 1995; the cost of the SRC was approximately \$36.5 million (TAMU SRC Natatorium). Although this sounds like a hefty price tag for only one university SRC, this amount is only a fraction of the \$4.4 billion that the National Intramural-Recreational Sports Association gave to 113 collegiate recreation centers in the U.S. between 1994 and 1999 (Jones 2001). Other universities like Washington State spent approximately \$40 million to construct a new SRC – the cost of construction was almost entirely funded by student fees (Jones 2001).

A visit to the TAMU SRC is well worth the money because it is the largest recreation center in the state of Texas, and it is home to one of the premier state-of-the-art recreational sports facilities in the entire U.S. (Randall 2002). Before the Mega-

Recreational Effect occurred at many U.S. Colleges during the mid 1990's, many university recreation centers were only a couple of basketball courts and maybe a small windowless free-weight area near the gymnasium (Bryant and Forsyth 2005). Since the mid 1990's, many U.S. Colleges have undergone athletic modernization and transformation with the construction of new and the renovation of old student recreation centers (Randall 2002, Reed 2014a and 2014b).

Randall (2002) says the TAMU SRC is more than your average gym - it is a health and wellness center that rivals many private exclusive sports and health clubs in the U.S. TAMU students are able to exercise at the SRC from sun up, until the midnight hour on most weekdays and on weekends.

There are 14 handball/racquetball/squash courts as well as 4 dance/activity rooms for Group RecXercise and Specialty Programs. In the open gymnasium area, there can be four full-court basketball courts, four volleyball courts, or 12 badminton courts in the southeast corner of the gymnasium. The same structural setup of the courts is present on the southwest side of the gymnasium. The other side of the gymnasium however, has rounded corners, dasher boards, and Plexiglas that is used for regulation size in-door soccer. At various times there will be how up to four indoor and four outdoor courts used to play pick-up basketball. These are the spaces that are most significant for my research of pick-up basketball players (Logan 2012).

### **Pick-up Basketball Players Inside of the TAMU SRC**

Most TAMU students taking one or more semester hours automatically become TAMU Student Recreation Members when they register and pay the recreational sports

fee that is incorporated in their tuition. Non-students may also have access to the recreation center. TAMU Affiliates are eligible to purchase discounted memberships, however TAMU visitors/guests are welcome to enjoy the SRC by purchasing a one-day pass for \$10.00, or a monthly pass for \$80.00 as of 2010 (General Membership, 2013).

Any person who desires to play recreational basketball is more than able to play in a wide variety of recreational basketball games and settings on the in-door and outdoor basketball courts. Not all recreational basketball players desire to play in pick-up basketball games, and not all recreational basketball players will be selected, or will have a chance to select, players to play in 5-on-5 full court pick-up basketball games. The teammate selection process of pick-up basketball players, as discussed previously, is often times a murky uncertain process, but is a central and essential aspect of who is able and allowed to play pick-up basketball.

In the most generic sense, pick-up basketball players inside of the TAMU SRC are typical flagship R-1 University, college-age males - mostly White/European American, middle-class suburban males between the ages of 18 and 23 (Stuber 2006 and Luckerson 2013). Many of these males come from the suburbs of major metropolitan cities within a 200-mile radius of College Station. There is also a significant amount of non-white, middle-class, suburban males between the ages of 18 and 23 who come from inside of major metropolitan cities within a 200-mile radius of College Station. Most males are familiar with how to play in pick-up basketball games with others. Quite a few players played for their varsity high school basketball teams, however most pick-up basketball players are simply average, everyday run-of-the-mill players.

Inside of the TAMU SRC, there are also quite a few atypical players. These atypical players are White/European American and non-white traditional college-age male Blinn College students. There are also White/European American and non-white urban TAMU students from metropolitan Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, or San Antonio. A few players are older than 23 years of age who are many times graduate students, staff, faculty, affiliates, and local businessmen and tradesmen. When the typical and atypical recreational basketball players congregate and interact on the courts and sidelines, there is a unique mixing of ideas, values, and beliefs about pick-up basketball. These manifest in the diverse (and routinely negotiable) cultural norms, values, and practices of players. The cultural norms, values, and practices of players vary, based on players' experiences and social class backgrounds.

## CHAPTER IV

### PLAYERS' PERCEPTIONS OF PLACE AND SPACE

Place and space are key considerations that effect the negotiation of culture, structure, and race. These considerations may organize the relationships of those individuals passing one another on streets, parks, and in public accommodations. Given this, it is important to examine how those who participate in recreational sports think about place and space. In this chapter I explore the players' perceptions of place and space and their influence on players' enjoyment, safety, competition, and privilege within the TAMU SRC. Exploring place and space will add an additional dimension to understanding how the players' make meaning of the cultural symbols in the play area, negotiate the various structural characteristics brought to the courts, and sort through the complexity of race and racial identity on the court.

#### **Players' Perceptions and Interpretations of Emotional, Physical, and Social Fulfillment**

Before I interviewed players in this study, I carefully observed how they acted and interacted individually with other players on the recreational basketball courts, and on the sidelines. I interviewed select players who self-identified and were socially identified by other players as "rec ball" regulars. I asked players a range of questions about their reasons for playing in the TAMU SRC, and about what they generally thought about the TAMU SRC. Below are five players' comments I categorized as

typical responses that were similar to many of the other pick-up basketball players' comments about playing pick-up basketball in the TAMU SRC. These comments shed light on players' perceptions on the emotional, physical, and social fulfillment of playing games.

Duke Coop, a 22-year-old White American male, Sr., business major from Dallas, said,

“It’s the first place I checked out. I didn’t go to the library, I went to the basketball court. I found the gym almost 2 weeks before classes started... I moved into the dorms two weeks before classes started and I had nothing to do. That time, I was here 7 days a week... there was nothing to do. After 2 days, this was the only thing I wanted to do.”

Rudy Hall, a 21-year-old Black American male, Jr., sociology major from Dallas, said,

“I love it here. It’s great. I come here to play (basket)ball and enjoy myself like all of the other young men in here today. I’m here to build friendships and camaraderie with others that are like-minded and love the sport. This is where I come to have a good time and to get away from the books for a little while - leave all the stress behind.”

Dave Thorn, a 19-year-old Black American male, So., Ed major from Ft. Worth, said,

“I love it in the gym, really love it. Rec ball here at A&M means a lot to me, it’s my safe haven. I come in here every day to blow off some steam, you know, to get a workout. I have a lot of friends that I met here... most of my friends I met here, guys and girls. I love the games in here, they are really competitive, besides, you can do a lot of stuff here at the rec.”

Nique Ward, a 20-year-old Black American male, So., Math major from Houston, said,

“I need the rec... the rec is a part of my everyday life... it’s my job really... I need to be in here.”

Bob Marly, a 21-year-old White American male, Jr., Business major from Houston, said,

“I first came to the gym with two guys who are now my two best friends in college. I didn’t know them when I got here to A&M. I was asking around about where’s the best place to play basketball... they told me let’s go to the rec, so we came to the rec.”

The players’ comments above are consistent with the literature explaining that sport is a positive force. Players share a sense of connectedness based on their level of involvement and commitment to pick-up basketball. This level of commitment is common among many players who are beginning their careers at the university, whether



they are incoming freshman or transfer students (Belch, Gebel, and Mass 2001). Some students demonstrate, both a love and need for pick-up basketball such that it is almost like a full time job (Madigan and Delaney 2009).

Players regard the places of the recreation center as spaces where friendships can be made and solidified. Indeed, players viewed participation in pick-up basketball as a means of developing relationships that would extend outside of the gym. For instance, although much of Marly's initial contact with other males occurred in the TAMU SRC, he explains how his recreational basketball relationships developed over time, and extended to other places outside of the courts.

The sociological literature and research addressing the significance of place highlights how peoples' esteemed value is directly linked to positive feelings, emotions, and a narrow range of meaning, identities, and interpretations. The players also identify with, and attach themselves to other pick-up basketball players in ways that influence their social interaction and expectations of other players, the creation, and development of particular relationships, and their senses of self (Kyle, Mowen, and Tarrant 2004). These players' perceptions and interpretations are reflective of their previous socialization experiences with basketball, composed of the socio-physical elements they incorporated in their interpersonal attachments, social relations, and group identities with other players.

## **Players' Perceptions and Interpretations of Safety**

When I interviewed players, I asked them a range of questions about their reasons for playing on particular courts, and what they thought about where, why, how, and whom they played with and against. Most of the players gave me specific information about playing with other players on particular recreational basketball courts. Below are four players' comments I categorize as typical responses, similar to many of the other pick-up basketball players' comments about particular pick-up basketball places and spaces inside of the TAMU SRC.

Bob Marly, a 21-year-old White American male, Jr., Business major from Houston, said,

“I come here to play basketball (pointing to the court- court #4) not to play with people that are learning how to play basketball.”

Rudy Hall, a 21-year-old Black American male, Jr., Sociology major from Dallas, said,

“I don't like playing over there because I don't want to get injured... sloppy play leads to injury. It's sloppy over here too, but I can handle it. It's the best we've got. I try not to go too hard - to prevent injury. Over there on the other courts, you have your hackers, your reachers, your foulers... your hand and arm slappers who have no kind of technique with the game. They travel, throw elbows... it's just a dangerous place to play. You can easily get hurt over there. They don't mean to do it on purpose, I think, they just don't know any better.”

Tom Jock, a 26-year-old White American male, grad student, Geology major from Houston, said,

“The guys I hate playing with are the guys that don’t know what they’re doing... guys who are out of control... no body control... guys that don’t know how to move properly... those kind of guys are dangerous, they are a hazard to themselves and to other people on the court. A lot of times guys find out the hard way by getting hurt... getting injured on the court... then they say, ‘man he doesn’t know what he’s doing.’ You can try to tell them that, but some guys just have to learn that the hard way.”

Dustin Hend, a 22-year-old Black American male, Sr., HR Development major and Business Management minor, from Houston, said,

“I learned... I now know where to play, how to play, and who to play with. You gotta pick your places very carefully.... I’ve seen a couple of dudes get hurt pretty bad. You can’t just come out here and play with anybody, you’ll get hurt trying to do that. You have to know who to play with... sometimes the play out here is sloppy... some guys don’t know what they’re doing. Their just running up and down the court like that guy right their (pointing to a guy on the court)... he’s a prime example. (Researcher: Describe him to me... what he looks like... is doing?) He’s wearing a baby blue cut-off shirt, shorts, and some worn-out

Nike shoes... you can tell he's not a hooper. He almost fooled me into believing he can hoop, but when I started looking at his shoes and socks I can tell... the combination from his shin down was not right... it just ain't right. He might be able to rebound because he's big, but he can't shoot... just look at him... he's throwing the ball at the hoop... you see it... that ain't how you shoot."

The players' comments above correspond with much of the sociological literature and research about how people make distinctions about particular sports places and spaces. Sports places and spaces are fundamentals to a sociology and geography of sport chiefly because they inform the ways in which people move and interact with one another in worlds of territoriality and hierarchies (Bale and Cronin 2003).

Like many of the TAMU students who matured over their collegiate careers, Bob Marly tells of his reduction of time spent playing pick-up basketball, and of his increasing selectivity with choosing particular places and players to play pick-up basketball. Bob Marly also emphasizes that he likes to play basketball, not to play with people that are learning to play basketball which he clarified. When I asked Bob to tell me about how he feels about pick-up basketball players that are learning to play, he said he has "no time for it, it is a waste of his time," and he "doesn't like to play with them," and that he would "prefer to stay home and watch TV rather than get frustrated or hurt in the process."

Rudy Hall and Tom Jock tell of distinctions they have made between particular recreational basketball places and spaces. Rudy Hall's comments about the sloppiness that ultimately leads to injury in his experience, and how he focuses on his safety by not

going too hard. Rudy also emphasizes that many players in the TAMU SRC have no kind of technique with the game, but in spite of the danger of playing with them, the players are all Aggies trying their best to defend against opposing players. Tom Jock tells of some of the players he dislikes playing with and against, because they don't know what they're doing. For Tom Jock these kinds of players are a hazard to him and to other players that cannot be told, but must be experienced firsthand via social interaction with dangerous/hazardous kinds of players on specific courts and settings.

Dustin Hend also tells of his experiences and interactions with a range of unsafe inexperienced pick-up basketball players. Dustin Hend emphasizes that he has learned where to play, how to play, and who to play with, and how to, pick his places very carefully to avoid injury. Another player also spoke about his safety after a game and about a brief altercation on the court.

Jay Pet, a 22-year-old Black American male, So., Blinn College student from Beaumont, Texas, said,

“I kinda had an attitude problem when I first came in here... I keep it hidden most of the time. It's in check, it's inside and if you know me you can tell when I'm pissed, but playing in here all the time helped me to learn how to control it. I try to not be a bully all the time, anymore. I'm not really anyway, but I know you saw me grab that guy last game. I just grabbed him and tried to get him to slow down a little bit... he was running wild all over the court, and I just had to grab him to slow him down. He's running everywhere... you saw me apologize to him afterwards... he was cool about it. I told him to slow down before he hurt

someone. I apologized to him: I was like, ‘man you just got to slow down, you gonna get somebody hurt.’ I’ve seen that happen before, guys going a 100 miles an hour right at you with the ball... that’s not the way to play basketball.”

Jay Pet’s comments illuminate overlapping ideas that lead to my next category, competition, as related to how pick-up basketball players make meaning and decisions about who, when, where, and how they play pick-up basketball.

### **Players’ Perceptions and Interpretations of Competition**

Many players describe and discuss their perceptions and interpretations of the courts and the players in ways related to their use of place and space. Several players responded in similar ways about some of the social interactions and experiences they had with other players on some of the different pick-up basketball courts. When I asked some of the players what they thought about the places and spaces in which they chose to play, these were some of their responses:

Mack Jack, a 20-year-old White American male, Jr., Sports Management major from Round Rock (North Austin), said,

“This guy I went to freshman camp with called me up and said, lets hit the rec. I didn’t know anything about this place, and I said, ‘let’s go.’ I played with him that first day and we ended up playing on the sorry courts... never again. I played over on the sorry courts my first day, and have never played over there again, ever. The guys on the sorry courts play like they’re out of control. They don’t know what they’re doing and they don’t care if they lose or not. It doesn’t matter to them at all. After I saw the competitive court... you can tell just by looking at

the players... the way they play with intensity... ever since that first day I have been with the most competitive people on the best courts. I don't like to play with just anybody. I come to play hard. I'm a competitive guy - that's the way I am. The courts are funny sometimes...sometimes, I have seen some people playing on the court, but when the really competitive people start coming they leave the court and go somewhere else. They don't want to play with that kind of competition. I think that they don't want to lose and have to give up the court so they will go someplace else where they can win, where it's easier to win. When you lose sometimes you have to wait like 4 games."

Tom Jock, a 26-year-old White American male, grad student, Geology major from Houston, said,

"Guys have to make a choice where they fit in as far as their talent level is concerned... they have choices they have to make when they come out here. Competitors, I think, will play against the best where ever the best is... they have this approach... this attitude that they want to compete against the best no matter how good they are. That's the difference between guys that come out here from being in the gym and wanting to get some cardio in. I love to play against some of the A&M guys that play for the team... it makes me a better player. It means something to me when they come out here... I want to play against them, and I want to beat them when they come in the gym, and I think that any real competitor wants that, and I think that the A&M players like that and they

respect that. I think that it makes them feel good about having a target on their back... having when people want to get them... beat them when they get on the court... making them have to play their best. I have scored a few times on them, and a few of the guys have gone pro... to Milwaukee, and L.A. and some of the guys that have gone overseas... I never tried out for the team, but I have played and practiced with them, a few of them, in their practice gym in Reed, but I was nervous. I wasn't in my zone... I didn't get a chance to get in my zone and find my niche because I was in their environment... in a new environment. All of these guys are good athletes... their not just good athletes, their talented. I have respect for all of them.”

Bob Marly, a 21-year-old White American male, Jr., Business major from Houston, said,

“So many of these guys don't know what they're doing out here - they can't play basketball. I don't want to bash people, but some of these guys out here, are just for the cardio. Some of them come with their friends, and because there are so many open courts, this is the only place that they can play... or are allowed to play. I don't blame them though, but stay outta my way. That guy there (pointing to a guy on the court), he's big and strong... kind of heavy set... he can't play. He can't dribble... can't shoot... look, he has no technique, but he has heart... that's basically what it comes down to out here sometimes.”



Rick Rolland, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Ag Leadership major, from Dallas, said,

“Most of the guys up here don’t know how to play basketball, but they come here to play basketball... they think they know what they're doing, at least most of them do... I’m speaking about the guys on the best courts out here! Basketball is a 5-on-5 sport, but out here it is a 1-on-1 sport... guys are trying to do it all themselves... there is no movement off the ball.”

Ty Roseman, a 22-year-old White American male, Jr., Sports Management major from Bryan, said,

“It’s nice to play in here... in a gym. I really like it. The rims and the courts, and, the nets. I get to play with some of my profs sometimes, and that’s always fun. There are always people in here. I wish that my friends could come in here more often, but it’s too much- it costs too much to come in here just to play basketball. I wish I could find the time to come in here more often because the competition in here is really good. Some of these guys are really good, they are way better than my friends, so I wish I had a chance to play with these guys more often.”

The players’ comments above illustrate many of the choices about where, how, and who to play pick-up basketball with and against. Mack Jack talks about the sorry courts and the most competitive courts, which is his interpretation the best courts, is telling of how he sees himself in relation to other players inside of the TAMU SRC.

Mack Jack makes it clear that for him competition and winning are central to where, how and whom he decides to play with and against. Tom Jock tells of players having to make choices about the places and spaces they want to play in as far as their own interpretation of their spirit of competition and their perception of their talent level is concerned. Tom Jock also demonstrates his understanding of players who are competitors, and players who are playing for cardio, which influences his decision and attitude, and his actions and interactions with particular kinds of players in specific places and spaces.

Bob Marly and Rick Rolland add to the explanations of particular pick-up basketball places and spaces as defining of players that have heart and play competitively, and of players that seek to maximize their personal enjoyment and fulfillment by trying to do it all themselves. Ty Roseman tells about the burden of not being able to play in the TAMU SRC, and of his desire to play in the SRC more, if it were not for his friends being financially unable to play. Like many of the other respondents, Ty Roseman enjoys the competition, and likes the challenge of playing pick-up basketball with other players who are better than he is. The players' comments above, concerning the competition on some of the recreational basketball courts is telling of the contested nature of games and players in particular TAMU SRC pick-up basketball places and spaces.

### **Players' Perceptions and Interpretations of Privilege**

In the last category, I found that pick-up basketball players used privilege to describe and discuss their perceptions and interpretations of pick-up basketball games

and players. Many of the pick-up basketball players responded positively about playing sports, and about their right as TAMU Students to play pick-up basketball inside of the TAMU SRC. When I asked players why they played pick-up basketball in the TAMU SRC, players explained to me about the places and spaces they played as privileges. Below are a few players' comments I categorized as reflective of many of the other players' comments about different basketball places and spaces.

Duke Coop, a 22-year-old White American male, Sr., Business major from Dallas, said,

“Sometimes it’s a pain to get here, but I hate outdoor ball. I hate outdoor ball because it’s a whole different game with those other guys. It’s less basketball, and it’s more physical with outdoor guys... it’s a different brand of basketball. In here, it’s different... I wouldn’t say that it’s a privilege to play in here because I pay for it, so it’s not really a privilege... the conditions are real nice, but like I said I pay for it. I have turned into a gym rat. In Dallas, I used to play outside but I never play outside anymore. I’m a gym rat now. When I go home I play at the YMCA or I find a gym...I have to play inside now. The backboards don’t have to be glass, they could be made of wood as long as it’s inside... indoor. I hate double rims, fuck that, I’m a shooter, I don’t like double rims. The people who make those rims expect for people to hang on the rims. Plus, they always build them like 10”2... it’s like they expect people to hang on the rims. Cheap \$20 rims.”

Dave Thorn, a 19-year-old Black American male, So., Ed major from Ft. Worth, said,

“I play on court #4 because that is where the competition plays... that’s where the good games are. I have come here to A&M to take over that court, so that is where I play. They have Volleyball and Badminton on the other court today so we were forced to move over here. I have played on every court in the rec, and I have ruled every court that I have been on. I own court #4. There are 8 courts in the rec, but they only use about 4 of the courts a day for basketball... plus outside, the outdoor courts. I think they only have 2 courts... over by the swimming pool, I think. I have never played outside... I don’t because I have bad knees even though I am young. The same plays that I make in here, in the gym, I can’t make on the outdoor courts. The concrete is bad for your knees out there. I am spoiled by playing in the gym anyways... definitely spoiled... It’s an honor... a privilege to play in here. I know people’s privileges can be taken away easily in here - if you break the rules in here, your gone. There’s no tolerance for fighting or foolishness in here. There is no tolerance for cursing and all of that... but, basketball players get heated sometimes, but you have to control yourself. You have to respect yourself and respect the school first. There’s really no tolerance for cursing, but people slip all the time... that’s usually as far as it goes. No fights though.”

Nique Ward, a 20-year-old Black American Male, So, Math Major from Houston, said,

“I have never been in any fights, but I have gotten into a few confrontations... It usually happens after a bad call or a really hard foul. You just feel like something, like... that is uncalled for... you are being disrespected for what you're trying to do and it's totally unnecessary. You have to stand up for yourself and that will cause a confrontation. I usually say, 'don't do that again or... if that happens again.' The problem is, as men, we are not going to back down from each other... as people period. Other words... usually, other words are said, and that's how a confrontation usually begins. No one is willing to back down. The last time I got in a confrontation like that was in my freshman year. I'm a sophomore now, my temper is a lot more calm now, I have calmed down. Like I said before, it's a privilege to play in the gym, and I'm trying to take advantage of that privilege.”

The three players above describe and discuss the courts and games, and their social interaction with players on particular courts. Like the respondents above, many players expressed that the TAMU SRC was a privileged place to play ball, and a few players asserted that because they were TAMU students it was one of many social advantages they felt entitled to, and sought to maximize as an important part of their collegiate growth, development, and experience. Duke Coop, like many of the other players, asserted his privilege in association with material and social rewards of being a TAMU student, like having access and opportunities for campus housing and

recreational facilities. Duke Coop also expressed strong emotional and psychological senses of self that he showed in his self-confidence, comfortableness, and sense of belonging and worth as a player on the pick-up basketball courts (Kimmel and Ferber 2003). While players like Duke Coop often report difficulties of getting to the gym, many such players simultaneously assert that they never play outside anymore. Like many of the other respondents, Duke Coop interprets pick-up basketball games and players inside of the TAMU SRC as a different brand that is distinct from other brands of pick-up basketball that exist in outdoor non-collegiate settings and contexts.

Dave Thorn and Nique Ward describe and discuss the privilege of playing pickup basketball inside of the TAMU SRC. Dave Thorn states that with stern competition, men's temperatures are sure to rise, but that as a player who is a TAMU student, he has to respect himself and respect the school first. Dave Thorn also illustrates the importance of adhering to known and unknown pick-up basketball rules via adhering to broader measures of appropriate educational conduct and behavior on-campus that enable him to play pick-up basketball in the TAMU SRC. Even though Dave Thorn says, we were forced to move over here to another court, he emphasizes a particular place and space he routinely plays in with particular groups of players. Dave Thorn also reveals he does not know much about the outdoor courts, nor does he care to know anything about them because like many of the other young men who openly professed to me they are gym rats, he is spoiled by playing inside of a gym. Dave Thorn also tells of how TAMU SRC privileges can be taken away easily if rules are broken, which is both a measure of players' self-control and institutional efforts to reduce conflict, violence, fighting, and

foolishness. Dave Thorn demonstrates how pick-up basketball players and educational institutions like TAMU work together to significantly influence people's actions, interactions, and use of recreational sports places and spaces.

Nique Ward asserts like many of the other young men, he has calmed down a lot more, and is constantly trying to take advantage of the privilege of playing pick-up basketball inside of the TAMU SRC. Nique Ward also says although he feels like some fouls are harmful and totally unnecessary, he understands that these are part of games he chooses to play in with particular players in highly competitive pick-up basketball places and spaces. Although verbal altercations routinely occur in pick-up basketball, Nique Ward, like many of the other players, constantly work to balance their emotional and physical outbursts by channeling their aggression in acceptable ways. This is reflective of how many of the players inside of the TAMU SRC think it is an honor, and seek to take advantage of being able to play in a small privileged pick-up basketball places and spaces.

## **Discussion**

The TAMU SRC pick-up basketball players illuminate different meanings and decisions about pick-up basketball places and spaces via their social interaction and interpretation with players and games. Most of the pick-up basketball players I interviewed, referred to the TAMU SRC pick-up basketball courts as places that are explicit, fixed locales that are identifiable by particular sets of situated expectations and behavior. In this sense, player's developed understandings of particular social locations that influence their identities, experiences, and memories about their everyday practices,

as well as their understandings of themselves in relation to broader pick-up basketball classification and stratification systems to which all players belonged.

All the players I interviewed made specific meaning and decisions about pick-up basketball places and spaces, which mirrored their beliefs about how particular geographic locations were connected to certain values and feelings of desire and the need for euphoria and fulfillment. For many players, their choice of particular places was based on the customary practices and the expectations of such practices that occur in specific geographic locations. When taken together, players' use of pick-up basketball places is not unique, special, or distinct - places, in and of themselves, are social sites distinct from other locales, values, and social practices that contribute to peoples' sense of attachment and belonging (Williams, Patterson, Roggenbuck, and Watson 1992, and Milligan 1998). Pick-up basketball places are socio-physical blueprints of particular geographic locales, however these places come into existence when players give meaning to part of larger undifferentiated sports spaces (Tuan 1977 and 1979). As players shift from one space to another, which requires their movement from one place to another, their places require players to have generic conceptual understandings of how spaces are used to construct place. Harmonious co-dependency is required for place and space to exist, chiefly because place insinuates material dimensions and constructs, and space insinuates temporal locales and social relations.

## **Conclusion**

TAMU students' everyday recreational actions, interactions, and activities in pick-up basketball are important because they are linked to players' senses of self,



identities, lifestyles, and life choices. These characteristics are important for players' interpretations and negotiations of meaning about places and spaces.

Many regular TAMU pick-up basketball players like to play in safe on-campus places and spaces with sober like-minded players whom like to compete in specific kinds of ways. Many TAMU players choose to play inside of university-sponsored studentcentered gymnasiums, if and when these kinds of opportunities arise. Similarly, other urban and suburban pick-up basketball players also turn away from the outdoor concrete asphalt recreational basketball courts in their local neighborhood public parks to play inside of places and spaces like TAMU SRC (Dalgarn 2001, Zizzi, Ayers, Watson II, and Keeler 2004, McKenzie, Cohen, Sehgal, Williamson, and Golinelli 2006, Reed 2007, and Huesman Jr, Brown, Lee, Kellogg, and Radcliffe 2009). Within places like the TAMU SRC, players spend time negotiating the cultural milieu of space. This is the subject of the next chapter.

## CHAPTER V

### CULTURES AND SUBCULTURES OF PICK-UP BASKETBALL PLAYERS INSIDE OF TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY STUDENT RECREATION CENTER

Pick-up basketball cultures and subcultures are created, negotiated, and developed via the everyday actions and interactions of players (Peterson 1979, Swidler 1986, Harrison and Huntington 2000, Eliasoph and Lichterman 2003, and Schwartz 2006). Cultures of players, in the broadest sense, are the sum total of learned beliefs, values, and customs that inform and undergird the dominant actions, interactions, and behaviors of players in pick-up basketball. While cultures also encompass dominant material items, artifacts, and the social ideology of players within particular societies, subcultures are manifest via the distinct values, norms, and practices of particular groups that are different from the societal majority. Subcultural groups of players exist under dominant cultures of players; these competing cultures, even the benign ones, often tend to trigger tension and conflict in society.

Players, who are part of particular informally organized teams and games, construct cultures and subcultures via their social interaction in large and small groups (Elias and Dunning 1966, Fine 1979, Fine and Kleinman 1979, Nixon 1993, Nichols, Tacon, and Muir 2013). Large and small groups of players in specific social settings and contexts, routinely work to re-create and maintain their groups by acting and interacting in ways that account for, describe, and explain much about the socio-cultural bargaining processes of players. The socio-cultural bargaining processes of players are the basis for

much of the meaning-making and decision-making that players make and give to themselves and other players (Fine 1979, Fine and Kleinman 1979, and Stolte, Fine, and Cook 2001).

Large and small groups of pick-up basketball players form cultures and subcultures (a.k.a. micro-cultures/idiocultures) comprised of dyads and triads; these dyads and triads make up different large and small group cultures and subcultures of players via the ritual social interaction and relations that players have with one another in these groups (Fine 1979, Fine and Kleinman 1979, and Landers and Fine 1996).

In this chapter, I discuss how players inside of the TAMU SRC create and negotiate cultures and subcultures via their social interaction with large and small groups of players. First, I discuss how players make meaning and decisions about material objects and items. I show how players challenge and contest the physical attire and the social dispositions of other players. After that, I show how players make and use small groups to create and maintain social and symbolic boundaries. I show how these boundaries are reflected in the cultural attitudes and demeanor of players. I also explain: 1) how players become involved and participate in large and small groups based on their interpretation of groups' collective practices, and 2) how players manage their interpersonal and face-to-face interactions with particular players in large and small groups. After that, I describe players' decisions to play with large and small groups based on their cooperative and competitive dispositions that are expressed as cultural and subcultural approaches and attitudes. I also show how players follow routines via regularly playing with small subcultural groups who most often are close friends and

roommates. Finally, I explain how players use both material objects and non-material ideas to construct and negotiate cultures and subcultures of large and small groups. I close by showing how small groups of players create and negotiate competitive and cooperative interactions, which often times strengthens specific social bonds between players and small groups (Bowlby 1979).

### **About Pick-up Basketball Cultures and Subcultures**

There are many different cultures and subcultures of pick-up basketball players, and many different subcultures within subcultural groups of players (Anderson and Millman 1998, Jimerson 1996, McLaughlin 2004, and Atencio and Wright 2008). The varied cultures and subcultures of players are created and maintained collectively by the players themselves, via the amalgamation of the formal and informal rules that make up much of the everyday norms and values of players, which are expressed, challenged, and negotiated by players.

Players use cultural and subcultural objects to understand and interpret particular players, games, courts, sidelines, and social settings. These objects are markers and indicators of players and groups interpretations of values, intentions, expectations, and practices. Players also form and solidify their pick-up basketball notions, identities, and practices around competitive and cooperative attitudes and dispositions within small groups. Small groups of players significantly impact much of the day-to-day norms and performances of players like how, when, and where players intend to play, and whom players routinely choose to (and not to) play with and against. In specific pick-up basketball settings and contexts, players use jargon-based language and gestures filled

with contested meaning about the competitive and cooperative actions and attitudes of players, and about the particular values, customs, and practices of players.

Much of the norms of players are manifest in the day-to-day practices of players on particular courts and sidelines, via interpersonal and face-to-face interaction. Players routinely express and communicate particular values, verbally and non-verbally, and use interaction to make and negotiate cultural and subcultural meaning about particular courts and social settings. Players transmit their understandings of themselves, others, courts, and sidelines via their use of social and symbolic codes of action and interaction (DiMaggio 1997, and Lamont and Molnár 2002). Through players' communication, language, and nonverbal messages, cultures and subcultures are performed as every day social practices (Harrison, Lawrence, and Bukstein 2011).

### **TAMU SRC Cultures and Subcultures of Pick-up Basketball Players**

Players inside of the TAMU SRC create and sustain pick-up basketball cultures and subcultures as social processes of the organizational management of players (Ravasi and Schultz 2006). Players' management of pick-up basketball cultures and subcultures are often understood as hands-on straightforward activities that are based on a set of shared cognitive assumptions that guide the generic actions, behavior, and the personal and interpersonal relations of players. Players create, negotiate, and define and re-define what is culturally appropriate and inappropriate within particular social settings and contexts (Allison 1981 and 1982a, Allison and Lueschen 1979, and Stewart and Smith 2010).

In my observations and interactions with various players, I found that players' used group cultures and subcultures as an important way to make specific bonds, and to maintain particular loyalties and commitments to: 1) other players, 2) large and small groups, and 3) specific social settings among the broader aggregate of courts. Players also use large and small groups to make meaning, sense, and decisions about whom they will routinely play with and socialize with, inside and outside of the TAMU SRC. I have found also that many players assessed and made decisions about material and nonmaterial aspects of pick-up basketball via questioning and confronting the decisions and choices of other players in small group interaction. Additionally, players use a complex mixture of perception, experience, and interaction to culturally fit in with small groups, while excluding and ostracizing others via individual internal justifications about how material items and non-material aspects of pick-up basketball should be approached, understood, and used (Reay, Crozier, and Clayton 2009).

Much of the practices and activities that take place on particular courts are important social and symbolic signs that players use to communicate complex varied negotiations and interpretations of cultural and subcultural competencies, which are chiefly related to players' demonstrations of specific intentions and expectations (Birrell 1981, Crosset and Beal 1997, and Donnelly 2000). As players work to manage and negotiate their impressions, they use interpersonal relations to bargain social and spatial distance in order to have close intimate interactions with particular small groups

(Sanders 2004, and Jones, Potrac, Cushion, Ronglan and Davey 2011). Players' use of material culture is important for understanding how they structure and negotiate racial dynamics. First, let us explore the players' use of material culture.

### **Pick-up Basketball Players' Use of Material Culture**

Material objects are cultural products that help players to construct, negotiate, and affirm their ideas and beliefs about the best and worst players and contexts in which they are willing to play (Mills 1959 and Kaufman 1997). Players also used material objects to identify with, and to relate culturally to other players, and to the game of organized basketball (Naismith 1941). The objects that players surround themselves with have important meaning for players' identities, participation, and interaction because these objects are linked to their presentations of themselves (Goffman 1959, and Jones, Potrac, Cushion, Ronglan, and Davey 2011). Material objects then, serve as cultural signs and indicators of how players want and expect other players to approach them, and to act and interact with them as part of small groups.

Material objects are cultural items, which are collectively created and best understood as fruits of collective production that are fundamentally social in their genesis (Griswold 2012, p. 48). The material objects that players use bring culture and social life together as special constructions that fuse thought and action together in players' thinking and daily practices (Knappett 2011). The essence of material objects is derived from players' use, and the anticipated function of such objects (Knappett 2011,

p. 170). Players rely on material objects to help them to think about themselves, other players, and particular games and contexts, and to make sense and meaning about other social and symbolic cultural and subcultural constructions (Hindmarsh and Heath 2003).

Below are three field note journal entries and one interviewees' response that illuminate and explain much about the human-artifact fusion between players and their material objects, which are collectively-created cultural productions (Knappett 2011). The field notes are a description of my actions and interactions with specific small groups of players who are highly competitive and who are known to be vocal and prone to arguments on the courts and sidelines.

The players in the field note entry below use material objects to transmit culturally appropriate and inappropriate messages and meaning, which they express via the aesthetic and functional use of particular material objects (Baudrillard 1996, Stets and Burke 2000, and Vincent, Imwold, Masemann, and Johnson 2002).

September 2006- 3:30 p.m. - The Student Recreation Center, College Station, TX

It's Fall 2006...The 1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday of school, 2 day's in. I was talking with Reggie on the sideline; Quincy, C-Day, Davi, and Tall Pete were chillin,' all waitin' to play next. There was this big white guy who was kinda heavy set with tight swimming shorts on. Quincy and Tall Pete were talking about him and what he was wearing...they over heard me asking Reggie, "Yo, what's up with that guy? What's he got going on?" (I was pointing and hinting at the size of the guy's basketball shorts as Quincy and Tall Pete were discussing.) The guy's



shorts were not only small and tight, they exposed his mid and upper thighs. These shorts are not shorts that are common for contemporary basketball players in the Student Recreation Center. Quincy and Tall Pete initially hinted to me about his shorts, and when I began to laugh, Tall Pete said, “Maybe that's what he wants to do...maybe he's more free... more comfortable like that... free! (as he shrugged his shoulders...I believe he was saying this in his usual underhanded sarcastic manner while trying to hold a straight face.) The three of us busted out in laughter. Reggie jumped to the guy's defense and said to me, “Don't be talking under your breath...I'ma tell him!” I said, “You can tell him...I don't care!” I said it in a masculine manner as if I didn't care, but I really did. Just as the guy walked aimlessly over our way, Reggie said, “Dude! Dude!” trying to get the guy's attention. As Reggie was about to engage the guy in conversation, Quincy sprung up from the bench and asked him loudly, “Dude, why your shorts so little, man?” The guy didn't say anything. I could tell that he was kinda embarrassed. He just rocked back and forth standing there while he tried to pull his shorts down in a sort of stretching-the-clothes manner. Quincy insisted on getting an answer by raising his voice and repeating the question and tapping the guy on the tricep as he tried to look away, “Hey yo! Yo, why your shorts so little man?” The guys said, “Awe man... I don't know...these are my shorts” as he pulled on his shorts. We all (except the guy in the short shorts) just kinda chuckled. I chuckled because I didn't think Quincy was gonna insist that the guy really explain why he chose to wear what he was wearing. I chuckled and turned

my head to act as if I was not interested in the conversation, not because of how the guy was being teased, but because of how Quincy had put him on the spot.

The field note journal entry above tells about some of the players' interactions on the sidelines, and about some of my perceptions and interpretations. It also describes my actions and interactions with a particular small group of players. Some of my own cultural biases are exposed from the ideas and hints of other players, specifically related to how I and other players learned to make sense and meaning of particular basketball objects. Often times I listened in on many conversations and discussions about various basketball topics related to players' use of clothing, shoes, courts, and contexts, and have discovered a wide variety of arguments and interpretations based on different players' use of material basketball objects. The field note journal entry above, however, explains some ways players use common objects to tease and confront one another about what they think is culturally appropriate and inappropriate uses of material objects.

In the next field note journal entry, I show how another group of players make sense of, and negotiate other players' use of material objects in ways that socially define and delineate between cultures and subcultures of small groups. Specifically, I show how players differentiate between those who they perceive as knowing how to play and those they perceive as not knowing how to play. The field note entry below is about a conversation among a small group of players at one of the courts, which is known to be highly competitive. Some players on this court are vocal and sometimes prone to arguments and disputes.

Monday-October 13, 2008 @ about 4:30 p.m., The Student Recreation Center,

College Station, TX

I'm sitting on the sideline talking shit with some of the guys. We're all a little pissed because we lost a game we should've won. It's me, Davi, Reggie, Kaymo, Coach (one of the intramural refs and basketball profs at the school) and Doc Banner. One of the unknown guys walked over to us dribbling a basketball. He was wearing running shoes and an Aggie Hat backwards, which was strapping down his long hair... like a long hair skater-type. I saw his 'loud blue shoes' because he almost stepped on my hand. He asked aloud to anyone in our little group, "You guys got next?" No one answered. We are all kinda tired, and doing the usual - a post-game evaluation of our play in which we lost essentially by a buzzer beater. Kaymo said real loud, "Naw, naw, we don't have next... we're done!" He directed the guy with a wave towards some of the other guys who were at the opposite end of the court. When the guy walked away Kaymo said loudly to our little group, "I had a coach in high school who told me one time, 'Don't ever play basketball with a guy with running shoes on, who wears a hat backwards.' I always remembered that, because there was this one time that a guy walked in the gym here, wearing running shoes and his hat backwards. I just sorta laughed to myself thinking about what my coach told me. I wasn't gonna take what my coach said seriously, and then you'll never guess what happened? So we got out on the court, and, let me tell ya... that guy must have hurt every last one of us! We all ended up limping off the court, limping out of the gym, limping all the way home. You can't play with a guy who wears

a hat and running shoes on the basketball court. They don't know what they're doing. They'll end up hurtin' themselves and hurtin' everyone in the process.”

Kaymo is part of a competitive small group of regular players. He often shares the information and experience he has gained over his life with many of the younger players, especially because he is an older married man and father. Kaymo's comments about the material objects that players use, explains much about the human-artifact fusion between players and their material objects, which are cultural and subcultural productions manifest in players' social performances.

The field note entry above, describes Kaymo's interaction with us as a large and small group, and his interaction with another player who is a small group outsider. Kaymo's comments to our small group illuminates some ways that he learned to make and negotiate meaning about how pick-up basketball players use material objects like clothing. Material objects are cultural items that possess social and symbolic meaning, which players use to transmit messages and to make indications and distinctions about players. In this sense, Kaymo's comments were socio-cultural expressions of values and beliefs about how to play with experienced and inexperienced pick-up basketball players. Kaymo's comments also create social and cultural distance from small group outsiders, all the while serving to shield and protect our small group from social interference, cultural division, and physical harm.

My next data entry tells of an interviewee's response that illuminates how small groups of players make sense and negotiate meaning via their selection (and their avoiding having to select) particular players in small group settings and contexts.

Mark Visi, a 23-year-old White American male, Sr., Sport Management major from Friendswood (Greater Houston), said,

“Up here, there was a guy a few years ago that used to come in with Lugz on (Lugz are popular urban boots that are endorsed by key professional basketball players and celebrities from the world of hip hop). Every time he was in here playing, he was wearing jeans and a white t-shirt, and Lugz to play basketball in... I never understood it. I knew not to pick him up, or play with him. Most of the time he would call ‘next.’ I wouldn’t play with him, but other people played with him. He would pick up people to play with him, but they wouldn’t pass him the ball.”

The interviewee above discusses a particular player among his small group of regulars, which he remembered because of the player's use of particular material objects that he failed to understand properly. The interviewee found these objects to be socially and culturally inappropriate. Players, who wear culturally inappropriate shoes and clothing like Lugz, demonstrate short-sighted understandings of how other players make meaning and decisions about symbolic signs of incompetence (History: Company Background, 2013). Players who send out such signals frequently float from one recreational basketball court to another, and often find it difficult to find their niche

within a particular small group of regulars. Players that wear Lugz often go from court to court, looking to play a game with other players willing to play with them.

The interviewee's negative evaluation of the player's boots ultimately resulted in him not playing with or wanting to pick him up, even though other players chose to play with him. The interviewee also went on to assert that when he sees particular players playing on the courts that he regularly plays on, he is able to easily interpret other players' use of material objects in ways that allow him to avoid having to select similar kinds of players as teammates. The interviewees' comments also illuminate cultural and subcultural perceptions and interpretations that do not account for players' broader identities, or consider the social forces and cultural conditions that influence particular players' uses of material objects.

In my next field note entry, I tell about how a particular player on one of the courts struggled to make sense and negotiate meaning about another player's actions and interactions. These actions and interactions resulted in emotional outbursts and perpetual verbal responses to this problem.

Wed - October 15, 2008 @ 4:30 p.m., The Student Recreation Center, College Station, TX

I walked in the gym today. The first person that drew my attention was John. A few of the regulars have called him a natural athlete, competitor, and a skilled player... this seems to be accurate to me being that John led his intramural basketball team to the championship last year, before getting beaten by Ronnie,

Regan, Dick, and Jim's team in the finals. John/Johnny Hops (as some of us refer to him because he can 'jump outta the gym') was asked to play intramural football in the fall of 2008. He told me, "Football is not my thing...I don't really know what I'm doin'...I'm not even sure why I'm out here." Even though his team placed as 'runner up' last year (the 2007-2008 School Year,) John was unable to lead his pick-up basketball team to victory today. John seemed more than irritated today, and he was speaking more than usual. He was running up and down the court talking loudly saying, "You gotta stop foulin' man...you hangin' all over me...you been all over me the whole game...Yo, you gotta watch it, man...I'm tellin' you..." I saw the guy that John was playing against in the post (position), and I giggled to myself thinking, 'that guy is gonna hurt someone'. After the game, I pulled John aside and said, "Yo, John, just chill out, man! You know you can't even be mad at that guy. Just look at him? Look at what he's wearing?" John responded in a somewhat irritated manner, but I saw a sense of relief as he reflected on the situation. Then he said, "Yea, man. I guess you're right. He's wearing swimming trunks for God sake."

The field note also describes my observation of, and face-to-face interaction with this emotionally charged player. His behavior influenced both his and my own understanding of how other players act and behave via our small group reasoning and interpretation. Further, the field note demonstrates how different players' actions and interactions are important cultural aspects for interpreting players' interactions and behaviors on the pick-up basketball courts and sidelines. Players many times get

frustrated on the courts about the actions of others players. This is complicated further when frustrated players have overlooked that the offending player has failed to properly use material objects, like basketball shorts and shoes. After the interviewee calmed himself down and reduced his emotional stress-level and anxiety about playing against this player, he made a few unconscious gestures and a swift remark that indicated he understood that the player he was playing against was socially unaware and culturally inexperienced.

The field notes and interviewee's response above, illuminate how players learned to make sense and negotiate meaning about others use of material objects. These objects are not always essential indicators of a player's skills, talents, or identities. Rather these objects are negotiated and maintained in small group interaction—which is seen in players' competition and cooperation.

### **Competition and Cooperation as Large Group Cultures and Subcultures**

Competition and cooperation are base beliefs and values that undergird much of the everyday cultural and subcultural practices of players (Nelson and Cody 1979, Albert 1991, and Crosset and Beal 1997). Players' cultural and subcultural practices influence the creation and maintenance of distinct large groups, and the social bonds of specific players. Within large group settings and contexts, players socially construct and negotiate competitive and cooperative practices on the court and on the sidelines (Nelson and Cody 1979, and Cudd 2007). Some players' motivations are attributable to their focus on individual effort, while some players are focused on teamwork. These



individual and collective foci make up the broader culture of competition in U.S. Sport and Society (Edwards 1970, and Klein 1991).

Competitive and cooperative values manifest themselves in the patterned actions and activities of pick-up basketball players, which is evident in players' large group interactions (Weiler 2013). Players learn pick-up basketball behavior via sport-based socialization, and in their associations with a range of influential others in large groups (Fine 1979, and Jones, Potrac, Cushion, Ronglan and Davey 2011).

Based on two interviewees' responses, I demonstrate how players interpret playing pick-up basketball as a cultural and subcultural practice among a large group of competitive regulars. The first interviewee tells of his every day pre-game pick-up basketball rituals, and how he selects where he plays, and whom he routinely plays with from the larger group of players and courts.

Tom Jock, a 26-year-old White American male, grad student, Geology major from Houston, said,

“When I come up here to play, I never call anybody before I come. I just come up here and see whose here. There's always guys here that I know, a bunch of regular guys that we play with. It's really the same group of guys that are constantly here. But...sometimes I don't really care who I play with, but, sometimes...I wonder why some guys really come to play on this court. There is a difference between the courts. The better athletes stick together, they prefer to play together...that's where the talent is established...guys like me that are interested in the better talent, the better players. Some guys, they will just come

here to witness what's going on... they'll just stand there and watch for a few minutes before they make a decision to either put down their stuff and play, or move on to another court. You see guys all the time looking around for a court and for competition that they can play against. Their looking from the sidelines, and you can see it in their face. Their saying, 'Man, there is no way I'm playing on this court,' because they fear that they will get embarrassed on the court we play on. People know the courts with the better athletes, the better players."

The interviewee's response tells about his broad perceptions and interpretations of players who congregate on many of the pick-up basketball courts. He also explains his perception of large groups of competitive regulars who often times interact and play with slightly skilled and mildly competitive players. The interviewee also made and explained his understanding of social and symbolic boundaries between himself and other large groups of players via his competitive approach, attitude, and demeanor. In a follow-up interview with this player, he told me more about some of the differences between the players on some of the particular courts.

"The comp{etition} today... it's not that good today. There are a few guys that don't really know how to play team ball, and that's going to affect the team.

There is a team that has next, and they don't look that good. There is about 3 of the guys on that team that know what they're doing, and two that don't. Those three guys are going to have to step up their game and do some things that they don't ordinarily do, if they are going to win. I feel sorry for them because they are not in a position to win. Those 3 guys are going to have to create shots for

themselves because the other players on their team are not going to help them get good shots. I know that I'm not a 1-on-1 player! I know that I need help from the team, from my teammates. I have to rely on picks, I need picks if I'm going to be able to get off a couple of good shots! I would have to do more than usual if I was on that team with them so, I decided to get next and wait. I'd rather wait and construct my own team. When you play with players that know what they are doing, the game comes easier to you. You don't have to create as much, and you can work off the ball more. When you only have 3 players that can play team ball, you can't count on the other two guys to help you. You end up trying so hard and getting burnt out that you eventually become ineffective. You end up not being able to help the team at all."

The interviewee's follow-up comments tell much about how he makes sense, meaning, and decisions about other players in large competitive groups; he also shows some ways that players turn down short-term opportunities for better long-term opportunities. He explains some of his decisions for being part of particular pick-up basketball teams and social settings that influence the kinds of social relations and bonds he has with other players in large and small groups.

The next interviewee's comments tell of his approach and experiences with playing with highly competitive large groups. This interviewee also tells of his interpretation of the social interactions and relations he made with others, on the courts and sidelines.

Dusty Rain, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Sports Management major and Business and Communications minor, from Dallas, said,

“I didn’t start playing ball in here until about my sophomore year because I really didn’t play basketball at all in high school. I enjoyed playing sports in high school because I’m really competitive, so, I started coming to the rec in my sophomore year during the summertime. Whenever I had some free time I would come to the rec and shoot around with some of the guys. I learned how to play out here... I’ve been able to meet a lot of people. You get to know everybody out here pretty quick because it’s all the same guys usually. It’s about the same 100 people that are always here. I love playing out here. Its fun, and, some of these guys are really good. I played with some of the guys that actually made it on the A&M Team, but not everybody is that good. It’s too bad for some of those guys because I know that they made it on the team, but their grades... they couldn’t stay on the team because of their low grades. Out here, it’s like we are a small family... it’s real family-oriented out here. It’s like playing with your fathers, brothers, and cousins for the most part. Everybody knows everybody, and it doesn’t take long for that to happen. It’s usually all the same guys that are in here, guys that you play with and against day-in and day-out, but don’t get me wrong there is conflict in every family. They’re going to be brothers out here that don’t talk to one another anymore who were close once but an incident has come between them and has broken their relationship, and they don’t speak to each other anymore. For the most part you treat the guys out here kinda like cousins,

some older and some younger, guys that you grew up playing with. And, some cousins you are close to, and you know all about them, and some cousins you just know them as just people in your family that you are familiar with but don't know them all that well. The older guys are like father figures and leaders from the Aggie Community... pillars of the community.”

The interviewee's comments above tell much about his competitive pick-up basketball approach and attitude, and about how he learned to play and develop as a competitive pick-up basketball player. He also tells about meeting many different kinds of people and about quickly getting to know all of the guys because, it is about the same 100 people. His comments about the pick-up basketball players are primarily related to his experiences with particular large and small groups of players that range from playing on the TAMU Varsity Basketball teams or to just being rec ball regulars.

### **Competition and Cooperation as Small Group Cultures and Subcultures**

Pick-up basketball players share macro and micro ideas and values that are manifest in the similar cultural perceptions and interpretations of particular players and courts. These similarities in perception and interpretation are most evident in the cultural and subcultural practices that are performed by small groups of players. Among small groups of players tension exists, and is bound to arise from the conflict between that which makes players desire to congregate on particular courts at specific times and days, and that which makes players not willing to participate and/or interact with small groups of outsiders. The characteristics which small groups share, and the characteristics that

separate and sustain the separation of players into small distinct groups are culture and subcultures.

Below, I provide five interviewee responses and one field note entry, which tell about how players form and maintain small group cultures and subcultures of pick-up basketball players. These interviewees' responses and the field note entry also show how players create and maintain small group interactions and relations via specific social bonds on the courts, on the sidelines, and outside of the social setting and context of the TAMU SRC.

The first interviewee below tells about how he found out about, and then decided to play with a particular small group of players on a regular basis, and how he has built much of his collegiate friendships with small groups of regulars who are TAMU Students.

Mark Visi, a 23-year-old White American male, Sr., Sport Management major from Friendswood (Greater Houston), said,

“When I first started playing ball my freshman year, it was with my now two best friends. We just came up here, and it was the 3 of us. We picked up 2 random guys to play with so we could have 5. After a few weeks, we just kept playing together all the time. We bonded by just being A&M students and loving to play basketball all the time.”

The interviewee describes his small group of players who were TAMU Freshman, who became his college best friends. The interviewee also shows how playing

regularly with these friends strengthen their relationships on and off the courts. In addition to his bonding with these particular players, the interviewee also tells of how he and his friends looked for random individual players or a pick-up basketball dyad to fill in as teammates. Although most of the pick-up basketball players inside of the TAMU SRC are: 1) students, 2) pick-up basketball enthusiasts, and 3) small groups of regulars, this interviewee told of how he strengthens his social bonds with his small group of best friends by constantly interacting, communicating (i.e. calling and texting), and partying with them outside of the TAMU SRC.

In another interview with a player that I routinely observed and interacted with, the player told me that playing pick-up basketball was an everyday routine and a necessary social activity he and his friends did. This player also told me how he made and used rec-ball acquaintances and friends to find out more about particular players, games, and small competitive groups of players. His response, tells how he uses small groups of players to create and maintain social and symbolic boundaries inside and outside of the TAMU SRC, which was a central aspect of his identity as a basketball player.

Lenny Iggy, a 22-year-old Nigerian American male, Sr. Chemical Engineering major, from Houston, said,

“I come out here a lot... I guess you can say I’m a regular. I know a lot of faces, but I only know a few people... names I mean, from being in the same dorm and seeing them on campus all the time. I see a lot of guys on campus, but I don’t have any classes with them. There is only a hand full of people that I hang out

with outside of basketball... most of the people I hang out with are from the gym... from playing ball in the gym.”

Like many of the highly competitive TAMU SRC Students who are pick-up basketball regulars, this interviewee’s comments tell of whom he routinely hangs out with. This interviewee also explains how he forms social bonds and relationships with players on particular courts who attend TAMU. The interviewee’s comments also explain how pick-up basketball relationships serve as surrogate primary/referent groups for players. Like many of the TAMU students who are competitive regulars, particularly the freshman and sophomores, this interviewee also shows how recreational sports relationships can lead to limited social networks and friendships.

Over the course of this study, I have found that many of the highly competitive TAMU SRC pick-up basketball players who are TAMU students usually hang out with other players who are in the same cohort, in the same general academic major, and have similar social class backgrounds, educational, and formally organized high school basketball experiences. I also found that many players usually play with all the same guys at particular scheduled times, except for when they have special study groups, events, or classes.

Another interviewee spoke of his acquaintances and friendships from the pick-up basketball courts, which he used to formulate particular small groups of players, and to create a specific subcultural group of players. This player’s comments are telling of particular times and places that his group of players likes to play, which illuminates



much about how his small group of players maintains a particular pick-up basketball subculture.

Al Beers, a 20-year-old White American male Jr., Industrial Engineering major from Flower Mound, (North Dallas), said,

“I’ve been going to A&M for 3 years... I’ve been playing ball in here since I was a freshman. I’d say I play about 3 to 4 times a week for about 4 hours at a time. I know that seems like a lot of basketball, but it’s not... it’s too much time for an average player, but not for the all the regulars that play in here. That much, is how we all do it. There are people, random people, that come in here once in a while. When I was in my sophomore year, I used to come in here and play 4 or 5 times a week. The actual time that I spend on the court really depended on how well I am shooting that day. I’d say it’s usually like a 45-minute wait on a busy day, and after that... most of the time, that’s when I’m actually on the court. I don’t plan on... don’t intend to lose when I’m on the court, so I usually come up here with good players... so that helps.”

My knowledge and familiarity with the interviewee and some of his close friends helped me to ask about how he created and developed some of his friendships and social relationships (Antonio 2001). When I asked him about some of his pick-up basketball friends, and about him being a regular, he commented on some of his friends and about how he distinguishes regulars from non-regulars. His comments are reflective of many ways that pick-up basketball regulars learn to make sense and meaning of recreational

basketball acquaintances, and to form particular friendships and social bonds with particular players. Below are his follow-up comments about regulars and non-regulars.

“A regular is somebody that you know their face, their name, everything about them simply because you see them at least twice a week at the rec. I chill and hang out with a lot of people from the rec, actually, most of my friends from freshman and sophomore year are from the rec. My roommates now...my best friends are all guys that I met at the rec in my freshman and sophomore year. Steve, you know Steve, he’s one of them. I met him up here. We used to play all the time, but now, I’m on the team, but they don’t play for the team so, we don’t get to play and hang out that much together anymore.”

The interviewees’ comments above tell about the development of a small intimate pick-up basketball group of players that was initially created and maintained from playing pick-up basketball regularly.

The next interviewee below explained to me how many players choose to play with particular small groups in specific settings and contexts. This interviewee also told of how he plays with many groups of players on all of the different pick-up basketball courts all the time, but usually prefers to play on what he commonly refers to as The NBA-Varsity Court with the best players in the rec. Below are some of his comments about trying to penetrate a competitive small group of players on one of the courts.

Dre Howdy, a 21-year-old Black American male, Jr., Civil Engineering major from South Dallas, said,

“King, and Davi & Reggie, and other guys... they do it... all the time! They stack their teams. King asks me to play all the time, but I say no a lot. He uses me as a fill-in. I know that they are waiting on their other players. I know that, and sometimes I’m not gonna waste my time and energy. King only plays with certain people... people that fit his skill set... people that do what he tells them to do... what he needs them to do. He just ain’t picking up anybody. He {King} doesn’t play with everybody... for the most part they {King and his team} run the courts because rarely do you have all the good players all up here at the same time... Like I was saying, King stacks his team. My freshman year some of the guys asked me to play with them on his intramural team... he was like ‘yea yea, play with us, we could use you on the team,’ be he never let me on the team. He wouldn’t let me on. In the end, he was like ‘we don’t need him.’ I was like, ‘Whatever, man!’ Then he went around saying that I was asking to play with him - Crazy! Everybody knows that they wanted me on the team. You can ask them... go ahead! But he didn’t want to... he said no.”

The interviewee above, like many of the highly competitive and selective players, recalls failing to play with a specific small group of rec ball regulars. Like many of the highly competitive and selective players, the interviewee was shaken at first by not being able to penetrate a highly desirous competitive small group of skilled players, but remained confident when interacting with and against similar small groups of players.

Another interviewee tells of his inability to play with a particular small group of players, and what it meant to him at that time, and what it currently means to him. This

interviewee also tells of his creation and development of his own small group, which is a subcultural group of players.

Mack Jack, a 20-year-old White American male, Jr., Sports Management major from Round Rock (North Austin), said,

“I like to get here about 2:30...3... 3 is prime time to play... I think Reggie started that. He used to play with his guys. All the upper classmen - Tom, Dayton, Theodore, etc. They didn't like me too much...they never picked me up. Back then, I didn't really play too much defense, and I shot the ball a lot. I remember one time when I was a freshman. I walked up to Doc Banner and I said, 'Do you have next?' He said 'yes.' I asked if he 'had 5' and he said 'No.' I asked if I could run and he said 'No...' I didn't even argue because I knew how they were. They were all upper classmen, and they played a different kind of basketball. Real mature. Now, when I come in, Reggie will ask me if I want to play. I think I have gotten smarter as a player. I've matured.”

When I asked the interviewee above to tell me more about who he currently plays with, and when and where he plays, as well as what his generic routine is before playing, he responded saying,

“I like to run with my boys... we come up here all the time. We usually let each other know when we are gonna play via text. A mass text to the crew. We usually say what time we're hitting the rec, like hooping at 3, or hoopin at 4. I send out a

lot of texts cause I'm the one that wants to play all the time... When I send out a text and guys show up late, there is only so long you can hold a spot.

When it's our turn to play, we have to play. We have to have 5 to play, so we have to pick someone...other people up. We joke with some of the guys for coming late because they end up having to wait. They have to just sit there and wait, and watch us having fun whoopin' guys on the court. Sometimes when they're late, they end up having to run with sorry people and run against us and we're whoop'em. I tell them don't be late next time, and that won't happen."

Many players form different kinds of social bonds, emotional involvements, and disturbing attachments to players. In many cases players have experienced and demonstrated frustration, animosity, and resentment from being unable to penetrate and participate in particular games with exclusive small groups of players. In general, competition is central to the cultural and subcultural formation of small pick-up basketball groups, chiefly because competition is intertwined with cooperative aspects of players' actions and interactions. Players' reliance on competitive small groups as niches of culture also operate as powerful stimulus for individual achievement that produce unique social bonds.

The players' comments above about competition and cooperation are basic values and ideals that are essential elements of a wide variety of pick-up basketball games, which are generally undeniable (Allison 1981, p. 91-92). The illumination of competition and cooperation in pick-up basketball is an important physical aspect of the

social activities of players, which is linked to the macro and micro social forces that impact players' actions and interactions in and among groups (Allison 1981, p. 92). The interaction among players and groups demonstrates how players form and maintain norms, and expectations via their use of social and symbolic cultural boundaries rooted in notions of competition and cooperation.

### **Players' Use of Speech, Language, and Demeanor as Small Group Relations and Social Bonds**

Players and small groups form cultures and subcultures of competition and cooperation in games, on courts, and on sidelines. Particular players form and maintain malleable bonds and networks in micro settings and contexts. Many of the players I studied reported competing in small groups as coordinated, cooperative, competitive scheduled activities; many players also reported promoting and maintaining small group relations with particular players. These small group relations are attached to players' notions of basketball status, honor, wealth a.k.a. talent, and success (Henry 2003).

Players' competitive struggle for achievement, success, and recognition in particular games and settings is a primary motive, goal, and pursuit. Selecting the most competitive games and courts also plays a large part in players' identities and notions of status. Pick-up basketball games occur as calculable struggles of competition and cooperation for victory that manifests itself in the physical and emotional actions and reactions of players. The expression of tension via the interaction of players is how many players relate and communicate with one another, and form short-term and long-term

social bonds. Many of these bonds are based on the fragility of players' competitive and cooperative functions that are evident in the specialized roles of players (Sabo, Miller, Melnick, Farrell, and Barnes 2005).

Players develop unique kinds of social bonds based on their interaction dependencies with small groups on the courts and on the sidelines. Social and emotional bonds and attachments are formed among particular players and groups, in particular contexts and locales. As different kinds of social bonds are created, new layers of identity emerge and develop that are largely dependent on players' positions in the figuration of particular roles. Cultures and subcultures are also formed during pre-, mid-, and post-game interactions. Sideline conversations and discussions are often times based on playful teasing, challenges, and friendly competitive contestation. These conversations are a fundamental part of the formation of small groups and small group cultures.

Below are three interviewee responses that tell about players' use of competition and cooperation as essential to the formation of small group cultures and subcultures. These three players' comments also illuminate much about how pick-up basketball players spontaneously develop small groups, and sustain specific friendships and networks. The first interviewee tells of his use of competition and cooperation when playing with and against close friends in a jovial rivalry manner. His comments follow an interview discussion we had about how players work to control the physical and emotional tension that arises among highly competitive players.

Johnny Johns, a 20-year-old White American male, Jr., Information Systems major from Spring (Northwest Houston), said,

“Fights? I’ve seen my fair share the 3 years I’ve been up here! I would say I’ve seen about ten. Ten or so that came to blows I’d say but, there’s a lot of, you know, trash talking out here. Everyday! Everyday people are talking trash...including myself. Trash talk is funny though. I’ll trash talk to guys on the other team and to my own teammates... a little of both. Both ways. When you’re talking to your teammates and friends, it’s all good. Trash talking to my friends, I mean, when you come out here with all your friends, you know, your roommates, you know, the guys. You’re gonna trash talk to, your roommates. I’m gonna talk trash to them, they are my roommates.”

The interviewee’s comments tell about how he motivates himself and other players by competitively trash talking while playing in particular games with close friends. His comments also demonstrate the use of particular language and intonation, which is evidence by his competitive approach, disposition, and attitude. He also explains much about how his values are linked and expressed via the social bonds he strengthens with his teammates and/or opponents who are usually his close friends and roommates.

The next interviewee responds in a similar way when talking about some of his pick-up basketball friends inside and outside the recreation center. This interviewee also explained some of the ways in which he created and developed particular types of social bonds among his small group of friends.



Bob Marly, a 21-year-old White American male, Jr., Business major from Houston, said,

“I pretty much play with my roommates most of the time...one (roommate), we went to high school together. Now, I have two roommates. One I’ve been rooming with since my sophomore year. The other roommate transferred from Texas Tech... he decided to come to a better school. I always tell him anything is better than going to Tech. I tease him about that all the time.”

Playful teasing and joking are important ways to form and test uncertain social relations, bonds, and relationships (Eveslage and Delaney 1998). Although trash talk is approached and interpreted in different ways, explorations and explanations of trash talk are useful for better understanding of how players and groups make and negotiate meaning, and make decisions about aspects of culture and subculture like norms and values (Phillip, Dooley, and Phillip 1995, Maharaj 1997, and Kassing and Sanderson 2010).

The interviewee below tells about how his competitive drive led him to play pick-up basketball inside of the TAMU SRC, and about his interpretation of competition and cooperation among his small group of players.

Dusty Rain, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Sports Management major and Business and Communications minor, from Dallas, said,

“Guys out here frequently tease each other and say stuff like ‘get your weight up.’... Basically it has two connotations...it might mean it in a literal sense like when you’re going for a shot or something like that, and a guy is in your face and

you can't move him because he's stronger than you and he's forcing you to play according to his defense... you should start lifting weights and go the gym and put on more weight... get your weight up, essentially... gain weight, put on more weight... muscle... so he doesn't push you around anymore. It also means to some guys, go practice and get your game better... go get more skills and come back and challenge me again after you have more skills in your tool box. I'm still trying to get my weight up... we all are when you really think about it.”

This interviewee describes how his group of regulars uses playful jargon to develop a close basketball relationship. He also told me that playing with good players pushes him to his limits in ways that enable him to maximize the best of his abilities. His comments about playing with bigger and better players, has helped him to rely on constant communication and interaction with his teammates as an undersized player.

All of the players' comments above tell of players' self-perceptions and interpretations of others inside and outside of their small groups. Much of these perceptions are expressed towards members of small groups in face-to-face good humored competition. The players above demonstrate the ability to find their niches among particular small cultural and subcultural groups of players, however not all joking and teasing among players is always unanimously interpreted in a positive manner (Boxer and Cortés-Conde 1997). As tensions rise among players in highly competitive games on particular pick-up basketball courts, a generic interpretation of players' actions and interactions is ambiguous. The ambiguous nature of players' speech and jargon frequently results in misinterpretations, suspicions, overly aggressive behavior, and

sometimes violence. In the final section of this chapter, I show how players' actions and interactions on the court and sidelines (related to competition and cooperation) are central to the formation and maintenance of particular social bonds and relations among small groups of players.

### **Social Bonds from Everyday Spontaneous Pick-up Basketball Practices**

In addition to the interpersonal interactions and social relations of large and small groups of pick-up basketball players, players usually look to form dyads and triads with others based on common ties, interest, and values. These common ties, interests, and values enable players to create and maintain distinct small group cultures and subcultures. These dyads and triads also help players to commit and recommit to playing together, based on a combination of their social histories and friendships, cultural identities, and collective everyday practices (Driskell and Lyon 2002, McLaughlin 2004 and 2008, and Thangaraj 2010a and 2010b).

Not all players form social bonds from their interactions and relations in dyads and triads, and not all players are required to interact with one another in small groups to ensure the survival of a particular small group. Many players are also not welcomed to play in a variety of pick-up basketball games and social settings. Just as particular social interactions and relationships are configured to suit particular games and players, the experiences and interpretations of particular players are exploited to facilitate particular small group relations (Fine 1979, Fine and Kleinman 1979, and Driskell and Lyon 2002).

After studying many different large and small groups of players, I discovered many short-term and long-term friendships and relationships, and a great deal of diversity in the social origins, forms, proximity, and interaction styles of players. I also found that the social interactions and relations of players were never completely closed or static, but were constantly created and re-created by players via their small cultural and subcultural gatherings within particular social settings and contexts. These social interactions and relations across various cultural settings and contexts enabled particular players and small groups to create and strengthen unique kinds of social bonds with one another. When players regularly played together, they often demonstrated and expressed particular loyalties via the experience of playing together regularly in small groups. Players also enhanced their experiences and social bonds with others by routinely interacting on the sidelines with small groups of regulars, and by constantly communicating and interacting in small groups outside of the TAMU SRC.

Below are three interviewees' responses and a field note that tell about the unique kinds of social bonds that players form and strengthen via regularly playing pickup basketball together in small groups. These players' comments and the field note also tell about social patterns, and illuminate characteristic ways that players create and negotiate small group cultures and subcultures via their social interactions with one another. In many cases, small groups of pick-up basketball players serve as surrogate primary groups for collegiate freshman and sophomores. These group relations often extend beyond the pick-up basketball courts inside of the TAMU SRC. In many cases, I also found that players reported making and negotiating friendships with teammates and

opposing team members via competitive and cooperative interactions, both on the court and on the sidelines. The first interviewee's response explains how players' competitive speech, language, and demeanor among particular small groups of players, contributes to the formation of particular small group cultures and subcultures. The interviewee's response below, also explains how players' challenge and contest one another in ways that add to the strength of particular social bonds among certain dyads and triads.

Nathan Doggs, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Political Science major from Austin, said,

“Yea... really! I was about to fight Dre! Dre was a freshman, and I was a sophomore at the time. Dre's a pretty good basketball player, and he is out here tryin' to do his Kobe thing, like everyone else. I would foul him, and we would go back and forth a lot. Sometimes when I played with Dre, he plays half ass. If he was my height or of average size on the A&M team, he could probably play for the A&M Team. He's just not big enough, and... he's lazy sometimes...he half-asses a lot... We would chit-chat on the sideline while waiting for a game, and we just clicked. We would walk back to the dorms together because he lived in the dorm across from mine, and when we first went and got something to eat outside of the rec, that was it. We would hang out together all the time, and we eventually ended up becoming roommates ever since we did something outside the rec. We would go shoot pool, play video games... we would compete with any and everything that we did together. We were always trying to outdo one another.”

The interviewee's comments above are telling of a friendship that he formed from the social interactions he had with another player on the sidelines of a particular court, among a small group of competitive regulars. The interviewee's comments about his social relations with this player demonstrates how friendly interaction and competitive play are perpetuated off of the pick-up basketball courts to a wider variety of social settings and contexts. The interviewee also told of how he was always trying to outdo his competitor who became a close collegiate friend and roommate, which is telling of social patterns that are characteristic of unique social bonds and friendships among competitive small cultural and subcultural groups of players.

In another interview, a player talked about one of his close on-the-court and off-the-court friendships that began in a small group setting among a small group of competitive regulars. Below this interviewee tells of how a particular incident challenged and contributed to the strength of a unique social bond with another player who he would eventually ask to be his roommate. His comments about the incident that challenged his friendship and the social relations he had with this other player, is as follows:

Mack Jack, a 20-year-old White American male, Jr., Sports Management major from Round Rock (North Austin), said,

“Arguing? Yea, all the time! One time we (Jimmy and I) did get in an argument on the court when we were playing together. He missed a shot down low in the paint, and he was pretty pissed and upset that he missed an easy layup. He was walking back down court, and I told him to stop walking, and man-up and... to stop being a pussy and just forget about it and play ball. I said some more stuff,

and... he just looked at me and walked off the court. I kept going, and... I said stuff like, 'for real... is that what your gonna do... for real, stop acting like a bitch... let's play man... just play ball.'... I kept saying some more stuff like that... that was a bad move on my part. When he was walking off the court, he said, 'Man, we ain't playing together!'... and I kept talking and then he started to walk over to me. Will (Bishop) had to break us up. Will knew what was about to happen, and he jumped in the middle first. The rest of the guys jumped in and split us up after that. It would have probably come to a few blows before Will split us up. Jimmy left the court after that, and sat against the wall. He came over to me and gave me a pound before he left... I knew it was all good after that. No words were said, but I think that we ended up going out that night. Some people aren't like that though... there are people who come up here and get into it with other guys, and they hold on to stuff like that. When I get off the court, it's pretty much over. Some guys don't understand that you should leave it all on the court."

The interviewee above previously described being a highly competitive player, and how he always tries to play on the most competitive court with the best players inside of the TAMU SRC. I have known the interviewee since he was an 18-year-old College Freshman at Blinn College, and I knew of his close friendship with Jimmy, the player he commented specifically about. I asked Jimmy to tell me his side of the story concerning his friendship with Jack, and about how they became close friends and tried

to become roommates after first meeting and forming a friendship on the TAMU SRC pick-up basketball courts. Jimmy's comments about Jack are as follows:

Jimmy Pet, a 22-year-old Black American male, So., Blinn College student, from Beaumont, said,

“I met Jack right here, playing ball! We're supposed to room together this year, but I just wanted it to be me and him...it didn't work out though. A bunch of other guys' wanted to be in on it... that's too many people for me in one space. All I needed was one more person to room with... split bills with. Anything more than that is frustrating for me. In my freshman year, I came out here and he was playing... he (Jack) got my number and I was like 'whatever.' He said, 'I'll let you know... I'll hit you up.' He kept bugging me kinda, and I was real busy at the time, and I kept blowing him off. I was like 'who is this kid, and what does he want from me?' We ended up hanging out, and since then we have been good friends. That's how it was. I guess that's how I kinda really made a lot of my friends out here... through playing basketball. With Jack, it's about how we click... how we know the game, basketball I mean. It has to do with being aware of each other on the court, and when we're playing the game. After that, it was just hangin' out and finding out that we kinda shared the same qualities.”

The interviewee above, Jimmy, had a lot to say about his friendship and about how he socially relates with Jack. They have remained close friends. Jack also told me that Jimmy recently broke up with his long-distance girlfriend and has found a new



girlfriend in College Station. This change in relationship status absorbs the time and money he used to spend playing pick-up basketball inside of the TAMU SRC.

In the last data entry, I tell of my observations and interactions with a small group of competitive regulars on one of the courts inside of the TAMU SRC. I found that this particular group of competitive regulars is frequently in contact with one another throughout the week via calling and text messaging. Like many of the other small groups of players who routinely interacted with one another on and off the pick-up basketball courts, this particular small group demonstrated specific cultural and subcultural interactions and norms. They expressed these norms in constant playful patterns of masculinity.

Monday- January 22, 2007- 6:30 p.m. – The Student Recreation Center, College Station, TX

Today I got to the gym about 6:00 pm...I walked in the rec from the front entrance...it's packed! They finally finished the construction on the front entrance. I'm not dressed to play ball today. I'm just here just to observe. I walked directly to the 'NBA Courts' to see who was there. I saw a few guys on the court that I knew, and the rest of the crew was standing near the sideline getting dressed. They had just finished playing. It was Reggie, Davi, a New Nigerian Guy, Meric, and C-Day. They were all talking about playing ball. I heard Reggie leading the conversation saying, "Yea, all I do is play organized ball...that's all I know how to do. It's the only way I know how to play. We can just play for fun if that is what you'll want. Anybody can do that. I play to

win...for me wining is the fun.” C-Day and Davi jumped in and shared their experiences with playing organized ball. They each shared stories of high school basketball and playing for their coaches.

Reggie asked J-Hard about when he first started playing ball, and he said, “Like third or fourth grade...all my friends were playing...that’s what we did.” C-Day jumped in and said, “My parents have pictures of me playing as a little kid...pictures of me playing on a little hoop...even back then I was trying to dunk the ball on the playschool basket.” Davi said, “My parents got the same thing (the same kind of pictures)! I was trying to rip the rim down when I was little.” Davi went on to share that he was 20, and would be turning 21 soon. He said he doesn’t drink because he likes his body. Reggie teased Davi about his reasons, especially because his reasons were not religious/biblical reasons. Reggie said, “I thought you were doing it to be pure, you doin’ it for the wrong reason.” Reggie also teased Davi for being gay, and said that Davi recently broke up with his girlfriend to be with “15 year old boys.” Reggie went on-and-on about Davi’s desiring to be with young boys.

C-Day said he started to play organized ball very early, “Like fourth or fifth grade.” He said, “In high school I hated playing for coaches that couldn’t count. We had to make 80 layups in two minutes, and I always hated coaches who couldn’t count. I hated when I was at 77 and the next guy couldn’t make the layup and coach would say ‘put it back up there on the board again.’”

Davi shared a similar story about having to run drills in high school. He went on about having to 'run the floor,' and doing drills over-and-over again until they were done right. Reggie, Davi, and C-Day went on-and-on about having to complete drills as J-Hard just listened and watched. As C-Day put it in his one-man-up-ship style, "I can do you one better." The three of them went on-and-on about the glory-filled and painful days of playing (and practicing for) high school basketball. According to J-Hard, Davi's and C-Day's careers started early in third or fourth grade. Reggie said his career started a little later when he was in middle school.

Meric joined in the conversation. He had 2 downs on the court, and he was under the basket shooting the ball with the other guys waiting for his time to play. Reggie called Meric over to ask him something. Davi was changing his basketball shoes into a pair of Yellow Timberland Boots that he said cost "\$150." Reggie was teasing him saying that he had imitation boots, and that his boots were gay. Davi held the boots up for me to see, and he showed me and some of the other guys the tag, and said, "It's official...just for all the haters." Reggie said he had made a song on the Internet that was fashioned after an old 1980's song titled 'My Adidas,' and he said his song was about "Nikes." Davi laughed, and Reggie said, "You got get up on that shit...that was how we referred to Nikes back in the day. I made a song about it...It's on my webpage...'Nike's on My Brain'...you gotta check it out..."

Merik took the conversation in another direction. He said, “Shaq (O’Neal) was the only player to sign two different shoe deals. One with Reebok, and another with something or the other... some big name athletic apparel I can’t remember.” Reggie started teasing Davi about his boots being gay again, and about him breaking up with his Nigerian girlfriend to pursue young boys. Davi looked at Reggie and said, “Dude, what’s up with all the gay shit? Why you fucking with me?” We all busted out laughing. Davi had to address Reggie because Reggie wouldn’t stop until Davi recognized him and acknowledged what he was saying.

Reggie asked if the rumor was true about Davi breaking up with his girlfriend (in New York) and he gestured that it was true as he lowered his head to put on his boots. Reggie said something derogatory (just in play) about her being Nigerian. There was a Nigerian guy sitting on the bench next to Steve, and he was listening in on the conversation (half way while watching the rest of the guys play ball). Reggie was joking by gesturing to the guys in the conversation, that he wanted the Nigerian guy on the bench to over hear his derogatory comments. The guy looked over and spoke to Davi saying, “Yo, your girl was Nigerian? You broke up with her cause she was Nigerian? I’m Nigerian!” Reggie and everybody busted out laughing again because we all knew he was Nigerian. Reggie unofficially started picking on the guy next to Davi on the bench because Reggie knew he was Nigerian. After that happened, Reggie said to the Nigerian guy, “I saw you listening, and I wanted to draw you in!”

The field note entry above depicts some players' everyday interactions on the sidelines of particular courts, among small groups of competitive regulars. The field note also illuminates that perhaps the most trying set of boundary-testing behaviors can be the emotional ones (Palmer 2009, p. 432.) Small subcultural groups of players often engage in teasing and testing the limits of other players via trying to cause emotional reactions and outbursts through provocation, name-calling, and using demeaning language, antics, and character associations.

The interviewees' comments and the field note above, demonstrate how different kinds of pick-up basketball cultures and subcultures form via the unique kinds of ritual interactions that players have in small groups. The interviews and the field note data above also demonstrate and reflect how competition and cooperation are expressed in a jovial and playful manner that is undergird by norms about masculinity. Although much of the commentary and conversation among small groups of competitive regulars illuminates unique kinds of social problems and issues in pick-up basketball, these players' comments and interactions about themselves in relation to others demonstrates how social bonds and relationships often times are spontaneously created, contested, and quickly negotiated.

### **Conclusion**

Pick-up basketball players inside of the TAMU SRC routinely use and negotiate cultures and subcultures of small groups of players, to make meaning and decisions about when and where they will play, and how and who they will routinely play with and against. These players' creation and negotiation of small group cultures and subcultures

is also telling of the social divisions and distinctions that players give and give off to other players in games, social settings, and contexts. Much of these players' attitudes and demeanor is manifest in their sideline interpersonal and face-to-face interactions. Many players' experiences are based on socially constructed and negotiated interpretations of cultural and subcultural norms and values that are expressed via players' small group interaction.

TAMU SRC pick-up basketball players also use social interaction to construct and maintain particular social and symbolic boundaries among small cultural and subcultural groups. The players I observed and interacted with routinely described themselves, and their desires to select (and avoid selecting) particular kinds of players based on their perceptions and interpretations of competitive and cooperative approaches, attitudes, and performances on the courts and on the sidelines (Jimerson 1996 and 1999, and Lamont and Molnár 2002).

Material and non-material objects were used as cultural markers and indicators of players' creation and maintenance of small group boundaries. These boundaries were confronted, contested, and stretched via the experimental creative questioning and interrogation of players (Palmer 2009, p. 432). The teasing and testing of players included but was not limited to the stretching of emotional territories via friendly competitive and cooperative interaction. Players also encouraged one another to accept physical and mental challenges, and to continue their interactions with one another in ways that strengthened emotional ties and bonds. When players challenged and stretched one another's boundaries, they actively molded and negotiated cultures and subcultures

by shaping and reshaping the values, norms, and expectations of small groups of players on particular courts and sidelines.

CHAPTER VI  
MICRO-LEVEL STRUCTURES OF PICK-UP BASKETBALL  
PLAYERS AND GROUPS

Micro-level structures of pick-up basketball players and groups can be difficult to understand and envision, chiefly because they are sociological concepts that are based on explanations of the everyday operations of pick-up basketball players and groups. By micro-level structures, I mean the social relationships, group relations, networks, and norms that involve the direct social interaction of players and groups that are made up of the everyday behavioral patterns and practices (Cook and Whitmeyer 1992). These structures also operate in cultural forms that are based largely on the social histories of players and groups. Socialization and players' negotiations of socialization via their resocialization in pick-up basketball reveals a lot about players and groups' creation, recreation, and negotiation of these structures. These structures also operate as networks of players' and groups' relationships, and players' and group's social relations based on their social actions and interactions on the courts and sidelines.

Players and groups' negotiations of their relationships and social relations also reveals much about access and opportunities to play with other players and groups in particular games on particular courts. These structures also function via the institutionallike statuses and roles of players and groups; players and groups rely on statuses and roles as indicators of particular attributes like informal leadership, which is commonly accepted and incorporated into players and group's organized patterns of



competition, cooperation, and conformity (Adler and Adler 1987). These elements influence players and groups' contestations and negotiations of micro-level pick-up basketball structures in games and social settings inside of the TAMU SRC.

In this chapter, I explore how pick-up basketball players and groups create, recreate, contest, and negotiate micro-level structures on particular pick-up basketball courts and sidelines. First, I discuss players' social relationships, and then I explain how players' group relations actively influence their re-creations and negotiations of microlevel structures. I show this by examining the various ways that players and groups make sense, meaning, and decisions about where, how, and who they play with from: 1) their previous knowledge, experiences, and expectations with non-TAMU players and groups, and 2) their social actions and interactions with TAMU SRC players and groups. After that, I describe social networks, and how players and groups use social networks to gain access and opportunities (which also limits other players and groups' access and opportunities) to play with particular players in specific games and social settings. After that, I show how players and groups build and implement status-like positions for other players, with corresponding social roles, that operate as markers of informal leadership and as patterns of conformity that support and maintain micro-level structures. I conclude with some ways that players and groups produce and reproduce micro-level structures in pick-up basketball that are contested social activities.

### **Players and Group's Relationships and Social Relations as Micro-level Structures**

The day-to-day informal gatherings and interactions of pick-up basketball players and groups illuminate the workings of various key elements that comprise micro-level

pick-up basketball structures. Players and groups routinely give life and meaning to pickup basketball, and make quick calculated decisions about a wide variety of pick-up basketball players and games as well as social settings and contexts. Much of the details of these everyday ritual activities and social practices are unaccounted for as key structural factors of the micro-level processes. An examination of a subset of players' everyday lives and experiences, specifically the micro-level decisions of players, can provide a way of better envisioning, understanding, and interpreting the operation of micro-level structures in particular pick-up basketball players and games.

Pick-up basketball players routinely create, re-create, contest, and negotiate micro-level structures on the courts and sidelines. These structures provide and reinforce players' understandings of: 1) the broad informal organization of players, and 2) particular group practices, interactions, and behaviors.

Pick-up basketball players rely on cultural orientations that coincide with broader basketball-based systems of interaction and expectations. The material structure is derived from the cultural structure, hence the basic structure of social relations in pickup basketball originates from the content of the cultures that the players create and share (Bernardi, González, and Requena 2007). These cultural orientations are social models that function as prescriptions and interpretations for players' attitudes. These attitudes are manifest in the social values of players, and are related to their perceptions and interpretations of appropriate and inappropriate actions and behavior. The ideational contexts of players' behavior are an antecedent and a kind of cultural determinism related to social action (Parsons, Shils, and Smelser 1965, and Coleman 1986). Players

however, actively create and re-create micro-level structures in ways consistent with the broader formal arrangement of organized basketball. Organized basketball is a macrocultural symbol and collective representation that organizes and regulates players' actions and behaviors.

On the pick-up basketball courts and sidelines of the TAMU SRC, many players share value-systems that are governed by cultural norms; these norms are transmitted via players' interactions and social relations from one social setting to another (Lüeschen 1967, Guttman 1991, and Malcolm 2006). Players' norms routinely collide via cultural shock and diffusion, specifically in players' day-to-day creation and re-creation of value laden norms and practices. Norms (and the contestation and negotiation of norms) play a central role in players' creation and re-creation of micro-level structures. These norms are based on the assorted assembly and unification of shared cultures via social exchange and material interdependence. These social structures are cultural norms that are expressed as social patterns of players' interactions and behaviors (Lopez and Scott 2000, p. 3).

### **What Is What, and Who Is Who: Players and Groups' Relationships and Social Relations**

Before most pick-up basketball players step foot onto the pick-up basketball courts inside of the TAMU SRC, they bring with them previous knowledge and experiences of pick-up basketball games and group behaviors based on their socialization experiences in previously played games. Players' knowledge and experiences significantly contribute to how they will tend to act and interact with other

players and groups; their experiences will also provide them with expectations and beliefs about how other players ought to act and interact with them. Players' patterns of socialization are routinely contested and negotiated through face-to-face interactions. These interactions reveal varying degrees of conflict and coercion, measures of conformity, and the miniscule consistent incongruities that players seek to align. As new players and groups enter the pick-up basketball courts, these players and groups will have to negotiate their actions, attitudes, and behaviors with the existing players.

Players' prior pick-up basketball experiences, coupled with their re-socialization experiences and their day-to-day interactions with others inside of the TAMU SRC, stimulates their previous and immediate cognitive frameworks of understanding and interpretation. These cognitive frameworks are socio-cultural maps that help them to make and organize meaning, and to make quick decisions about other players and groups. Below are eight interviewee responses that illuminate how players draw on their previous knowledge and experiences with non-TAMU players, and how they base much of their actions and interactions with TAMU SRC players on a mixture of their previous socialization experiences and the macro-cultural norms.

The first interviewee tells about how he learned to play and participate with others, and like most of the other players inside of the TAMU SRC, he draws on his previous knowledge, experiences, and expectations with players outside of the TAMU SRC to relate to, and interact with, TAMU SRC players.

Mark Visi, a 23-year-old White American male, Sr., Sport Management major from Friendswood (Greater Houston), said,

“My freshman year, I really didn’t know how it works in here...you can’t really know as a freshman, but in freshman year I had to find out the rules. Play to 15... call your own fouls... straight up. Back home where I’m from, I play at a 24 hour fitness. At home, where I’m from (Friendswood, Texas), we play to 12... by 1’s and 2’s... and win by 2, so., the games could go all the way to 22! I had to learn both the rules and the culture of basketball when I first got here... Out here, I learned not to be a ball hog. Some people will try to score all 15 points... They’ll try to shoot every shot and not pass very much... and, people will foul you. People aren’t afraid to play hard! They’re all trying to prove that they are better than the next person...better than everybody else, and they will do whatever it takes to prove that. Back home where I played, everyone knew each other. The games would be a lot better because there would be more passing. It would be like 2 minutes before someone would take a shot. Out here, no one plays defense until there is about 10 or 11 points...then they wanna start playing defense.”

This interviewee's comments illuminate a reliance on previous socialization experiences coupled with knowledge and experience gained from interactions with TAMU SRC players and groups. He also demonstrates an understanding of the informal rules and norms that operate as both micro-level cultures and structures of games and social settings (Overman 1999 and Nasir 2000). His comments also illuminate and describe his routine attendance and interactions with various players and small groups before being able to find his niche among small groups. His actions and interactions explain much about the patterned behavior of players and groups on particular courts;

especially his highlighted responses about the competitive and cooperative attitudes and dispositions of players and groups near the end of games.

Another interviewee illuminated and explained his social approach and interaction with a wide range of pick-up basketball players and groups inside of the TAMU SRC. He also explained the different kinds of approaches, attitudes, and behaviors of players and groups that go unregulated in pick-up basketball because of the informal structure and organization of players.

Doc Banner, a 65-year-old Black American male, and professor said,

“There are several kinds of players that come out here. There are those who have the high school and college experience, and then there are those who do not. For those who have high school experience, this is their chance especially if they were non-starters and not part of the lime-light... This is their chance to shine and show their skills. If they have any decent skills, this is their chance to display those skills so they hog the ball and try to show people and demonstrate to others that ‘yes, they have skills’ and ‘yes they deserve to be out here.’ I know that there are some ex-college players that are also trying to show people that they can play on the A&M team... They have that in the back of their minds when they are playing. Those type of guys are trying to prove that ‘I am better than you are.’ I have also seen players that come out here who may have been coached by a parent, and that parent has given them the green light to shoot any shot they want, anytime they want, and as much shots as they want. They come out here with that mentality and disrupt any kind of team play. It doesn’t take you long to

find out a player like that because every time they're on the court, they're the one bringing the ball up the court and the only one to touch the ball offensively.”

This interviewee's comments illuminate some ways he works to impart informal structure and order via the more equitable participation of players. His assertions about a better distribution of the basketball to teammates are also telling of his actions and interactions on the court. His remarks also demonstrate coercion, in his case passive participation and self-removal from players and groups of players who are teammates whom hog the ball.

Another interviewee also told me about his previous knowledge, experiences, and expectations with non-TAMU players in his old neighborhood, and how he was unaware of the way different groups of TAMU SRC players collectively played inside of the rec.

Dustin Hend, a 22-year-old Black American male, Sr., HR Development major and Business Management minor, from Houston, said,

“I have learned so much up here playing ball. I come from a real bad part of Houston, and we didn't have all of these lovely conditions for playing ball. I didn't know you could actually be nice and still play ball. I mean, I have always been a pretty good guy... I would like to think of myself as a good guy. I didn't know that you don't have to be mean to play ball...on the court I mean. It's just so friendly up here, it's a different atmosphere to me all together. It changed my whole view on playing ball. People up here are friendly, and they can play. These guys are introducing themselves and shaking hands and shit before games. It

took me a little while to get acclimated to the environment. I would say a couple of weeks in the gym and then I realized that this is how it is in here. I wasn't sure what to think of it when I first got here, but I'm used to it now.”

This interviewee's comments explain much about his: 1) competitive background, 2) the previous environments he is used to playing in, and 3) his neo-social approach and disposition on the courts inside of the TAMU SRC. He also explained much about players and groups that contributes to the informal organization of particular groups, and the informal function of micro-level pick-up basketball structures. His comments also demonstrate his ability to negotiate particular values and norms that influence how he has played in past settings and contexts, and his alteration of this approach and understanding of games. His explanation of players' pre-game interactions and behavior reveals much about the generic uniform dispositions of players and groups across a wide range of the courts inside of the TAMU SRC. His comments also illuminate how players' dispositions are manifest parts of the operation of micro-level structures that are ritual activities that characterize much of players' informal approaches.

Another interviewee also told me about how he learned to interact and play with pick-up basketball players and groups inside of the TAMU SRC. He based much of his interactions with TAMU SRC players on the social setting and contexts of games, which is different from the old social relations he had with non-TAMU players that he used to play with back in his hometown.



Nathan Doggs, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Political Science major from Austin, said,

“When I first came to the rec, I had to learn how it works in here... it’s not that different from where I come from. In here, they basically play the same, strait 15... 1’s and 2’s. They’re always arguing about backcourt. Sometimes they play backcourt, and sometimes they don’t... They check ball at half court when you make a call. Make your own calls, etc. I learned out here not to be a K-Mud... Don’t be a K-Mud! (K-Mud is a Black American player that other players have mixed feeling about). K-Mud is known for dribbling the ball a lot, not pass to unskilled players who are his teammates, and taking a lot of challenging shots. I was raised around white people growing up, but when I got here, I wasn’t used to these kinds of white people. I grew up with white people that weren’t in school, and when I got here I had to get used to it...Playing with all of these white school kids. Playing ball with white people where I’m from...whites and blacks intermingled and when we played you had to play hard! I would say that the people that I played with, where I’m from are a little more edgy. Back where I’m from you better not say too much or foul too hard or you’ll end up in a fight, but out here they are so much more chill. There is not that same edge. When I first got here and someone fouled me I was ready to fight...I was ready to scrap, but I found that they really don’t take basketball to that level out here. They are not that serious about basketball out here... but there are some people that are real serious like that...Like how I first used to be when I first got here. If I got

fouled a couple of times, when I first got here, I would push you and get in your face, but I am not really like that anymore. When you first get here you have to find out who you can and can't foul, who you can and cannot argue with, and who you shouldn't try to fight... you don't want to foul Allen, it will end up in a fight. You don't want to hack Joe, it will end up bad for you. You don't want to foul Will unnecessarily, he'll foul you back...harder!"

Another interviewee also told me about his knowledge, experiences, and expectations on the courts, and how he has learned to listen to, and take feedback from, other players that he believed increased his social desirability as a top selection.

Dusty Rain, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Sports Management major and Business and Communications minor, from Dallas, said,

"When I first started playing I wasn't that good so, it was hard for me to get people on my team...People to play with me, or even to get picked up, but a few guys gave me a chance. I had to show people out here that I'm willing to work hard...I mean play hard! I had to earn their respect, and now people are pretty much willing to play with me. I know that if you come out here with a bad attitude, and you're not positive, people are hesitant to play with you... to give you a chance. Even if you're a good player and have skills, if you have an attitude people will pretty much say, 'I really don't care how good he is, I just don't want to play with him.'"

This interviewee's comments explain much about the problems that he faced, which many other players encounter with having limited human capital (i.e. size, skills, and experience) and social capital (i.e. having acquaintances, friends, and other kinds of influential relationships). Social capital is a sociological concept that refers to connections within and between social networks (Imandoust 2011). His comments also show how he developed and strengthen some of his relationships with other players via his attitude and performance. When I asked him to tell me more about who he usually talks to and plays with, he explained more about some of his experiences and perceptions of himself and other players.

“When I come to play, I play with anybody that is willing to play...who is willing to play on the main court. My goal is to get on the court and to win, and if you're trying to do that then I'll play with you. I try not to underestimate anybody, or disrespect anybody out here because they want to...are willing to play with the best people. I feel a lot of times like I'm the worst player out here, skills wise, but I'm willing to hustle so, on a good day... one of my good days, I am one of the best guys out here because I am willing to hustle and play harder than anyone else. I think that the guys out here are pretty good. They're better than your average everyday recreational players because they are in here all the time... playing all the time. I'm an average player, but the guys out here on the main court are definitely above average. I have learned to be humble out here, because I have not been playing basketball long...only for about 3 years. There are guys out here that have been playing 8 or 9 years... they've been playing

most of their lives. Literally, every time I come out here, I learn something new. Today I had a bad day... they stole the ball from me a couple of times when I would try to drive in the lane. I didn't see the double team... they kept doubling on me and they would eventually get the ball. I'm learning all the time, what to do and what not to do."

This interviewee's response illuminates much about his self-perceptions and interpretations, and his beliefs about other players. His comments assert specific beliefs about the exemplary kinds of attitudes and demeanor that other players usually look for when selecting teammates. He keeps these attitudes in mind, because he perceives them to be esteemed characteristics that are important cultural markers and indicators of players who are in a position to structure teams.

He also explains how his attitude is a driving force for his performance on the court, which he believes allowed him to gain access and opportunities to play with other competitive small groups of regulars. He also explains how some of the other more experienced players who have better skills and abilities than he does, are not a deterrent to his hard work, humble approach. He briefly describes how his attitude is part of his social capital, and how being friendly and competitive on the court has helped him to get along with many other different kinds of players. He says that he knows of some players who have been frequently passed over because of their unsuitable attitudes, and because of their inability to play with particular teammates. His humble hustle approach and attitude is something he claims is both an appropriate and desirable attribute of pick-up basketball players, especially when he combines this approach with a willingness to

learn from other players. His ideas about competing aggressively with other players are also telling of his perceptions of esteemed pick-up basketball values and ideals.

His approach to pick-up basketball games and activities on the courts and sidelines, also reveal a lot about how he relates to other players, and how he tries to create relationships via the particular kinds of ritual interactions and social relations he has with others. Like Rudy Hall, a 21-year-old Black American male, Jr., Sociology major from Dallas, said, “You gotta know... like, look like you know what you’re doing when you step on the court. People are watching all the time! They're looking for a reason to either cut you or pick you up.”

Another interviewee told me about his competitive approach to games and to selecting players as teammates; he revealed much of this in his use of micro-level structures.

Tom Jock, a 26-year-old White American male, grad student, Geology major from Houston, said,

“Today, there is that one guy in here... He is pretty good. He plays for the school. He was out here yesterday, and I played with him. I will play with any of these guys right here... They are all nice guys and good ball players. I have played with and against most of those guys. Those guys, the ones standing over there, I’m not gonna pick them up... There is no way. The guys over there way off to the side, you can see them talk about whether they want to play here or not... they look scared to play on this court. They don’t want to get embarrassed, and... they’re not that serious about the game. To me, you can be a competitor and still

not be that good. If you play your hardest and give it your all, there is satisfaction in that. When guys are afraid to play hard because they will be embarrassed, I don't want to play with them... that's not a guy that I want on my team.”

This interviewee's comments reflect his detailed focus on the competitive and cooperative approaches and attitudes of particular players and small groups. His comments also show his use of these approaches and attitudes as social and symbolic signs to make distinctions between different players and small groups. For him, these attributes of players and small groups have high socio-cultural value, chiefly because they operate in his thinking, as a conscious coercive factor via his meaning and decision making processes.

My last interviewee in this section, told me about how he manages his time by playing in as many pick-up basketball games as he can.

Joe Peterson, a 23-year-old ½ Asian ½ White American male, 1<sup>st</sup> year med student, said,

“I've been playing ball at the rec now for about 5 years. It's too crowded sometimes, especially with intramurals, sometimes. I wish there was more room... more facilities, but with 44,000 students I guess you really can't do that... make room for that many people. I would love more gyms...that would help a lot! They're outside courts, but I'm not playing out there. I go to G. Rollie sometimes when the rec is packed... a lot of the guys in here go over there when Intramurals is going on... there are more courts over there.” (Researcher: How did you hear about that?)... I found out my freshman year... I used to play all the

time, but intramurals... we got pushed out. Some of the guys said they're going over to G. Rollie. I said what is that, and they said another gym. I'm like, 'how many gyms does A&M have,' and one of the guys laughed at me and said, 'Just G. Rollie, the old Gym.'"

His comments are reflective of his friendly casual interactions and relations with other players and small groups that enable him to obtain valuable information. His comments reflect accidental-like access to information that opened up opportunities for him to play in a broader range of games. As a TAMU SRC late-night rec ball regular, this interviewee's comments highlight opportunities of interaction with players, which led him to other opportunities with the same players, in similar social settings and contexts.

Players with more knowledge and information of pick-up basketball settings and contexts on TAMU's campus, have tended to have larger networks and increased social capital via their broader interactions and relations with a wider range of players. Players and groups with smaller, less diverse networks, tend only to accumulate social capital via their daily interactions with familiar friends and acquaintances, and with some of the infrequent strangers who might occasionally wander into their small group of players. Many interviewees however, make "conscious investments" in their social interactions and behavior with other players in order to make friends, build relationships, and to expand their pick-up basketball opportunities via using network information and social relations (Resnick 2002, and Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009).

All of the comments above reveal much about how players and small groups find out what is what, and who is who via playing pick-up basketball inside of the TAMU SRC. The above interviewees' responses describe how they make meaning and decisions from their social interactions, and from their patterns of action and behavior that are telling of: 1) their relationships and social relations, 2) their similarities in socialization and re-socialization, and 3) their commonalities as players and groups with corresponding attitudes, approaches, and demeanor. These players and groups' patterns of social relations explain much about the internalization of micro-level structures. These patterns of relations occur as customs and ritual performances that contribute to the selection and/or avoidance of particular players and groups on particular courts and sidelines. All of these aspects play a central role in players and groups' conceptual and practical creations and negotiations, and their maintenance of particular micro-level pick-up basketball structures and social systems.

### **Networks as Micro-level Pick-up Basketball Structures**

In many cases, players that make up dyads and triads will congregate on the courts looking to play in games. They will often meet with, and team up with, other players and groups whom are looking to do the same thing. The formation of teams comprised of five players, includes some players and excludes other players from playing in these games. When players negotiate their selection of teammates, they use and implement informal order in ways derived and reflective of the operation of microlevel pick-up basketball structures among particular players and small groups.



Players' negotiations with other players, is based largely on social exchange, competition, cooperation, conflict, and coercion. Players strategically make meaning and decisions by selecting (or avoiding to select) one another as informal social exchanges related to the transference of mutual rewards in their attempts to collectively win games with particular groups of players. Players also strategically make meaning and decisions by selecting (or avoiding to select) one another to compete in an attempt to win and to obtain collective goals that are associated with both prized and scarce pick-up basketball resources (i.e. retention of the courts via winning games). Players' actions and interactions involve the use of deceptive and coercive pick-up basketball strategies and tactics to persuade players to help them to achieve their group goals. These aspects of players' interests are chain events and interaction rituals that form the base of players and small groups' day-to-day creations, re-creations, and contestations of micro-level pick-up basketball structures on particular courts and sidelines (Collins 1981 and 2004, Barbalet 2006, and Cottingham 2012).

When groups of players know nothing about other players, and tend not to identify with other players as belonging to particular groups, they will act, behave, and interact in impersonal ways based on their broad understanding of the informal organization of pick-up basketball (Baumeister and Leary 1995). Players' impersonal relations in particular social settings and contexts, reveal much about the patterned interactions and social relations that comprise players' networks of strong and weak ties (Granovetter 1973, Erickson 1996, and Wang and Wellman, 2010). Players express these

kinds of ties in their bonds of loyalty and commitment to players and groups in specific social settings and contexts.

Players' networks significantly influence their perceptions of reality, their interpretations of experience, and their performances on the courts and sidelines. Networks comprise sets of interlocking relationships and social relations, which are micro-level ties that structure players and groups' access and opportunities to play in particular games on particular courts. Many of the players' relationships and social relations in small groups are based on ties of common interest as communities of every day practice, who share similar goals because they have mutual attachments and affiliations. These mutual attachments and interests inform much of players' creation and re-creation of the informal order and micro-level structures in pick-up basketball. Many players also contest and negotiate the informal order and micro-level pick-up basketball structures by challenging small group goals and interests with their individual goals and interests. Players' interests often collide when dynamic sets of interpersonal bonds and social relations conflict, chiefly because of players' competing interests that are undergirded by a diverse range of motives.

Not all players and groups have the same social capital, chiefly because this form of capital is not equally available or attainable in the same way that other forms of capital are obtained, used, and diffused (Bourdieu 2002 and Portes 1998). Geographic and social isolation contributes to players and groups' limited access to social capital as an important resource for playing in particular games, social settings, and contexts. The socio-cultural value of a specific source of social capital depends largely on the

socioeconomic position of that source, and of a group's interactions with that source (Imandoust 2011). The absence of influential sources of social capital in pick-up basketball often result in the exclusion and/or limited participation of particular players and groups whom are perceive to be outsiders, as well as other restrictions on these players and groups' actions, freedoms, and ability to utilize common norms (Portes 1998).

Pick-up basketball players and groups frequently use their telephones as primary methods of pre-game informal communication. Players and groups are able to propel their interests via the use of this technology, bridled with other forms of cyber communication. These various methods of communication provide players and groups with virtually unlimited access to instant interaction and information about the social activities of friends and acquaintances, which comprise their media-based networks. Other avenues of modern technology related to instant communication, have also enabled players and small groups to communicate quickly via skype, texts, emails, and postings. These sources of information comprise various electronic grapevines for the giving and receiving of information. These technological advancements have also produced efficiency and exclusivity via the confidentiality of information that is related to the particular kinds of social relationships and exchanges of information (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009).

“Electronic grapevines” characterize players’ patterns of pre-game interaction and communication across a wide range of social settings and contexts (Valenzuela, Park, and Kee 2009). At relatively affordable rates, players and groups can use these

technologies to obtain instant information about the social activities and interactions of others, which can help them to informally organize pick-up basketball players and small groups for games. If players are able to broaden their networks, these modern forms of technology can contribute to social capital, via players and groups' creation of weak ties to other players.

Pick-up basketball information is frequently passed via cluster chains; these chains offer relatively fast information that can be highly inaccurate because of: 1) miscommunication, 2) the oversimplification of information, 3) ambiguity, and 4) simple errors that occur via the mass use and volume of messages (Newstrom and Davis 1993. P 441, 445). Phone and computer-mediated networks enable information to be communicated quickly; they also influence the management of players and groups' attitudes, demeanor, and personalities, which are directly related to access and opportunities (or lack thereof) to play with particular players and groups in particular games, social settings, and contexts. These forms of cyber-communication are highly influential because they cut across institutional lines via dealing with players and small groups directly, in ways that contribute to small group solidarity, exclusivity, and confidentiality (Newstrom and Davis 1993. p. 446-447).

### **Players and Groups' Networks: Games within Games**

When players arrive at crowded courts, it is routine that they wait on the sidelines before they are able to play in games. When they wait, their wait is a central aspect of the order of things, specifically the micro-level order that comprises the informal

structured arrangement of players and groups into games that is manifest in players' attempts to self-organize and to socially self-situate among broader groups of players (Smart 1990, Loader 1997, and Douglas 1991 and 2003).

Players and groups on the sidelines will tend to chitchat, stretch, and/or shoot around as pre-game warm-up rituals, which are non-competitive activities. Players and groups however, use these activities to make sense and meaning of the actions, interactions, and behavior of other players and groups, which they make as quick calculated decisions. Players and groups routinely engage in these kinds of pre-game activities that amount to social and symbolic expressions and indications of familiarity (or lack thereof) with the informal pre-game order of things. Players and groups express and demonstrate their understanding of this order as part of the broad socio-cultural norms of pick-up basketball.

In most cases, the most recent players and groups on the sidelines will look to others for order, specifically to make meaning and decisions based on their individual and collective definitions of pick-up basketball situations from their face-to-face interactions and communications with the existing players. After this, players and groups will usually try to place themselves in the best light to accomplish their particular pickup basketball goals and purposes (Goffman 1959). These goals and purposes are largely dependent on the different pursuits of players, the size of groups, the social order of games, and the personal and interpersonal relationships they may have with particular players and groups on the courts and sidelines (i.e. the friendships and acquaintances and the social bonds and/or ties they may have with the existing players and groups).

Players and groups will tend to work towards achieving their goals and purposes by strategically managing their impressions via their interpersonal interactions and behaviors. They accomplish this through the social relations they have with others, in order to be perceived in a favorable manner (Goffman 1959). Many of these actions and interactions are based on deception and trickery, especially because these settings and contexts are governed by the informal ritual activities and interactions that comprise networks of players and groups. Players and groups routinely try to influence other players who are in a structural position to select them as teammates. Players and groups also use networks as micro-level structures to create, maintain, and negotiate the social rules that are the enduring normative patterns of order and behavior, and will try to coerce other players and groups to help them achieve their goals and purposes (Nadel 2002 and 2013). These different player and group networks undergird the micro-level informal order of players and groups, and operate in ways that distribute informal rewards in pickup basketball settings with limited resources (i.e. highly skilled players on congested courts).

Below are four interviewees' responses and two field note entries that describe and discuss players' use of networks as contestable and negotiable micro-level structures. In my first interview with a competitive regular, he told me about his dealing with particular players, specifically how he manages and negotiates access and opportunities to play with particular players via his ritual interaction.

Nathan Doggs, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Political Science major from Austin, said,

(Researcher:) “Explain my options again? (Interviewee:) So, yea... there are three ways to get on a packed court with a 5 or 6 game wait. First, you can call ahead and try to reserve a next...you can call someone, one of your buddies and tell them to tell people... tell everyone up here that you have next if you’re not here yet. If you’re a really good player you can try to get picked up... you have to keep asking around...shopping around for somebody who might let you on a team if one of their guys is leaving. Or three, you just have to call next and wait your ass on the sideline till it’s your turn, like everybody else. That’s it! Those are your options: get picked-up... hook-up, merge, or wait and construct your own team. Also, if you know people, you might not be the best player- the guy that they might really want - but if you know people, and if people like you and they know what you can and can’t do, then they might pick you up. I’ve been picked up before when there are better players out here... they have picked me up because I’m their boy! They know me, and were boyz, and cause we’re cool like that. People lie all the time and say they have 5 and they don’t! They end up picking me up because they feel like... sometimes, like they have a better chance winning with me.”

When I asked this interviewee to tell me more about how he was able to jump the social pecking order of players and to get ahead, he explained much of this via the general interactions he tries to have with players on the courts and sidelines of games (Chase 1980).

“When you come up here, it’s all about who you meet. When you come to the gym and you want to play ball, you have to talk to people... you have to be sociable... make yourself sociable... like we’re doing right now! You have to find out things about people... what they like and what they don’t like... and the kinds of things that they do outside of basketball. You have to step out there and meet some people. Sometimes you get lucky, and you meet some of the right people, and develop a crew and a cool group of friends, and... sometimes you don’t get so lucky. You start hangin’ out with people that are pulling you down... pulling you away from what you’re supposed to be doin’... school wise. I know some people who have come up here for 4 or 5 years, and basically, they don’t know anyone. They’re in here all the time... for 4 or 5 years, and all they have is a few first names! Then you have a guy like me that has met some cool people in the rec, and now they have become some of my best friends... and roommates. Me and Dre just clicked, but I know that some people are here for different reasons. Some just want to play by themselves.”

This interviewee’s response illuminates the influence of his social interactions, networks, and the social relations he has with other players on the courts and sidelines. He explains how meeting and interacting with the right people a.k.a. cool groups of friends that are not pulling him down, played a role in him being able to have opportunities to play on highly competitive courts with highly skilled players. The interviewee also illuminated how his social capital (i.e. network relations) and personal



relationships with the right people provided him with opportunities that surpassed his limited human capital, which influenced other player's selection of him as a teammate.

In another interview with a self-proclaimed competitive regular, this player explained to me how he makes meaning and decisions about where and whom he usually plays with on particular pick-up basketball courts.

Avon Burns, a 22-year-old Black American male, Blinn College student, said, "Right now, I know a lot of the guys in here. At least a dozen easy, today. When I walk in, I'm looking to get on the court the best and the fastest way that I can. It's fifty-fifty when I come in here with regards to who I will play with. It really all depends on who's on the court at the time. There are days when I come in and I don't have to call 'next.' Some days I get picked up a lot, and so I don't have to wait... usually. Sometimes there are days when everyone has 5... days when I get up here late. Guys are all running with their crews, and it hard to get on the court. Those days you just have to sit and wait, and shoot around until it's your game. There have been a few times when I have come out here, and a guy ends up bumping another guy on the team to make room for me... he, essentially, kicks another guy off the team in order for me to play. I'm a pretty good shooter, at least I think so, so there has been times where guys have been bumped off... other teammates, because they said they need me on their team... because they need a shooter. I have been told that. I, myself, I have never been bumped off. I do the bumping."

The interviewee's comments describe much of his pre-game approach and his interaction rituals with other players and groups. They also describe how other player's knowledge of him via a mixture of face-to-face and impersonal interactions, was able to influence other players' selection of him as a teammate. His comments also illuminate his familiarity with other players, and the influence of other players on providing him access to particular courts with competitive and highly skilled players. Many of his comments illuminate how he is able to leap ahead of other players at times, but under particular conditions, situations, and circumstances.

In many cases however, this interviewee is subject to the traditional informal order of players and groups by having to call next, and having to sit and wait and construct his own team because of the limited opportunities to jump ahead. His ability to bump other players off of teams also illuminates how his social capital and human capital are intertwined. This interviewee's familiarity with other players, which is largely due to his regular interaction with other competitive players and groups on the courts and sidelines, illuminates much about his experiences, his negotiation of the informal order of players and groups, and his use of micro-level structures of network relations that enable him to justify his ability to jump the pecking order.

Another interviewee described some of his frustrations with the informal organization of players and groups. He explicitly comments on players who desire to play in games the fastest way they can.

Mark Visi, a 23-year-old White American male, Sr., Sport Management major from Friendswood (Greater Houston), said,

“The guys I play with, some of them might come together, but if there’s a spot open on the court, everyone is quick to jump in! For the most part, getting on a packed court is top priority... you can’t build any sort of commitment or community like that...when guys are selfish like that... we all do it! Nobody wants to wait 3 or 4 games when the gym is packed like that.”

This interviewee’s comments illuminate some of the vantage points and access opportunities of players to fill-in open slots on teams, by essentially being in the right places at the right times to have their desires filled. His comments about other players, and about himself, also reveal much about the priorities and values of players as part of flexible groups, and how players comprised of dyads and triads often have to pick-up individual players to form five-on-five teams. His comments also describe much about how micro-level structures of players and groups are quickly negotiated by the access and opportunities that are presented to players and small groups.

In another interview, a player told me of how he managed to negotiate multiple positions on the pick-up basketball courts and sidelines by maximizing his social bonds and relationships with other players and groups.

Mack Jack, a 20-year-old White American male, Jr., Sports Management major from Round Rock (North Austin), said,

“If there is a long wait, I usually try to get picked up by somebody... I’ll run with anybody. When I ask somebody and they say that they have 4 and they need a 5<sup>th</sup>

I'll ask to play with them. If I think that they are gonna loose, I'll ask some of my boys who are waiting for next to hold a spot for me. If we end up winning, I'll switch teams to play with my boys... they (the other team) can find somebody else to play with. If our team loses, it's all good because I end up getting to run with my boys anyway. People out here stack the teams... they do it all the time so they can stay on the court. You can't win with just anybody.”

This interviewee's comments also illuminate how players negotiate access and opportunities to play by quickly filling-in open slots on teams. This interviewee, however hedges his bets by reserving a position with his boys, who will select him as a teammate if he should loose. This interviewee's comments illuminate the dysfunctions of the informal organization of players and groups (i.e. the unintended or unrecognized/latent functions), which have a negative effect on other players and groups' abilities and chances to play on particular courts with particular players and groups. His comments also reveal much about his priorities and values that are related to him being a part of numerous informally organized teams and groups. His responses also describe much about how micro-level structures of players and groups are routinely negotiated.

In a field note entry, I tell about my actions, interactions, and perceptions and interpretations of new players from my position as one of the regulars on the sideline of one of the competitive courts.

Tuesday - September 22, 2009- 3:30 p.m. - The Student Recreation Center,  
College Station, TX

I'm in the gym today; it's the second day of class, the first week of school. I got to the court early today cause I know it's gonna be packed today. Usually all the freshman come out to play and they pack the gym...they walk in the gym and scope out the courts like they are a player on the A&M Basketball team. They have an arrogance...as if they chose not to play for the school. There is such arrogance... their skills, or what they think they have that makes them better than the rest of us. Most of them don't talk to anyone, they don't acknowledge us with any eye contact or a head nod, or whatever... they just look around to find the court that they wanna play on. They're usually lookin' for the toughest court, the court that they think will get them the most respect on if they can win...usually the courts with all the black players. I have spoken with a few of them when they have to speak to me, to either construct a team or to play with me. It's cute that most of them are usually talking loud and wearing high school basketball t-shirts of their school, or some sort of collegiate or professional basketball jersey. Whatever it is, it's something to show that they can play ball, or that they are familiar with competitive basketball. Even when they are tryin to act hard and look independent of anyone, eventually they'll have to come and speak to me because I have next, and they aren't going to play with me or anyone else if they don't man up and come and talk to me.

The field note explains how social order is routinely created, re-created, maintained, and negotiated as a central aspect of the day-to-day operation of micro-level structures of players.

In the field note entry below, I show how players use micro-level structures as vantage points to organize players and groups onto teams, in ways that best meets their goals and desires.

Monday - September 22, 2008- 2:30 p.m. - The Student Recreation Center,  
College Station, TX

I walked in the gym today, and it was packed. After I got there I saw about 9 or 10 guys waiting to play. There were already 10 guys on the court playing... running up and down. I placed my bag on the ground and began to tie my shoes because I was ready to play. I made sure I got to the gym early today because today is one of the better days to play. The competition is usually better on Mondays and Wednesdays, so they say.

I walked over and spoke to Davi, Brian, and a number of the guys who I am familiar with. For the most part, they know me and I know them, and even if I don't know them I slap them five kinda like a NBA player greeting anonymous fans as he enters on his home court. They were all sitting on the bleachers. I asked, "Who has next?" One of the guys, C-Day, raised his hand and said, "I got it." Then I asked, "Do you have 5?" and he said, "Yea, I got 5." Then I asked, "Well, who's got after you?" and he pointed to another one of the guys on the bleachers named Drew as he said, "I think he's got next." So I said to Drew, "Yo, you got next after him?" and he said, "Yea." Then I asked, "Do you have 5?" and he said, "Yea, I got 5." Then I said, "Well, who's got after you?" He looked around for a few seconds and hesitated, and then said, "I think one of

those guys... I think the guy in the blue shirt at the end of the court shooting around...he's got after me."

So I walked over to the end of the court and began to talk with the guy that Drew indicated had next. He told me, "Yea, I have third downs, meaning I am third on the list to play." I said, "Do you have 5?" and he said, "Yea, I got 5." So I was a little frustrated at this point and began to talk loud and aggressively as I walked back over to the bleachers using a little bit of profane language. (I have found it beneficial to "talk a lil trash" as a way of showing aggression and self assertion.) I said loudly and in a sarcastic tone when I got back to the benches, "There's 10 guys on the court, about 8 or 9 guys waitin' to play and there is 3 downs, and everyone is talking bout they have 5. That's bull shit! I see what you all are doing! You all wanna play with your boyfriends...scratching and patting each other on the ass. There's more people here than have downs, than people that are actually playing! How is there going to be 3 downs and only 8 guys waiting to play, and you only need 5 to play. I understand what's goin' on here! I see what's happening! You all got a crop rotation goin' on...recycling players. I see what's up! I know what's up!"

Some of the guys on the bleachers began to laugh and chuckle and smile without giving me direct eye contact. They know that what they are doing is wrong, but they don't have the guts to say to me, Sean, you can't play, you're too slow, and your defense sucks and you know that! I know that I am not the best player out here, but all they want to do is pick-up guys that are selfish players

that hog the ball and score all the points. Then they started making fun of me because I was mad. They wouldn't respond to what I was saying, but they knew that what I was saying was true. They saw my frustration... I know that some of them knew exactly what I felt, and they knew what I was talking about simply because they were forced to call next and to construct their own team.

The field note above describes some of my experience as a regular on what many players reported was the most competitive and highly argumentative court of regulars. It also illuminates what it felt like to not be selected as a player, and what it was like to have to wait to play, or to have to find another court to play on with mildly competitive groups of players. Although much of the field note captures my frustration and my obnoxious sarcastic tone, it also demonstrates how players create and re-create opportunities for (and limit the opportunities of) other players on particular courts. Even though I tried to explain to players on the sidelines that what they were doing was wrong, they were performing and executing normative functions, which I found were dysfunctional to me as a player because they had had unintended or unrecognized/latent functions. These unintended functions limited my access and opportunities to play with competitive groups of highly skilled players.

Although the field note captures some negative effects of key elements of microlevel pick-up basketball structures in the day-to-day face-to-face interaction of players and groups (i.e. how competition, conflict, deception, and coercion operate), it illuminates how the various values, goals, and purposes of players are contested and negotiated via the everyday activities and practices of players and groups. The field note



also illuminates how players' actions and interactions are central to their creation of games, settings, and contexts that is reflected in players and groups' norms, attitudes, and dispositions. The field note also shows how players and groups use micro-level structures that permit them to make and exercise order in ways that best suits their desires and needs, and demonstrates how networks and social capital are routinely contested and negotiated. These factors frequently operate as unfruitful challenges to the human capital of highly competitive, better skilled players (Coleman 1988, Bourdieu 2002, and Pfeffer and Parra 2009).

### **Imputing Status and Roles as Informal Leadership and Norms**

The influence of formally organized basketball on players' thinking about formal basketball structures is evident in the actions and interactions of players and groups. Players routinely create and re-create informal statuses and roles as informal leadership and norms. They also assert a wide range of sport identities, which they routinely express as group values and practices in their expectations of themselves and others. Based on many of the players' experiences with formally organized basketball structures and systems, I have found that players and groups frequently assert their interpretations of values and ideals as collectively held, uniformly esteemed norms across a wide range of courts. This lack of universally prized norms is manifest in the differential enforcement of the social rules and infractions. This is also evident in the lack of consensus in players and groups' thinking and behavior with others on the courts and sidelines.

Formally organized basketball is based on a set of stable and enduring patterns of positions, social relations, and roles. These are a foundational part of players' thinking and their actions and interactions on the pick-up basketball courts and sidelines. These relationships comprise a mixture of generic and specific responsibilities that make up the informal organization and expectations of players; these expectations are based on the informal roles that players are assumed to carry out. These roles are comprised patterns of behavior that support and perpetuate particular norms of players and groups. Players and groups rely on these norms as a way of informally organizing positions with corresponding roles.

Many problems with the informal organization of players and groups occur, because of inflexibility and resistance to change. Particular players and groups often desire to protect and perpetuate specific patterns of behavior in their everyday practices. These special ways of life require conformity to particular norms. Patterns of interaction and behavior based on inconsistent norms are a major source of conflict and contradiction. Differences in players' interpretations and communications are a result of their diverse approaches, attitudes, practices, and expectations of others in games.

Players and groups encourage and police specific norms, and require conformity of behavior that is evident in specific attitudes and dispositions. In many cases, players and groups use social sanctions to persuade others to conform; persuasion serves as a measurement of informal rewards and penalties. When sanctions on norms are strong and routinely enforced in consistent ways, players and groups will tend to develop

strained interpersonal and intergroup relations that reduce and limit motivation and satisfaction (Newstrom and Davis 1993p. 440). (Newstrom and Davis 1993 p. 440).

Pick-up basketball players and groups have no formal hierarchy or leadership, however the presence of specific hierarchies and leadership is not absent from the minds of many players. Status operates informally in players' everyday beliefs and practices; status in the thinking of players informs how they consistently impute leadership to particular players. Status operates as a micro-level structure that undergirds the players' interactions and interpretations of others. Players rely on formal frameworks like status, which is built on much of the formal structures they encounter in everyday life, to impute leadership to particular players.

Leadership and its corollary attachment to status, has corresponding roles and responsibilities. Leadership within informal organizations does not occur without conflict or coercion. Unofficial leaders tend to emerge via conflict based on a variety of factors related to a mixture of their ascribed and achieved status. Players usually pay deference to unofficial leaders, and usually conform to these kinds of seniority systems (Bielby 2000). Unofficial leaders in pick-up basketball tend to rely on micro-level structures to support and maintain specific norms and everyday practices. Informal leadership represents and is reflective of a driving force behind players' conformity to norms and micro-level structures that impact social relations, interactions, and expectations among players.

### **Creating Informal Leadership: Deference and Conformity**

The informal arrangement of players, their activities and social relations, influences group behavior. Players' webs of relationship comprise their networks, which are an important basis of their social relations and exchanges. Micro-level structures manage players' social exchanges, and helps players to negotiate their everyday interactions and behavior. These structures also aid players' interpretation of norms, while perpetuating specific norms based on leadership.

Informal leadership operates as status that wields influence, not power. Power is invested in formal hierarchal chains of authority. Few players are infused with informal leadership based on other players' deference to their perspectives and interpretations. Informal leaders wield influence as a way to maintain, advocate for, and appeal to the conformity of others. Informal leaders also use and rely heavily on persuasion as a means of obtaining order via the conformity of others.

Below are five interviewee responses that illustrate how some players impute other players with informal leadership. These interviewee responses also show how informal leadership is contested and negotiated by players in particular social settings and contexts. The first interviewee's response tells of a player's everyday interactions and behavior, which is reflective of the norms and values that undergird his day-to-day interactions and social exchanges with other players.

Doc Banner, a 65-year-old Black American male, professor, said,

“I have played with all kinds and types out here. My philosophy is that, if you make a call it’s your ball, and when I make a call it’s my ball. That’s the way I play! My rule is, I do not have to agree with your call, but I will respect the call. That also means and indicates to me that if you make a bad call and I respect your call and then I make a call, and you don’t respect my call, things are going to get out of control... Things are out of order at that point. We have to respect each other’s calls irrespective of how we may feel about one another as people. I make an effort to comply with that general rule... in some respect it is a guiding principle of how things work out here. I tell people all the time there is no need to argue because when it’s your call... when you make a bad or questionable call... you will not have an argument, you just get the ball. The people that I play with, they know that... they often look to me when there is a dispute because, I think because I am older... they respect me because of how I conduct myself out here on the court. Players make calls all the time and look to me... sometimes they back down because of pressure after they have made a call... They are getting argued down and I tell them if you legitimately believe that it was a fair and right call then don’t back down. The backing down on a call also causes problems. I say to the guys in here only make a call if you’re positively right about the call... That’s my philosophy, but others out here like to argue and I think that that is part of the ambiance and camaraderie of this environment. I know a lot of individuals who have come and gone who love to argue when they get on the court... That’s just the way they are, and that’s how they play

basketball... I really don't find any abuses of calls, but if the situation gets out of hand...when a guy is making a lot of calls, I just give them the ball, just to stop the arguing. I will say, let's just play ball, and then when I make a call and they choose not to respect it, I just stop playing... I just walk off the court.”

This interviewee's comments demonstrate his understanding of how players impute informal status to him as leadership via their deference. His comments also show how deference to him is frequently contested and negotiated because particular players routinely try to manipulate the outcome of micro-events and games in their best interest. His explanation of his actions and behavior on the court demonstrate how he actively recreates and works to maintain micro-level structures via order and norms. His remarks are also telling of norms of reciprocity in much of the social exchanges he has with players. His tone illuminates the fluid nature of conflict and coercion in the discursive practices of players, based largely on players' different interpretations of the same events. In this regard, players' deference and conformity to his norms are always open to contestation and negotiation.

Another important aspect of his leadership is based on his understanding of his personal influence, not his formal power. His comments reveal an awareness of his personal influence, as based on his interpersonal and personal relationships with particular players and groups. Players impute leadership to him, in ways directly linked to personal attributes, and players defer to him as a leader, not because of his position of superiority, but because of his everyday practices and interactions with them. His comments about the everyday operations of pick-up basketball illuminate a complex

informal, highly flexible, hierarchy void of formal order, which makes it very unstable during the absence of particular players like him. In his absence, and in the absence of other players imputed with informal leadership, the management and maintenance of other competing norms regulate the informal organization of players (Newstrom and Davis 1993, p. 434).

Another interviewee explained how players and groups resolve disputes via the invocation of imparted leadership and norms; his comments illuminate much about how players routinely create, re-create, and negotiate these competing micro-level structures.

Duke Coop, a 22-year-old White American male, Sr., Business major from Dallas, said,

“Arguments and a lot of arguing resolves disputes. There is constant arguing and usually you have to shoot for ball to settle it... a lot of times if you’ve got seniority on the court you kinda get your way. If you’ve got age and time on the court, and you know the rules... if your good, and if people know you, and you’ve been on the court for a while people will respect you ... your opinion is more respected that way. It all really depends sometimes, but seniority is usually by age and skill.”

This interviewee’s comments demonstrate his understanding of how influence operates via: 1) status-like attributes, 2) the interpersonal relations of players, and 3) the face-to-face interactions of players with particular others. He also demonstrates how informal leadership operates through players and group’s deference and conformity to the coercive and discursive practices of others. His understanding of personal influence

however, is complex and fleeting because it manifests itself via players' face-to-face interactions, and is lost without players' first-hand involvement and participation in disputable matters. This interviewee's comments also demonstrate how players erect informal seniority systems that operate as internalized parts of player's thinking, actions, and interactions that are referenced during disputes in games. His comments illuminate how deference to seniority systems frequently takes precedence over the proposed arguments and assertions of other players (Godwyn and Gittell 2011, p. 195).

Another interviewee gave me a comprehensive explanation of what he learned and gained from playing pick-up basketball inside of the TAMU SRC over an extended period. His comments explain much about his perceptions and interpretations of his informal influence on others, which is also telling of much of the day-to-day operations of informal leadership and norms in micro-level pick-up basketball structures.

Tom Jock, a 26-year-old White American male, grad student, Geology major from Houston, said,

“I’ve been playing rec ball since I was a freshman. I was 17 when I got here. I was one of the younger guys here in the gym... I’m 26 now! I’ve seen a lot of changes since I got here. I’ve seen a lot of guys grow up. When I was a freshman I was intimidated when I first stepped in the gym because I was one of the younger guys. I was seeing all of these older guys playing ball, seeing all the guys that were here- guys that were bigger than me - guys that could play better than me. I was real quiet back then, but as I got older and began to know people



and to make friends, I came out of my shell a little bit. I learned how to stand my ground and have people listen to me... have people look up to me.”

This interviewee described perceptions of his growth and influence as an informal leader. He also explained, based on his time and familiarity on particular courts with particular groups of players, his influence as an informal leader. He also told how the informal organization of players frequently conflicted with the norms and the informal structure of players on the sidelines. His explanation of his growth is something he asserts that helped him to enjoy certain rewards and privileges via personal relationships and regular interaction with others. He attributes his growth in self-esteem and his acquisition of personal responsibility to learning how to deal with particular players in certain situations (Newstrom and Davis 1993. p. 436).

Another interviewee told me about his personal goals and decisions when playing in games with familiar and unfamiliar others. Much of his explanations about his interactions with familiar and unfamiliar others is based on his use of norms and roles as micro-level structures.

Sam Bean, a 23-year-old White American male, Sr., Parks and Rec major from Ft. Worth, said,

“I like to play with certain people, certain guys. I usually play with them when I come in here.... just the regular guys usually, because I have played with them longer. I know them, and they know me; they know how to share the ball and, they play defense. I don't like playing with guys that don't play defense. It frustrates me because the team with the better defense usually wins. Sometimes I

end up... I have to pick up guys that I know don't play defense because they are good offensive players... all they do is play offense, but it's a trade off. I usually try to look for a balance, but it's hard to get that out here... guys that are good offensively and guys that play good d(efense).”

This interviewee's comments explain much about how he negotiates particular roles and norms when playing with particular groups of players. He also tells about how he acts and interacts with other players using these norms, specifically when he has to select players that are known for only playing certain types of roles. During the interview, I sensed some anxiety with his selection of players. I asked him to explain more about his reasons for selecting particular players. He told me more about the specific role he plays, and explained what he expects from other players when he selects them as teammates.

“When I come up here.... when I play, I want to win, and... I want to stay on the court. That's my goal! If I score 2 points that's no big deal to me. There have been games where I have not scored any points and that's ok with me, and then there have been games when I have scored 9 or 10 points, and that's ok with me too. I don't care what I have to do... I just want to win. I know my role most of the time. When I come up here with a group of friends, usually each guy knows their role. They kinda know what they are expected to do. When you play with a random bunch of guys it's all mismatch. You'll have people that dominate the ball, and people aren't sure what they are supposed to do. A lot of times you'll have people just standing around, and there is not a lot of movement or motion

without the ball going on. That's also when people get a little frustrated because they are not sure of how to help their team win. People begin to take things on the court personally, and then they begin to play a little bit rougher. I think that sometimes you have to look out for your safety and your own well-being when things like that start to happen.... Hard fouls I mean."

This interviewee's comments explain a lot about how he is often times resigned to playing particular roles when he has to play with unfamiliar groups of players who are his teammates. He also explained the social exchange of competition and cooperation in interaction, specifically how he feels compelled at times, to select particular players in order to place himself in a winning situation. His comments reflect the feelings of many players who find themselves playing particular roles and envisioning their roles as important for helping their teams win games.

His approach and behavior towards the teammate selection process is a central part of other players' active regulation of competition. The values and practices he uses to select players are also key elements of the structure of cooperation that makes up the informal organization of players in games. His selection of particular roles is also telling of his quick calculated decisions that are based on: 1) the roles of all the other players he selects as teammates, and 2) the roles of all of the other players who are eligible for teammate selection as well as the roles of the players who comprise the opposing team members. His decisions, like many of the decisions of other players, illuminates how players' cooperation frequently trumps the competition for particular roles on particular

teams, especially when winning becomes the collective goal of a team.

Selecting and performing particular roles is an important part of the informal order of players, teams, and games, which contributes to players' conscious decisions to select other players who are known to routinely play isolated categorical roles. Players consciously impart to others, and regulate others by giving them specific roles and responsibilities based on a mixture of their physical attributes and the physical attributes of their opponents. Players then, willingly play certain roles that are designed to provide order and stability, which contribute to the unified pursuit of team victories. Over time, players' performances become expectations and norms, which are patterns of behavior that are directly related to particular roles. Players' then, comprise teams based on role performances and expectations that are part of the coercive and discursive interactions and social relations of the teammate selection processes.

My last interviewee informed me of some of the problems he faced with playing with groups of players who had no knowledge or experience with playing particular positions or performing particular roles. His comments contribute to a complex understanding of the informal organization of players on teams, which highlight the operation of the informal norms that govern pick-up basketball.

Rudy Hall, a 21-year-old Black American male, Jr., Sociology major from Dallas, said,

“Organized structured ball is crisp. It’s nice! It’s organized where people are more attune to the game of basketball. I mean, you are more in tune with playing with one another... not so much fouling either. In structured ball, everybody has

a role...things that they do, or are supposed to do. This recreational ball in here... its every man for himself... everybody feels responsible for handling the ball... shooting the 3 ball. In structured ball you have your 1 and 2 guards bringing the ball up the court and distributing the ball... you don't have your center bringing the ball up the court. If you're a center and you shoot a 3 ball, better believe that you're going straight to the bench. Out here everyone is a point guard and a center at the same time... people taking all kinds of shots... everybody is doing every and anything at the same time. In structured ball, the bench is the greatest disciplinarian and motivator, but the rec doesn't have a bench... unless you lose.... and then you blame it on someone else because all five have to get off the court. Nobody is motivated to play basketball the correct way... nobody is required to do what their supposed to do and there is no motivating force.”

This interviewee's comments illuminate much about the everyday problems with the informal organization of games that is related to the structure of players on teams. Informally organized teams operate under many incongruities, specifically when teams are made up of players who perform ambiguous roles and carry out uncertain responsibilities. His comments also demonstrate a desire for formal structure and order that is absent in pick-up basketball, due to the absence of formal authority. Players often lack a consensus of norms that are related to notions and practices of how to play, and how to best win games. The informal organization of players is related to the lack of formal rewards, recognition, and achievement that come with success, as well as

punishments that are attached to failure. His remarks also show his frustration and lack of motivation. This frustration and lack of motivation illuminate how players are governed by diverse understandings of roles and norms.

### **Conclusion**

Players and groups routinely create, contest, and negotiate micro-level structures via their everyday actions, interactions, and behavior. Much of these contestations and negotiations take place in specific settings and context, with specific groups of players that comprise teams and games. When players and small groups routinely play together, they make sense, meaning, and decisions about where, how, and who they play with based on their previous knowledge and expectations from their socialization experiences and through active re-socialization.

I found that players' interactions were based on uniform norms; these interactions were likely to take place when players interacted on equal terms in large and small groups. I also found that small group interaction occurred with more frequency, as compared to interactions across subgroups. I also found that players had regular face-to-face interaction with others they had preexisting relationships with, which often led to the development of networks that were both broader and limited. Players' interactions remained uniform and impersonal with others that they had no preexisting relationship.

Micro-level structures as networks were easier to understand and interpret because of the intimate ritual interactions and activities of players. Players and groups use networks to gain access to opportunities to play with other players on specific courts in specific games. Many players also used social and human capital to negotiate existing

norms and roles; however, these norms and roles remained contested and negotiable by different players and groups across a wide range of settings and contexts.

Players routinely create and implement status-like positions of leadership onto particular others with corresponding roles and responsibilities that operate as a guide for broader patterns of behavior (Camp 2003). These informal leaders often play an important role in the solving of conflicts and disputes. Deference and conformity to these leaders' ways of thinking and acting, both support and maintain particular values and practices that perpetuate norms of interaction and behavior as micro-level structures.

Players actively re-create micro-level structures in contested ways, because of competing norms. Small groups of regulars establish trust and reciprocity and play in games together based on shared bonds and characteristics. These characteristics enable players to form bonds as socio-cultural and structural insiders and outsiders—which often results in a mix of short-term and long-term friendships and relationships (Merton 1972, and Schopmeyer and Fisher 1993). These experiences play a significant role in players' networks, and in players' thinking about the teammate selection process. Microlevel structures also operate as roles and norms that are informal models of action and behavior. These models also operate to initiate and motivate players' acceptance and conformity in their thinking, attitudes, values, and expectations of themselves and others. These attitudes and values undergird the actions, interactions, and behavior of players that is a key indicator of the formation and operation of micro-level structures.

CHAPTER VII  
RACE AND RACE RELATIONS AS MICRO-LEVEL  
SOCIAL FORCES OF PICK-UP BASKETBALL PLAYERS

Everyday pick-up basketball players use race in mixed race settings and contexts, as a micro-level social force to select or avoid selecting players. In mixed race settings, players rely on race as a proxy for natural athleticism, safe contexts, and perceived hazardous and criminal environments. Players exercise these notions via their impersonal and interpersonal interracial interactions with others.

In mixed race settings, players interracial interactions and behavior are easy to see, however much of their latent notions and assumptions about race, only appear to rise in the face of tough competition, incongruous cooperation with teammates, and conflict concerning calls and infractions. These factors often lead to players' use and validation of their perceptions of race. How and why these factors illuminate racial thinking and behavior is difficult to sociologically see, understand, and assess given the significance of race as a micro-level social force in the symbolic interracial interactions and relations of players.

By significant micro-level social force, I mean that race operates in and through pick-up basketball players' day-to-day interactions and experiences that is most manifest in their complex social relations with those who are outside of their race. Players' race, and their everyday interracial interactions with others outside of their race reveals much about the patterned cultural and structural forces that impact players, games, settings and



contexts. Race as a micro-level social force in pick-up basketball is made known in both the direct and indirect ways that shape the opinions, experiences, expressions, and worldview of players inside and outside of these games and settings.

Pick-up basketball is an ideal social site and informal activity for approaching and better understanding the day-to-day operations of race in players' everyday lives. Pick-up basketball games embody the concept of life as a game, whereby knowing how to play and compete in cooperative physical activities is of great significance (Denzin 1996). Race shapes what many pick-up basketball players consciously and unconsciously do, how they do it, and how they understand why they do what they do, and why others do what they do. What players have learned in their past, and in their previous social interactions in games determines largely what they do. Race, specifically the interracial interactions of pick-up basketball players can open doors for some, and close doors for others. In games like pick-up basketball, the players decide how to play their cards, but it is society's social forces that deals them their hands (Macionis 2007, p 9.)

In this chapter, I discuss race by looking specifically at a mixture of different racial perspectives and interpretations based on the interracial interactions and experiences of players. First, I describe Black and White American players' sociohistorical experiences in organized and recreational basketball as a way to make sense and meaning of everyday players' perceptions and interpretations. After that, I show how explicit and implicit forms of racism operate as responses to racial thinking,

tension, and hostility. After that, I discuss players' perspectives and interpretations of race and athleticism in their selection and avoidance of particular teammates, and in their selection of particular pick-up basketball courts and contexts. After that, I show how players actively re-create and police the courts and settings in ways that maintain and contribute to de facto racial segregation. I also illuminate players' interpretation of racial and talent-based social self-segregation. After that, I discuss the influence of race and social class on players' perceptions, interactions, and experiences with non-TAMU student players. I conclude with some ways that players' movements towards minimizing race is a central feature that contributes to factions among Black groups of players.

### **Black and White American Socio-historical Experiences in Basketball**

Race is a fundamental social characteristics and indispensable feature of U.S. Institutions of Higher Education. It is also an important base for understanding the operation of high profile, big-time money-making varsity collegiate sports as well as recreational collegiate sports (i.e. varsity and intramural football and basketball). Black students, in both of these contexts, were often excluded from interracial competition.

Historically, Black Americans were overwhelmingly denied participation in organized sport, except for a few token members on predominantly white college athletic teams. By in large, Black American athletes were barred from participating in professional and amateur sports (Sailes 1996). When they eventually were allowed the opportunity to participate, racial hatred and racial abuse was commonplace. These

students who were varsity and lay collegiate athletes understood that to compete they had to remain silent (Smith 2007).

Even after penetrating exclusionary barriers to participation, Black American students were still subjected to racial harassment (Smith 2007). For instance, Wilt "the Stilt" Chamberlain, while playing for the University of Kansas Jayhawks, was called moody and aloof by sportswriters. These sportswriters failed to contextualize the racial animosity that surrounded Chamberlain's off-the-court activities and run-of-the-mill collegiate life. What they failed to consider was that Chamberlain had to cope with explicit racism day-in and day-out, routinely having to deal with being called nigger.

Racism and segregation have not disappeared from American sport as race theorists and culture critics have told us. The mythology that sport provides the only kind of social capital that translates into social mobility for African Americans has been, and continues to be, a pernicious fiction (Edwards 1970, Hoberman 1997, and Dyreson 2001).

Some have consider White college students' abusive racial hostility and experiences with Black male athletes as unique and isolated occurrences, but unfortunately the history of Black male athletes in interracial athletics suggests these kinds of incidents were common (Smith 2007). It is against this historical backdrop that we must measure the extent of racial progress and the institutional provision of sporting environments that are free from socio-historical racial harassment. I measure the contemporary experiences of racial harassment by considering the day-to-day interactions of Black and White players inside of the TAMU SRC. These players'

informal sports interactions and experiences are reflective of the stagnant and progressive racial losses and gains.

Below are nine interviewee responses about explicit and implicit racial incidents that Black and White players had on the courts and sidelines. The first set of interview responses are of players' explicit comments to racially charged incidents. The second set describes players' comments to covert forms of racism. These incidents collectively illuminate the context in which racist interactions and responses manifest themselves as competitive aspects of games. Players in these contexts draw on micro-level forces as a way to gain (and refute) advantage via the introduction of the cultural norms, ideas, and beliefs about players and groups during the resolution of disputes. My first interviewee talks explicitly about an incident he was part of on one of the courts.

Nique Ward, a 20-year-old Black American male, So., Math major from Houston, said,

“A boy called me a nigger one day... it only happened one time though... basically. Me and my whole team was black and we got into it with them... the other team. I made a call and they... the other team tried to argue me down about it. I said fine, let's shoot for it and I shot the ball and made it and they said naw, naw, you fucking niggers! You always think that you can come in here and run shit!’ Quote unquote. Everybody heard it... you could not have heard it! That is the day that I was really about to fight. I feel like he addressed it to me, but he was really talking to the whole team. I haven't seen him in the rec since. I saw

him on campus one time after that... he was scared! He was coming out of a class... he wasn't expecting to see me.”

This interviewee's response is telling of a number of significant micro-level exchanges that occurred during a racially charged incident on the courts. The interviewee tells about how explicit racism was used in an indirect and ambiguous manner, as a way to challenge a call that he made. Ward appealed to the common norm of disputing a call by shooting for possession of the ball, and even after achieving success via making the required shot, racial hostility and resentment were used to diminish him and his achievement. Although he says the comment was not directed specifically to him, the explicit racial hostility that is directed at Black people is often violent.

Another interviewee also talks explicitly about some racist comments that were directed at him when he was on the sidelines of on one of the courts waiting to play.

Mark Visi, a 23-year-old White American male, Sr., Sport Management major from Friendswood (Greater Houston), said,

“I have heard a lot of the white guys on some of the court use racial slurs to try to get into black peoples' heads while their playing basketball... saying the N word under their breath. I hear it all the time... all the time. When a lot of the guys are looking for a court to play on, they say stuff like, look at all of these Bryan N's in here... All of these Blinn guys... Blinn Team... Team Blinn! I'm like what are you thinking man... One of the fights that I saw was some White guys that were playing against some Black guys, and they fouled one of the Black guys real hard and he called it. The white guy said stuff like, go back to Blinn if you can't

handle it over here. That pissed the Black guy off and he was like what are you trying to say man. Then they started to push and shove a little, and then it got broken up. The Black guy was an A&M student, a regular guy. He wasn't here for sports or anything, just a regular guy. I don't know who here goes to A&M and who goes to Blinn. I don't have... or know any stats on that, but all the people... most of the people that I know that are black that play in the gym, go to A&M. Plus, I think Blinn is more white than black anyways. There are more country types... everybody with their big trucks and their getter-done stickers on the back. I don't think that Blinn in Bryan has a gym... but there is a gym I think at the main campus in Brenham.”

This interviewee's comments are telling of a number of significant micro-level factors that occur as racial interactions and exchanges that are both impersonal and interpersonal. As players seek to play on the limited number of courts, they often feel pushed out of spaces they feel they are entitled to as White male students who are involved in recreational sports and physical activities. These White males often see the presence of Black males as educational intruders and athletic outsiders from the nearby City of Bryan. In much of players' observations, race is salient, and racial interpretations and interactive exchanges with those outside of their race illuminate many of the perceptions of Black male students on predominantly white university campuses.

A key feature of this interviewee's comments is how Black players are thought of as a collective group of racial interlopers in traditionally white athletic recreational

spaces, specifically in how White players perceive of, and address, Black players during disputes in which Whites draw upon their institutional power and ties to the institutions of higher education. The manifestation of White players' power is in the way in which Black players are conceptualized as non-TAMU students. These sentiments exist in many of the White players who do not have regular contact or interaction with black people, specifically Black players who are by and large TAMU students.

Another interviewee told of a racially charged incident that began with the racial coercion and resistance of a player. This resulted in physical violence, and later the institutional exclusion and expulsion of a player from the TAMU SRC. This interviewee's comments are based on his observations and interactions with a Black male player. I was later able to garner additional evidence during a subsequent interview.

Nathan Doggs, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Political Science major from Austin, said,

“I've seen guys fight...seen things come to blows... blood and everything.

Quincy, he used to fight in here all the time. He used to hang with this real tall guy, and he got kicked off the football team because some other guy took his spot who is now playing for the pros. He had a chip on his shoulder when he would come in here, but we all know that he lost his spot on the team and claimed that he was injured... he claimed some shoulder injury. He went to some small private school in Dallas, and he's a big dude and he likes to punk people because he thinks he's hard. I remember that this one time a guy called foul and was arguing with Quincy, and Quincy just walked over to him and hit him in the

face. The guy was startled... his mouth was bleeding and everything, but he didn't do anything. Quincy is bigger than most people in the gym... he's 6'3 or 6'4 and about 240. The little white guy just left. He told on Quincy, and Quincy got kicked out of the gym. Also, there was another time that I think that Quincy was arguing on the court, and a guy called Quincy the N-word and then Quincy hit him. The tension was high at the time, and some guys just say what's on their mind, and he said what he said. He said what was on his mind, and Quincy did what he did."

Doggs's comments illuminate how many players frequently trash talk, and say what is on their minds during intense competitive games. These kinds of comments are often an attempt by White players to psychologically disrupt Black players. According to Doggs, Quincy was later kicked out of the gym for a short period of time. When I saw Quincy a few weeks after his dismissal, I asked him about the incident and about his expulsion from the TAMU SRC.

Quincy Germ, a 22-year-old Black American male, Jr., Ag Leadership major from Dallas, said,

"Yea. I hit him...not hard though. If I wanted to, I could have really (really) hurt him though. I made a call and he was getting all loud with me. He grabbed the ball and wouldn't let it go. I told him my ball...give me the ball, and he threw it over to the other courts. He just kept on and on. He wouldn't stop...on and on.



Then he crossed the line...I had to check him! He said what he said, like N- get off the court if your gonna play that way, under his breath. After I heard that, I saw it in his face that he knew I heard him... he knew he crossed the line.” Many young men like Quincy adopt a coping strategy of "cool pose"—entailing cultural behaviors, scripts, physical posturing, and impression management in a carefully crafted physical appearances and performances—that often goes unrecognized and disrespected by White males who have little contact with Black males (Majors 1989, Majors and Billson 1992, and Pierre, Woodland, and Mahalik 2001).

In the next data set, I illuminate covert forms of racism that are subtle. My first example is an incident in which an interviewee interprets comments between Black and White players as having racial overtones.

Lenny Iggy, a 22-year-old Nigerian American male, Sr., Chemical Engineering major, from Houston, said,

“I’ve seen 2 (fights)... one was with the football players. This white guy fouled one of the football players this one time, and the football players said foul. The white guy got mad and said, come on man, look how big you are! You’re a big black guy, and I’m just a little white guy, and I barely even touched you man. The football player said, what the fuck is that supposed to mean? It started an altercation, and I’m glad to say that the black man prevailed. The white guy was saying stuff like you play football man, look at you you’re an athlete. You’re not supposed to even be playing basketball right now.”

Some White players internalize an inferior role and participation in sports like pick-up basketball. Much of this White player's interracial interactions and verbal exchange with the Black player rehashes stereotypes about Black male athletes as brutes (Sailes 1996). The Brute stereotype characterizes Black American males as primitive, temperamental, over reactive, violent, and physically and sexually powerful and uncontrollable (Sailes 1996 and Smith 2007). These stereotypes compromise the integrity of Black American males as hard-working diligent athletes, and assert scientifically unacceptable assumptions about the perceived brutish giftedness and racial dominance of Black males that is linked to "Dumb Jock" stereotypes (Sailes 1996 and Smith 2007).

What is of special importance is Iggy's objectification of Black and White players that are in contentious competition. Iggy's choice of words is telling of his racial pride, competitive socio-psychic dispositions, and his resistance to racial oppression, specifically the way in which he exalts the achievement of the Black player in question. In spite of the socio-historical weight of the implications of big Black men and little White men in the context of sport and broader society, the Black male in question is said to have asked for racial clarification from his White opponent. This raises a number of other concerns about the legitimacy of Black males in anything other than organized sports (Brooks and McKail 2008).

Another interviewee told me of an incident that occurred on the court during a close game. This interviewee interpreted the incident as implicitly racist based on the offending player's choice of words, and his verbal tone and demeanor.

Kale Galds, a 22-year-old Black American male, Sr., Industrial Distribution major from Houston, said,

“I’ve gotten into it with a couple people in here, but it’s been divided up before it became anything physical. The most recent one, incident, was about a month ago. This White boy called be me a fucking monkey! He was a bigger dude, bigger than me, and the game was on the line. He got the ball down low, and he was going up and I grabbed his arm to keep him from shooting. I think we were up, but it might have been a tie game... maybe a tie game. It was like 12 up, or 13 up, it was close. I grabbed his arm and he said what are you doing? I said I’m fouling you, and he said, no you’re not, you’re grabbing me. You’re hanging on me like a fucking monkey! He said it loud. Everybody heard. His friends... some of his White boy friends said you’re out of line for that man. Some of his other White boy friends saw what happened. I started cussing him out, and I started to square... square up on him. My friends picked me up and separated me from him...yeah, everybody heard it! Later on he tried to apologize - he tried to. He said, hey man I didn’t mean nothing by that – by saying that - I think it was just more or less a bad choice of words man. I don’t think it was a bad choice of words because I think he meant it, he meant to say it. I think that that’s what he really wanted to call me, and it came out because he was angry. You know, sometimes when you’re angry the truth comes out. That’s how you really feel about somebody. That’s the first time I’ve ever heard somebody yell, you’re

hanging on me like a monkey. Don't nobody say those words. That's not something anybody says on a daily, everyday... I haven't seen him since that.”

This interviewee's comments led him to believe race impacted an offending player's choice of words and intonation. His account of this incident highlights some players' use of loaded racist symbols in pick-up basketball that are associated with racist rhetoric and imagery. His response to the incident was one of a violent reaction, but as many conflicts are resolved, others in the gym quickly separated the two players. The offending player's friends also appeared to have interpreted a racist tone and meaning behind the use of the word monkey. The apology and appeal for forgiveness illuminates the rationale of a bad choice of words. This interviewee's comments demonstrate in a generic way how race operates as an implicitly.

Another interviewee told me about some ways he confronts and contests players' racist actions and interactions on the court and sidelines. His comments illuminate a lot about the ways he addresses problems and issues of race.

Dre Howdy, a 21-year-old Black American male, Jr., Civil Engineering major from South Dallas, said,

“Out here I've heard lots of racist things... the N word and all kinds of stuff like that. It comes out real smooth and slick though. Like I will make a move to the basket, a crossover, and lose a guy and I will hear him say it under his breath. Guys will say stuff under their breath all the time... like, whatever nigger. Guys have never said it directly to me cause, I would slap a guy for saying something like that. I would say the racism that I encounter in here is more indirect than it is

direct. A lot of it is based on the things I say. I say positive stuff about Obama, and then they respond to me saying Obama this and Obama that... they get on me... try to get on me all the time. I respond by saying stuff like the only reason you riding him is because he's Black, just admit it. The White guys at that point say that's not true... are you calling me a racist... I'm not racist. I tell them that they don't even know that they're racist because they stereotype the shit out of minorities all the time... like when I'm walking on campus... and the crime alert... a perfect example is the Texas A&M crime alert. When anything happens on campus, like a crime, they send out messages to your cell phone through computer, to alert you about a criminal act that has taken place. The description of the criminal is always a black male who is between 5'8 and 6'4 who is wearing jeans and hoodie... it that not the case? The guys... the black guys that go to school don't even wear that, but they think we all wear that. The black guys here wear what White people wear. They try to assimilate into the culture. The Black people here try to be like the Caucasians, and they wear the tight jeans and tight shirts. I don't wear that shit."

This interviewee's comments illuminate some ways that White players insult Black players athletic skills and abilities by racially dismissing them with comments made under their breath. Howdy's comments also illuminate some ways White players conceal their racism via adopting and implementing conservative political viewpoints that they use in their everyday conversations and discussions.

Another important aspect of Howdy's comments is the way in which stereotypes operate as both cultural and institutional norms in White students' rebuff of claims not to be racist. Black TAMU students who are recreational basketball regulars like Howdy pose a challenge to White students who claim not to be racist (Bonilla-Silva 2001). White players rarely make openly racist or bigoted statements on the courts or sidelines because it is socially unacceptable to be seen as a racist.

Howdy also says that many of the White players often try to get on him, and try to argue racially oppressive perspectives because they fail to see how they stereotype others who are outside of their race. White players' racial privileges are linked to a broader ideology of systemic racism that operates like a form of clothing (Feagin 2013). White players routinely adorn themselves with racially oppressive clothing that are racist ideologies that express privileged styles and fashions. The players that Howdy often encounters in the recreation center use particular linguistic manners and racially loaded rhetorical strategies in their race talk. Their talk often appears to have a sense of colorblindness about it, but may be a subtle form of racism (Bonilla-Silva 2001, p. 53). The White players that Howdy often plays with and against are most often unaware of their racism and cannot recognize the ways in which their collective cultural experiences have influenced their beliefs about race (Barnes 2009).

Basketball apparel is an important way that players make sense and meaning of others in pick-up basketball. TAMU apparel, like urban street wear (i.e. baggy jeans and hoodies), informs how White TAMU students make sense and meaning of the Black collegiate-age males who embrace such styles. The urban apparel of many Black male

TAMU students result in tension and conflict over the broad racial profiling of a small group of people on campus. In addition, Black males who dress in urban street wear are often met with racial hostility and conflict in stores, restaurants, and shopping malls because these styles are embedded in practices of systematic racism (Kurin 2008). Many department store clerks are instructed to follow and observe Black customers closely, and to watch Black employees even though the statistics have shown time and again that White customers and employees steal at a higher rate (Kurin 2008). The learning and endorsing of practices rooted in the racial profiling of Black players in the recreation center is a key part of a broader ideology of systematic racism and racial profiling. White TAMU students use clothing style to associate Black players in the recreation center as criminals.

White players' also use appearance to identify Black players based on the stereotype of the brute athlete. This notion of the brute athlete is tied to the idea that they Black players have uncontrollable desires, attitudes, and violent responses to confrontation in recreational sports like pick-up basketball.

Another interviewee reported how racially motivated tension exists on the courts. He provided a light-hearted view of some ways that Black players interjected racial pride in particular aspects of their pick-up basketball performances.

Dustin Hend, a 22-year-old Black American male, Sr., HR Development major and Business Management minor, from Houston, said,

“I have heard some stuff, not serious stuff, just funny stuff like comments about being black... some dumb stuff like jokes. Funny stuff all the time. Like Dre

(Howdy) and Meric,... and some other guys who are always joking about Obama stuff all the time. Like, when they make a shot or something in a guy's face, they'll say Obama... There was this one time that something happened... something went down, but I only heard about it... I didn't see it. They're pretty good about being respectable about that out here. I haven't heard anything sexist either. I'm not saying that it doesn't happen, but at least I haven't heard it."

This interviewee shares interesting thoughts of how Howdy and other players' use race in the recreation center. For instance, Howdy's use of Obama as an in-your-face gesture after successfully scoring on a defender facilitates racial tension and conflict. Howdy uses Obama as a symbol of Black racial pride, achievement, and success in the presence of players he assumes to be racist. This symbolic use is one way that Black can challenge racist Whites (Harvey-Wingfield and Feagin 2009, and Feagin 2013).

Confronting and challenging explicit and implicit forms of racism is a part of many Black players' experiences. White players' experiences with racism and hostility are rare. Contention in interracial interactions with those outside of their race serves as an informal measure of social control for many players. Recreational basketball regulars either: 1) know other players, or 2) know something about other players. These players over time, usually become pick-up basketball friends and acquaintances with those players they are most familiar with in small groups settings. Given this familiarity, some players are less likely to engage in implicit and explicit racist behavior. Still, there are themes of racism that come through in the players' negotiation in the recreation center.



## **Race and Natural Athleticism: Players' Aptitude**

Pick-up basketball players have perceptions and interpretations of race that are often related to notions of natural athleticism (Gnida 1995 and Smith 2007). Notions about the relationship between race and natural athleticism play out in players' everyday interactions with others. These interactions illuminate players' perceptions of aptitude and attitude as it is associated with race.

For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in U.S. Society, sports like organized and recreational forms of basketball occurred in enclaves of difference where White and nonwhite athletes were socially separated. Within these contexts popular perceptions developed suggesting racial differences in genes and to a degree cultural backgrounds and the ways in which these differences impact athletic prowess (Hoberman 1997 and Craig 1998). These perceptions operate as discourse of racial advantage and disadvantage that is invariably reduced to seemingly harmless racial differences in recreational sports settings—a reduction that suggests a more sinister undercurrent (Hylton 2005 and 2008).

Some pseudo-scientific reports perpetuate folklore assumptions by identifying and asserting genetic differences based on race. Some of these researchers assert that blacks have proportionately longer legs, narrower hips, wider calf bones, greater ratios of tendon to muscle, and relatively greater bone densities than whites and thought it reasonable to conclude that such differences (if they really exist) give blacks an advantage in speed and power events (Fleming 2007). Some have asserted explanations that attribute athletic performance to differences in tendons, muscles, and hormonal level

even though these differences have been found to be slight and lack direct correlation with athletic performance (Carter, Chevront, Harrison, Proctor, Myburgh, Brown, and Malina 2010). In spite of the scholarship that has refuted racial assumptions based on the natural genetic make-up of players, there are still overwhelming beliefs that blacks have more natural athleticism than whites (Sailes 1996, Hoberman 1997, and Smith 2007).

Although it may sound innocent, or even a compliment to suggest that some racial groups possess some form of natural sporting ability, in reality these notions border on outright racism. The natural athlete stereotype implies that black athletes have some form of natural inborn ability for certain tasks. One could then argue that this stereotype indicates some racial groups possess a gift that other groups do not, and do not have to work as hard in order to achieve success (Price and Saeed 2012, p. 26.) Labeling Black American pick-up basketball players as naturally athletic celebrates perceptions of the biological superiority of Black bodies, but at the same time preserves White players' assumed intellectual superiority and work ethic (Stone, Perry, and Darley 1997 and Martin, Harrison, and Bukstein, 2010).

Below are three interviewee responses and a field note journal entry that illuminate players' perceptions and interpretations race and athletic ability. These players' responses are based on their notions of race and natural athleticism, and their interracial interactions with others. In my first set of interviews, I illuminate players' interpretations of race and athletic ability by looking at their perceptions of the aptitude of Black and White players. In my next set of interviews, I explain players'

interpretations of race and athletic ability by looking at their perceptions of the social attitudes of Black and White players. Interpretations of race that are manifest in players' aptitude and attitudes are micro-level social forces that players use in their everyday interracial interactions to organize and structure players and games.

My first interviewee tells about his self-perception of being a Black player, and how he feels this influences other players' perceptions and interpretations of him.

Nique Ward, a 20-year-old Black American male, So., Math major from Houston, said,

“Being Black in here, most of the time you might get picked up first when you walk in here, because, you're Black. People are gonna think that you can hoop, which is not true. Some Black people in here can't hoop.”

This interviewee's comment demonstrates the central role of race as a significant feature of others' selection of teammates. It also illuminates broader generic approaches and perspectives of both Black and White players concerning ideal types of players. His comments are consistent with the kinds of impressions that are conveyed in pseudoscience literature about Black males being genetically stronger, faster, quicker, and born with optimal instincts for recreational sports like pick-up basketball.

Another interviewee also tells of his self-perceptions of being a Black pick-up basketball player, and how he feels this influences other players' perceptions and interpretations of him.

Dustin Hend, a 22-year-old Black American male, Sr., HR Development major and Business Management minor, from Houston, said,

“The black people out here, well most of the black guys that come to the gym anyway are hoopers. They are familiar with basketball so that helps. When I would come out here, guys know me now... it’s easy for me to get picked up when I lose. For other people it’s hard to get picked up if you’re not that good. Being black or white doesn’t have anything to do with your ability to play ball... people might assume that, but I don’t think that is not true out here. Out here, if you’re black your black, that’s all that is! It doesn’t mean you can play anything. White people might assume you can jump, but that’s about it... it doesn’t mean you can play ball.”

This interviewee’s comments affirm his awareness of notions related to race and natural athleticism. His comments, however, illuminate that players in particular settings minimize race because of their personal experiences and interracial interactions with different kinds of players allows them to make different kinds of meaning devoid of notions of racialized natural athleticism. Hend’s comments also demonstrate that among competitive small groups of players, race is a small factor in these players’ selection of teammates.

Another interviewee tells about some of his self-perceptions of race that are linked to the perceived natural athleticism Black players. He also tells about how he negotiates these notions in his everyday selection of players as teammates and how he chooses courts.

Rudy Hall, a 21-year-old Black American Male, Jr., Sociology major from Dallas, said,

“Let’s say that a guy walks in the gym. He’s got a pair of Nikes, ankle braces, and headband on. You’re probably gonna give him a shot over a guy who is wearing running shoes... a pair of Asics with low socks. That’s just how it goes. Basketball players wear a certain type gear all the time, that’s what we do... high-tops, either Nikes, Jordans, Reeboks, what have you. You just have to check out guys the minute they walk in the gym. Funny thing though, you can’t judge a book by its cover ... (Pointing to a Black male on the court) ... Him being Black, has nothing to do with being able to play basketball. Actually basketball was created by a white guy to tell you the truth. I know Black people are in love with the game... I don’t know if that is an ignorant thing to say, but that’s been my experience. We might think that we have better odds of getting somewhere with basketball, but the odds are the same as if your White. You have to play against everybody... I come from a place, the Dallas streets, where there are no Caucasians, I mean, any... no White guys around, but I have found that some of the best players in the gym, some of the best basketball players in here are White guys. They know how to get it done, and at the end of the day, they get it done. Some of them (White guys) can ball better than me, and I don’t say that lightly. My freshman year I thought I was one of the best players in here until I found the real basketball players... On this court, skill matters. Race or color, doesn’t matter. If you want to play on the other courts, it doesn’t matter either. Anybody can play over there, but where I’m from (DeSoto, South Dallas) it matters, but in

here it's not that big of a deal. The skill level in here is not really too much different from the other courts, if you really think about it.”

This interviewee illuminates some of the judgments that are made about race as based on crude biological assumptions that assert race-based differences as cultural manifestation of particular ethnic lifestyles, choices in apparel and appearance, language, and patterns of speech (Adair 2013). Although some of his comments address players' use of material culture as markers of serious basketball players, he quickly switches his attention to race, and illuminates that race is made minimal when players demonstrate the appropriate knowledge and demeanor often expressed through the adoption of particular apparel. His comments also suggest that differences in the athletic performances of Black and White players is largely based on premature assumptions that are causally linked to genetic factors. The uncertainties in Black and White players' sport performances do not account for the psychological and physiological attributes of players chiefly related to diet and training as primary functions of their environments (Adair 2013, p, 19).

In a field note entry, I illuminate how one player makes sense of, and negotiates, meaning about selecting particular players. The field note entry also shows how a particular player demonstrates his understanding of race and natural athleticism among a small competitive group, and how he thinks more broadly about race based on his interpersonal face-to-face interracial interactions with players.

November 10, 2007- 4:30 p.m. – The Student Recreation Center, College Station

I was talking with Big Mark (Woody Wood's old roommate) today. I asked Mark if he had next, and he said he did. I asked if he had five, and he said he did. I looked around, and then I asked if he knew a lot of the guys at the court today. He said he only new one guy on the court right now, but that he would probably know more guys that would probably be coming in and out of the gym later today, if he had the time to stay. (From what I observed, this is not Mark's usual play time. Mark told me he started a new job at a new hotel nearby, and that he kinda has a girl now, so he has to play whenever he gets the chance between school, working, and his kinda girlfriend). Mark admitted to me that he didn't know most of the guys in the rec, and then I asked him how he assessed players that he wants to play with if he doesn't know them. He didn't say anything while he was tying his shoe, but I saw him thinking and looking around. Before he could answer I jokingly asked if he (like a lot of the guys in the rec) just picked all the black people that were available. Matt chuckled and said, "Well, you know what, one could argue that it is a factor, but you know what, out here at the recreational level, I think that there is such a difference between these players and players on other level. I mean college players and professional players. There is such a vast difference, you know. I mean that at the professional level there is a large percentage of black players as opposed to other players, but I still don't think race is a big deal, a factor. Out here, I really don't think that race is that big of a deal cause everyone out here is pretty much on the same level.

We're all kinda similar...virtually the same, so I really don't think race is really an indicator of who I would pick up. Out here, at this level, rec ball, we're all kinda the same Black or White. Out here, I play with the players that I think I can play with...I would pick them up because I know them or have seen them play before, not because of their race. To me, a guy out here doesn't get any extra points because he's Black. Just cause your black doesn't mean you can play basketball!

Mark's comments demonstrate his understanding of the place of race in players' abilities, and of the physical and athletic difference between everyday ordinary pick-up basketball players and players like those on the TAMU Men's team. His comments illuminate that in spite of prevailing notions of Blacks' natural athleticism, the Black and/or White players that he tries to select, have to know how to play basketball if he is going to choose them to be his teammates.

### **Black and White Players' Attitudes**

Studies of interracial contact and intergroup relations have asserted that 1) as ingroup size increases, out-group contact decreases, 2) as heterogeneity increases, the probability of intergroup contact increases, and 3) the distribution of characteristics in the population constrains contact opportunity by compressing the dimensions of social space. When people choose to interact and relate to others based on their socio-economic status, their status constrains their ability to have interracial contact and interaction (Moody 2001).



Interracial contact is required to reduce racial prejudice, but this kind of contact must reach below the surface in order to be effective. This kind of contact must also be based on cooperative activities that are likely to produce changes in racial attitudes (Sigelman and Welch 1993). The assumption of this approach rests on the idea that on multiethnic/multi-racial athletic teams difference becomes an irrelevant characteristic, and that the cooperative striving of players towards a unitary goal would engender social solidarity. Key characteristics of this approach also assert that interracial relations can be improved under particular conditions, chiefly where players are of equal status in their groups, where players share common group goals, and where players participate in cooperative interaction with one another underneath the support of positive environmental structures (Bobo 1999).

Some sport researchers have found personal contact in sport settings between members of different racial groups leads to more positive race relations (Slavin and Madden 1979). Some researchers, however, suggest sport may not fulfill many of the conditions necessary for the operation of the contact thesis, especially because Black and White players rarely enjoy equal status and rarely function as equals due to their different socioeconomic backgrounds. This is also complicated by players' expressions of diverse goals, purposes, and playing styles (Chu and Griffey 1985). When winning games becomes the super ordinate goal of players, failure to win may lead to scapegoating and to a subsequent deterioration of positive racial attitudes and behaviors among players and groups (Chu and Griffey 1985).

Below are seven interviewee responses, which illuminate how players' demeanors and attitudes influence their interracial interactions and behavior in pick-up basketball games. My first interviewee's comments illuminate much about his demeanor and attitude towards playing interracial pick-up basketball, and about his perceptions of other players that are racially similar and different.

Nathan Doggs, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Political Science major from Austin, said,

“Black and White people end up playing together because there is a small group of Black people at the school. Out of 45,000 people, Black people are only about 4% of the (TAMU) student population. Even if all the Black people were to play together, some White people want to play too. Some of them (White people) don't mind us. White people can play wherever they want though. There are so many courts in here. There are plenty of courts on both sides of the gym, especially when there is not any intramural games going on. Some White people prefer to play on the outdoor courts, and if you talk to some Black people, they will tell you that they didn't even know that there were outdoor courts at the rec. I've played on outdoor courts my whole life, for over 15 years... I'm not doing it anymore if I have a chance to play in a gym. The super scrubs play out there anyway... they don't know the difference. Really, who wants to play on concrete when you have indoor hardwood floors, breakaway rims, A.C.? I could go home and play outside if I want to... I don't have to have a gym membership if I want to play outside. I can play outside anywhere. The people I see playing out there

are not comfortable with their game... not comfortable playing with better competition. They don't want people to know how sorry they are at basketball. Some of those guys are doing it for the sweat and the cardio. They are out there sweating and not having to guard a guy that's real good and... to hear trash talk and having to be real competitive. They just want to get a workout. None of the guys that I know are going to pay to come to the gym to go outside and play. There is no way in hell I would pay \$10 to go play outside of the rec. Pay to play outside? That makes no sense."

The interviewee's statements above claim that Black and White players' play together all the time. His comments suggest that Black players have to play with White players, but that White players do not necessarily have to play with Black players. He asserts that some Whites want to play with Black players, and that the small numbers of Black students on campus (and inside the TAMU SRC) do not allow Black players to have complete racial domination over any one particular pick-up court or social setting. His comments also illuminate three racial categories of players: 1) the Black TAMU student players, 2) the White TAMU student players, and 3) the Black and White nonTAMU student players. His statements illuminate much about his demeanor and attitude as a Black TAMU Student Player, as well as his perceptions and interpretations of the demeanor and attitudes of Black non-TAMU student players.

Another interviewee discusses how players' demeanors and attitudes about race significantly influence their interracial interactions with others on the courts and sidelines.

Duke Coop, a 22-year-old White American male, Sr., Business major from Dallas, said,

“Race? Oh, yeah! Initially, yea! Definitely. I mean, basketball, the NBA is dominated by Black people, and most people like grow-up thinking that Black people are better at basketball. So if you have a White guy and a Black guy come out here, both at the same time, never played before, the Black guy is more probably gonna get picked up quicker than the White guy, if neither of them know anybody out here. But then, that’s just initially though... what you see doesn’t really much matter. I don’t know if race really matters out here. Some people, their thoughts and stuff don’t change just because of basketball. Just playing on the basketball courts out here is not gonna change how you think about some people, but it might change the image of who you think might actually be able to play regardless of their skin color. I don’t think peoples’ upbringing is going to change because of a couple of games. I mean, a White guy can be racist and put up a false front. Let’s say he was like a supreme racist, but he wants to win some games. He’ll probably pick up some of the Black guys because he wants to win. I’ve seen that happen, but it doesn’t carry over after the games. It doesn’t go anywhere, it’s just in here, playing basketball. A lot of White people don’t like to play with the Black people out here. (Researcher: Do you really think that a lot of White guys out here don’t want to play with the Black guys?) I mean you could see it that way. It’s more or less because people who play on this court are better. This is the main court and they are where all

the Blacks play. They are the best players in the gym on this court, the more talented. There are a bunch of reasons that guys don't play on this court, but that is a reason. I love this court, it is the only court I play on, unless we move...are forced to move because of intramurals, and then we all play on the other courts.”

What is especially important is how this interviewee asserts that race operates as a converging interest of White players specifically those players who want to win in competitive games. Players who are in a position to select teammates, might do so without forming any kind of social relationship or bond with Black players they select as teammates, and would not allow these relationships to transcend the context of particular pick-up basketball games. This interviewee suggests that when the desires of White players is to play in competitive pick-up basketball games with skilled players, they are able to select players as a racial trade-off, and to remain racist because of their love of competition and of basketball. This makes their interracial interactions complex. If this interviewee claims to have knowledge of these kinds of racial trade-offs, this means many White players interracial interactions and relationships with Black players who are teammates might begin and end their relationships on the courts and sidelines.

Of special importance is the way in which racist players might conceal their notions about Black players as being naturally athletic, but are still willing and able to gain from these players by selecting them to further their own interests. When particular White players are not willing to engage in this kind of racial trade-off by selecting Black players, they also have the opportunity to play on other courts void of competitive interracial interaction. These situations are not open to Black players because Black

players have to play with White players in the context of the TAMU SRC— a predominantly White institution of higher education. For White players - competitive or not - access to games, courts, and contexts is a win-win situation.

Another interviewee illuminated his understanding and interpretations of race and natural athleticism by infusing effort and hard work into the equation, thus undermining the racist logic of the pseudo-science approaches and beliefs. This interviewee's comments demonstrate awareness of socio-cultural factors, which influence the operation of race in players' lives and experiences inside and outside the context of sport.

Mark Visi, a 23-year-old White American male, Sr., Sport Management major from Friendswood (Greater Houston), said,

“I think that most of your minorities play harder out here... harder than White people out here. I think that some of the White people out here are not willing to play that hard because there are so many courts that they can play on. It's a privilege to be able to play in the gym here, with so many courts, to have the option to play wherever you want. But the minorities, the people that I play with mostly, they want to win. They want to win on the best court against the best competition. Other people are just out here for fun, to have fun with their friends. If you're on the good courts playing for fun, they get pissed real quick. You can see it in their faces. They're not gonna tell you to go play on the other courts, but most guys get the idea and just end up playing on the courts where they're not as competitive. People look at me and might think I'm White, and I'm short, so I

can't play. They think that I can't jump high. I dunked once in my life, but I come close all the time. People don't expect a guy to be 5'8" and dunking, Black or White. There's a lot of guys that can jump in here. It surprises me all the time. It just shows you how hard they work at it, work to get better at basketball. I would say anyone who is 5'10" and under that can dunk—I'm usually surprised that they can dunk. They're working hard to jump, to really get up there... their work ethic I mean. Their working hard... committed to jumping high, and playing better."

This interviewee's comments eliminate notions of race as related to Black peoples' natural athleticism and genetic superiority. His comments assert that all players can maximize their roles on the court via playing hard and working hard to be better pick-up basketball players. He also tells of his personal experiences and interactions with minority players who he believes play harder than White players.

Some of his other comments demonstrate (as do those that precede him in this section), that White players have many courts to select from, and will routinely exercise their options to play on these other courts before having to deal with competitive interracial groups of players. He suggests that White players have recreational privileges that Black players do not, such as: 1) having a broader range of settings and contexts that are devoid of interracial contact from which to choose, 2) having to deal with assumptions about race that are related to notions of natural athleticism.

He also highlights differences in players' attitudes as related to the kinds of games and contexts in which they desire to play; he proposes that minorities play to win

against the best competition, while other people play for fun and to have fun with their friends (Henderson, Glancy, and Little 1999). These comments illuminate complex cultural factors and backgrounds that are rooted in notions of different players' identities and experiences.

An especially important aspect of this interviewee's response is his comments about his jumping ability as a relatively short White player. For him, jumping high is linked to notions of effort and hard work, which are divorced from the logic of race and Black players' natural athleticism. His comments about the contexts in which he likes to play helps him to maximize his efforts by having to work and play hard, and having to jump higher than other players to be in a position to win games. His knowledge and experience of what it takes to win on competitive courts compels him to adopt particular kinds of attitudes about himself and other players. These ideas and attitudes are routinely expressed and transmitted among competitive groups of players.

Another interviewee shared his perceptions of race as an important factor of pickup basketball games. He described the physical make-up of players on particular courts.

He also made specific comments about players' demeanor and attitudes, which are expressed via players' impersonal and interpersonal face-to-face interracial interactions.

Slick Delly, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Ag Leadership and Development major, from Houston, said,

"It's pretty much Black and White in here today... pretty Oreish, but it's a mixed crowd usually. In here today, you have all the Black guys over here, and



all the White guys over there - sometimes it happens like that. That's what it looks like today, anyways. A lot of times, I think it happens because of the talent level. This is the best court as far as talent is concerned, but people shift courts all the time. I mean, over here, it will start out all White usually, and then us Black guys will come in here, and some of the White guys will leave and go play on the other courts. They're waiting for their friends, and sometimes they are just in here having fun and not wanting to be all that serious - the White guys I mean. The Black guys that come in here are looking to win. I don't think that they are better necessarily, but they are willing to play harder... they're tryin to win. We want to win. I think that the Black guys who come in here are also more athletic than most, but you see that White guy on the court right there in the middle of all those Black guys... he can fly (meaning jump) for real! He almost dunked on me this one time. I didn't know he could get up like that. They're some White dudes that come in here that can ball, for real. On this court a lot of times there are mostly Black people that play here, but there are some White people too. The White guys that stay on this court can ball. We all know them... they get picked up as soon as they walk in the gym.

This interviewee's comments are telling about how interracial interaction works as a social process of creation, contestation, and negotiation. He describes his perception of what he believes is usually mixed racial groups of players, but then asserts that

sometimes the courts are de facto racially segregated. He clarifies his approach to de facto racial segregation by suggesting players' self-select and willingly socially segregate based on talent. This results in de facto racial segregation.

Delly also asserts that White players are often times playing among friends and waiting for friends to have fun with and are not as serious as Black players. His interpretation of these racial groups is telling of friendships and social relationships that trump desires to play serious competitive pick-up basketball. His interpretation also suggests that the different approaches of racial groups to pick-up basketball are cultural approaches, and not inherent racial dispositions, attitudes, or manifestations of innate latent racial demeanor.

This interviewee also asserts that players from different races many times possess and demonstrate different goals and purposes for playing. These goals and purposes are made known in players' decisions. His explanation and interpretation of de facto racial segregation on particular courts is based on many Black players wanting to win, and wanting to beat the most competitive, aggressive, and skilled players. He makes specific mention of the idea that Black players are not necessarily better than other players, but that Black players' desires to win results in them giving different kinds of meaning to their actions as related to other players and games. Although he asserts that the Black players that are in the TAMU SRC are more athletic than most, there are White players who are also athletic and skilled who desire to win and better themselves by playing against those who they perceive to be the most competitive, aggressive, and skilled players.

Another interviewee told me about some of his perceptions of race, specifically his beliefs about how racism is a chief cause of the social division between large groups of Black and White players. His comments also illuminate broader notions of race as related to White peoples' perceptions of Black males inside and outside the context of sport, and what he believes this potentially means to White players who have very limited (or virtually no) interracial contact or interaction with Black people.

Dre Howdy, a 21-year-old Black American male, Jr., Civil Engineering major from South Dallas, said,

“I think that race has something to do with where some of the guys play in here sometimes... I think it's more about... because they (White Players) just don't want to have to deal with a confrontation. Black people will confront you on the basketball court if they feel like you're doing something wrong! I think some people think in terms of stereotypes, and they don't want to have to confront people they really don't know anything about. You know that the last crime alert report said that they were looking for an African American male who is a criminal suspect wearing basketball shorts! I mean everybody wears basketball shorts now, but I know that some people in here might think that Black people who are criminals wear basketball shorts, and they are not sure how to deal with that. I will tell you, I think that some Black people use that kind of information to their advantage. They'll try to intimidate White people on the court out here, all the time. I've done it before. All I have to do is start talking... just talk a lil bit. I don't have to say much. You can see the reaction on their faces. I think that some

Black guys out here also have a superiority complex, not that White guys can't play, but that they think they are better than everyone else, even other Black people. Sports is a rite of passage in the African American community. Nobody is asking you if you're in the chess club or nothing like that. In the African American community, guys are supposed to be good at some kinda sports - basketball, football, soccer, something. I don't know if it is like that in other communities. I feel like when I come out here, I have that approach and attitude sometimes. I know that if you think that your better than someone, then you're gonna act like it, and play like it. Out here there are only a few White guys that are really not afraid of black people out here. Black people respect that. Like that white guy we were talking about earlier, he can play and he doesn't back down. Black people out here know him, and they like him."

A key aspect of Howdy's description of race is how he links it to players' attitudes and demeanor in a non-racial sense. He asserts that Black players are willing to confront White players they perceive to be doing something wrong, and will try to intimidate White players from achieving individual success and team victories. This interviewee also says that White players often times have stereotypes of Black players as natural athletes, violent, and uncontrollable criminal brutes (King and Springwood 2001 and Feagin, Vera, and Imani, 1996). He also proposes that those White players who have limited (or virtually no) contact with Black players are not willing to interact with many Black players for a fear of confrontation. This interviewee also suggests, as have many other race theorists and scholars, that mass communication, entertainment, and

advertising industries have propagated negative stereotypes of Black males, specifically the merger of Black male identities as encompassing athletics, gangster rap, and criminal tendencies into a single Black Male persona (Hoberman 1997, p. xxvii). This Black Male persona, as scholars have suggested, dominates much of the image of Black athletes and masculinities inside of the TAMU SRC. Such images have limited many Black players' efforts at interracial interaction with whites.

Of central importance is how this interviewee thinks many Black players take advantage of racial stereotypes via their interracial interactions with White players on the court. Because many Black players have very limited and strained interracial interaction with White players and people, they might tend to intimidate White players by relying on racial stereotypes of Black males as naturally brute athletes. These kinds of interracial interactions do not stop many Black males from demonstrating similar attitudes and demeanor with other Black players - this often leads to considerable tension, conflict, and routine violence. What is most telling of many Black players' attempts to significantly influence other pick-up basketball players and settings is, how these players have internalize competition in sports as a means of attaining status and mobility, even in recreational settings. These kinds of approaches are infused into Black players thinking about their racial superiority as natural athletes, and are expressed in their attempts to dominate other Black players.

This interviewee also provides a socio-historical context for understanding the interracial interactions, attitudes, and demeanors of Black players. Howdy asserts that in his experience, sports are a rite of passage for Black players, and that appropriate

socialization in the context of sports requires Black players to internalize notions of athletic superiority and giftedness in an array of physical activities. This approach, however, does not undermine his knowledge and awareness of White players who can play and who are not afraid to play against Black players. He proposes that there are few White players who are not afraid of Black players. Further, that White players who routinely play against Black players are known and liked by Black players, chiefly for their lack of fear and intimidation. Much of this interviewee's comments confirm researchers' findings about lower levels of racial prejudice among White people who maintain close interracial contact with Blacks (Sigelman and Welch 1993).

My final interviewee in this section told me a lot about his perceptions and interpretations of race. He asserts that problems with race are reflected in the everyday interracial interactions between groups of Black and White players. He also told me about how competition influenced many Black and White players' approaches and attitudes to pick-up basketball games, courts, and social settings.

Kale Galds, a 22-year-old Black American male, Sr., Industrial Distribution major from Houston, said,

“Sometimes, when there's a lot of... I feel like sometimes, there's a lot of like... some of the White boys they be afraid! They're afraid! They're more timid when all the Black people come on. Most of the Black people stay on one court, and all the White boys, they like to move around when we come on... they slowly, but surely disperse. They move around. They don't stay on the court, you know. I don't know really why they do it. I don't know, but some of them - the only ones

that stay over here really, are like the well-known ones, the ones that be around us a lot - Black people. At least that's what I'm assuming. They're around us, use to us. The rest of them, I don't know why (they leave). The ones that are around us a lot, they're not as timid, they're not as afraid. We are all coming out here to compete. I think that they get that way because they stereotype... stereotype of a black man being angry, probably, and that we're very athletic, and they probably all think they can't beat us or something... beat us in basketball. They just go to other courts. I've seen some of them over on the other courts and they can actually play. The court that Black people are on is good competition. We can really play over here. I would say that it's the better court. When I go to the other courts, and I'm looking at the other courts, at some of the other (White) dudes, I'm like, man, what you doing over here? You should be hooping over here with us! Yea, I'm talking about some of the White guys that can hoop, like White guys that can actually play basketball, period! Like, if you can hoop, I think you should be at the competitive court, but I see them at the other courts sometimes. I think... probably, I think... it's either more because of all the Black people or they're just not as competitive. It can be that they are not as competitive, or they are either more timid of Black people, or... of the competition."

This interviewee's comments are a summary of most of the ideas and beliefs about race, which were expressed by many of the other interviewees. I included this interview because it highlights a new dimension of the social policing of players via norms and expectations. This interviewee told me that he frequently walks around the

rec when the courts are full, and when he is looking for the best competition to play with and against. His comments show his imposition of informal order via his expectations of skilled competitive players that he thinks should be playing with particular groups of competitive players, void of these players' racial composition. This is also telling of his interpretations of race, specifically how he believes race plays out in the interracial interactions of Black and White players in competitive settings and contexts. In the last section of this chapter, I describe and discuss problems related to race and social class in Black TAMU student players' social interactions and relations.

#### **TAMU and non-TAMU Student Players: Race and Social Class**

The Black American middle class developed significantly in the early 1960s due in large part to the outlawing of de jure racial segregation (Feagin and Sikes 1994, and Pattillo 2013). Prior to Civil Rights, Black Americans had limited opportunities for advancement in society; few Blacks were granted access to higher education. Blacks who attained a college education formed a new kind of educated employable middle class. The Black Middle class today is comprised essentially of white-collar professionals in the field of health care, law, education, and engineering (Lacy 2007, Landry and Marsh 2011, and Pattillo 2013). Most of the Black working class who were not able to obtain structural opportunities still have little to no access to higher education, and are confine to serving and working in unskilled industrial jobs (Feagin and Sikes 1994).



Many Black college students today are first and second generation students; only a few of these are first generation students who attend Research 1 predominantly white institutions of higher education. Because of geographic segregation in neighborhoods and social segregation between and within schools, college may provide the first opportunity for many Black students to interact closely in academic, residential, and recreational settings with members of different racial groups (Stearns, Buchmann, and Bonneau 2009). Many middle-class and working-class Black Americans, however, have kept and developed friendships, relationships, and ties to impoverished Black communities - much of which is due to the sharing of the same urban living environments and resources, despite many of these students' educational attainment. Segregated patterns in housing and education have kept many Black Americans from suburbanized education and employment opportunities that are linked to cultural knowledge and social networks (Feagin and Sikes 1994, Lacy 2007, and Pattillo 2013).

Black Americans access to institutions of higher education is not the end-all solution to de facto racial discrimination and segregation. At predominantly white institutions of higher education, racial problems and issues manifest everyday in much of the lives and experiences of Black students (Feagin and Sikes 1994, and Feagin 1996). Research 1 predominantly White institutions of higher education have not addressed basic problems and issues that Black students face with racial bias, prejudice, and discrimination inside and outside of the classroom (Fleming 2007). Racial bigotry on college campuses is demonstrated in the sport actions, behavior, and attitudes of White students (and faculty) in covert and subtle ways (Smith 2007). The persistence of

interpersonal and institutional racism in institutions of higher education is far more subtle, indirect, and ostensibly non-racial, particularly when White faculty and students reject gross stereotypes and blatant discrimination (Feagin 2013).

When White college students accept compliance to new racial norms of action and behavior without the internalization of racial acceptance, they frequently express emotional ambivalence toward Black students that stems from their early childhood socialization with race. When these behaviors and attitudes occur, sustained interracial interaction violates traditional American values, and ideals (Pettigrew 1980). The breaking of American traditions and values results in series of indirect micro-aggressions against Black students that are expressed in the avoidance of face-to-face interracial interaction and opposition to racial change for ostensibly non-racial reasons (Pettigrew 1980). These aggressions are characteristic of a mixture of front and back-stage patterns of language and speech that assert Black students are threats to racial change because of their desire for unearned structural opportunities, racial advantages, and race-based privileges (Picca and Feagin 2007).

When Black students are faced with having routine negative interracial interactions and encounters with explicit and implicit forms of racism, these contribute to their lower sense of social integration. Some scholars have challenged conservative findings that argue Black students dropout rates are due to low intelligence, poor character, community background, and family issues (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996). Much of these arguments stem from racist beliefs about the intellectual inability of Black males to advance and matriculate through institutions of higher education at the same

rates and pace as White students (Allen, Epps, and Haniff 1991, and Allen 1992). Many of these arguments also give no credit to the influence of Black students' socioeconomic backgrounds or the hostile interracial interactions with White students on predominantly White campuses. A chief issue that Black middle-class parents face is their desire for their children to go to strong competitive state colleges and universities that have reputations for racial prejudice and intolerance. This basic dilemma is a large issue in the decisions of Black parents and students, which White students are largely unaware of because of their racial privilege (Feagin 1996, p. 48).

The strivings of Black college students in the face of racial discrimination continues in spite of many blockages. Black males on college campuses frequently respond to racial hostility and antagonism via extreme involvement in recreational sports and physical activities. Many Black males across different social classes self-segregate because of their small numbers, racial identities, and athletic interests, and desires to create comfortable spaces within broad places (Tatum 2003). Black males' reaction to overt displays of racism contributes to their sense of racial solidarity and to their development of informal support networks as a way to deal with racial prejudice and discrimination (Feagin, Vera, and Imani 1996).

Below are eight interviewee responses that illuminate different aspects of racial and social class conflict in the interactions and relations of TAMU student players with non-TAMU student players. These players' responses also contextualize and illuminate differences in perceptions, attitudes, and demeanor. These players' comments also

suggest that status and opportunities to access much of the broader TAMU facilities, significantly influences players' self-perceptions and identities.

My first interviewee told me about how being a TAMU student changed his selfimage and outlook on life, and about why he does not routinely play inside of the TAMU SRC.

Dyson Road, a 22-year-old White American male, Sr., Sports Management major from Bryan, said,

“I’m from Bryan originally, I went to Bryan High (School). I grew up here and my parents pulled one over on me. They told me go to A&M... they said we are not paying for you to go anywhere else... I was kinda forced. My parents said stay here at A&M. My dad went here, and he wanted me to go here. I love it now... it grew on me... I’ve transformed into a real Aggie and I love it here now... When I was in high school I used to come in here a couple of times. It was 5\$ back then, but the price has gone up since then... it’s about double that right now. I know last year it was about 7\$ or 8\$, but now it’s 10\$. I don’t come that much anymore because my friends don’t want to pay that much to play in here. My friends from Bryan don’t think it’s worth it.”

This interviewee’s comments illuminate much about his ability to go to TAMU. His comments also illuminate his social class background and part of his high school experiences, which included visits to the TAMU SRC as a non-TAMU Student. After finding out he raps and makes rap beats and songs with his friends, I became more aware of a few of his close interracial relationships with a number of Black males from his high

school. This interviewee told me he still hangs out with many of his high school friends, and besides them hanging out, they like to play at a local park near his house because access for them to the TAMU SRC is costly because most of them are not TAMU students. This interviewee illuminates the financial strain on non-TAMU players who are willing to try to get their money's worth when they pay to enter the TAMU SRC.

Another interviewee told me about some of the disruptions that have occurred on the courts and sidelines of the TAMU SRC, with TAMU students who are players and with non-TAMU students.

Doc Banner, a 65-year-old Black American, said,

“Yes, I’ve seen fights... I’ve not seen knock down drag out fights. Since 2000 there have been less and less fights. I have seen a distinct correlation between the reduced number of fights and the increased cost of admission, specifically the number of incidents that have happened in the rec center. There are also individuals who are not here anymore who were also part of the A&M community who also caused trouble in here...they liked to instigate. I’ve seen friends fight and get into it...and after the fact I have told particular people that they were wrong for fighting. This also goes for the destruction of property. I have let those people who have fought and/or destroyed property to know that, if I am asked about it by a university official, I will not hesitate to point them out and say, yes they did that - I saw them do that. I will not lie for anybody. If I am around, I will tell what I did see. If you don’t want that to happen, then don’t do

it. In the last 3 or 4 years there has been a lot of pushing and shoving, but nothing like it used to be... no busted lips or bloody noses.”

This interviewee’s comments about fights on the courts reveal much more about the types of player who are part, and who are not part, of the TAMU community. His response also illuminates the financial threshold of players who are not TAMU students. His response also asserts that the rising cost of admission has deterred many players (he perceives as problematic players) from entering the rec. The higher cost of admission is a symbolic marker for those non-TAMU students who are willing to pay to enjoy the facility without disruption. In this sense, the cost is a socio-economic deterrent, which also operates as a racial deterrent for lower class Black players who cannot afford to enter the TAMU SRC regularly.

My next interviewee told me about some disruptions that occur on the courts and sidelines of the TAMU SRC. These disruptions occur TAMU students who are players and with non-TAMU students from the nearby community.

Sam Bean, a 23-year-old White American male, Sr., Parks and Rec major from Ft. Worth, said,

“There is definitely an Aggie (pick-up) basketball community in here. Most everyone knows everyone. Sometimes on the weekends it gets a little bit rougher, and more argumentative in here. There are people that play in here but they don’t go to school here, and a lot of times you will see kids from high school who come in here and kids that have already graduated from high school that come in here that didn’t go to college anywhere. I don’t want to stereotype

Bryan or anything like that, but you know that some of the kids that live in Bryan that come in here have been disruptive at times.”

This interviewee’s remarks illuminate much about the distinctions he makes as a TAMU student who is a recreational basketball regular. His statements are in relation to the disruptive players from the surrounding community who frequently visit the TAMU SRC on the weekends. From what I observed, many non-TAMU locals and those from the surrounding cities will visit the TAMU SRC on the weekends because their schedules may allow it. Playing during the weekend hours that are available to them is money and time well spent. Many of the non-TAMU locals and those from the surrounding cities seek to maximize their use of the courts, and many will try to play as quickly as possible for as long as possible. These motives are based on the time they have to play, and the amount they are willing to pay for their infrequent visits.

Another interviewee described and discussed the cost of attending the courts.

Avon Burns, a 22-year-old Black American male, Blinn college student, said, “I have to pay to come in the gym, even as a student at Blinn (College). There is no break if you’re not an A&M student. Now, I only come to the gym 2 or 3 times a week because my funds are low. That’s the only reason that I am not here more often. I have always been a gym rat, and if I had the money I would be here every day. Next week I’m going to buy a membership so I don’t have to pay every time. It’s 80\$ a month. It’s better that I buy a membership because of how much I like to come to the gym. Right now, it costs me ten dollars a pop, plus parking.”

This interviewee's comments explain a lot about his desire and commitment to play pick-up basketball. He also demonstrates how his money is a significant factor as to why he is not able to play inside of the TAMU SRC regularly. Much of the way he manages his time and money is related to his desires to maximize the use of skilled and competitive players on specific courts. Like many of the other interviewees' comments above, money is a significant aspect of players' choice to attend the TAMU SRC. Players' financial commitment to attend the courts is a social and symbolic marker of their desires and aspirations that are indicative of their broader patterns of participation in particular recreational sports.

Another interviewee described some problems and issues he faced on the courts and sidelines with being a Black TAMU student. He explained these problems in relation to some of his interpersonal interactions with Non-TAMU students from the nearby City of Bryan.

Nathan Doggs, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Political Science major from Austin, said,

“Some of the loc(al)s come in here and cause some problems. They feel that they have something to prove, and want to make a name for themselves. They'll come in saying, 'I'm from Bryan, straight outta Bryan, I'll play against any A&M cat any day of the week.' They say stuff like, 'Just cause you go to A&M you think your better than me, better than me and everybody else, but I'm gonna prove otherwise.' I think it's an insecurity issue about people going to a big school, and them not going to school here. Sometimes, it might be a masculinity issue...



trying to prove something to themselves and to other people. Maybe they were good back in the day, but hard times came. Maybe they did something stupid or messed up their leg, ankle, or knee, and now they're not that good anymore, and their having a problem dealing with it. Maybe they still think they got it, but they really don't. I haven't seen anybody that I thought could play for the A&M (Men's Basketball) Team. I've only seen 2 or 3 of those guys that are not bad. I would say that some of them might be good, but they're small. Then you have the players who are big, but have no skill. Some players are big and athletic, but have no skill."

This interviewee's comments explain much about his perceptions of some of the problem-makers who are from the nearby City of Bryan. He also explains that many of the Bryan players are not perceived to be TAMU students, and that these players want to play and compete by trying to make a name for themselves - playing like they have something to prove. What this interviewee fails to consider is that many of these players are not perceived to be TAMU students or rec ball regulars, and may not be familiar with most of players' use of friendships and networks for selecting players. The selection of players via friendships and networks is a chief norm of many TAMU student players, which the non-TAMU student players may not have any knowledge of. This sort of problem can become magnified when many Bryan players feel they are experiencing racial discrimination because they are not selected, especially when they may think that they have a racial advantage in sports because they are Black players.

Another important aspect of this interviewee's comments is the way he personalizes much of the lives and experiences of Bryan players via focusing on their insecurities about their: 1) educational status and attainment, 2) conceptions of masculinity, 3) athletic abilities and dealing with inabilities, and 4) overall difficulties in life, which he believes could be related to their bad choices and/or stupidity. What he has not consider is the broader social forces that impact these players' attitudes and interpretations of their athletic perceptions and abilities, which are based on cultural contexts outside of the TAMU SRC and a lack of regular interaction with players inside of the TAMU SRC. These broader social forces within these particular environments impact TAMU student players and non-student players' understandings of their small size and lack of skills. What is key, is pondering how these players may think of themselves in terms of their access to particular courts and players.

Another interviewee also told me about some problems and issues he faced on the courts and sidelines with being a Black TAMU student. He described his interpersonal interactions with Non-TAMU students from the nearby City of Bryan.

Dusty Rain, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Sports Management major and Business and Communications minor, from Dallas, said,

“Some of the people I really don't like playing with are people who are always wanting to argue and fight. They're a couple of people that come out here, and that's pretty much all they do when they play. I feel like some of those guys think that they have something to prove to everybody when they come out here.

They're just bringing whatever drama they have at home in their home environment to the court. I feel that sometimes if you're coming from a bad home you'll come out here with the attitude that someone...the world is always against you and it's not like that. That's what I really think about people who want to always fight out here all the time. There is more stuff on their mind than is actually going on out here. Usually, there are not a lot of fights out here because everybody jumps in and breaks it up. But, there is a whole lot of arguing - constant arguing all the time. I've seen some pushing and face-to-face stuff, but I think that actual fighting is rare. Every once in a while Aggies will fight Aggies, but more of the arguing and fighting occurs with people who are not from the A&M community - people from the surrounding community fighting with the guys in here from A&M...with the guys from school. I know that some of the guys that come over from Bryan might feel like they really have something to prove when they are in here. They tend to be a little rougher, and they look a little different from us in here...they're not as clean cut. I think that those guys believe that because we go to A&M, they might think, that we think, that we are better than they are, and that we look down on them, and that's not the case. Where're just out here to play basketball. That's it."

This interviewee's comments reveal his perceptions of TAMU student players and TAMU non-student players. His comments focus largely on bad home lives of players, as has the literature and scholarship about race, persistent inequality, and Black

peoples' lack of effort and desire for educational achievement and upward social mobility. Much of his comments simplify non-TAMU students' opportunities to attend TAMU, and their lack of access to the TAMU SRC because of educational and financial strain. These issues are an absent part of this interviewee's conceptualization of some of the aspects of Bryan players' identities and experiences.

What is telling about his comments is the way in which he asserts that every once in a while Aggies will fight Aggies, but that much of the fighting and arguing are people who are not from the A&M community - people from the surrounding community fighting with the guys in here from A&M. This approach again simplifies much of nonstudent players struggle for access and dominance over limited time and resources. This is complicated with Bryan players' perceptions that other players might feel that they are less than them, because they are not a formal part of TAMU. These issues, when linked with many of the perceptions that Bryan players have of themselves (given their interactions with middle class players who are both Black and White), gives credence to their approaches and attitudes in sport, and what recreational sporting achievements may mean to them.

Another interviewee told me about some of his perceptions and interactions with players from Bryan on the inside of the TAMU SRC.

King Drow, a 23-year-old Black American male, Sr., Computer Engineering major from Carrollton (North Dallas), said,

“I can’t say that I have. I’ve seen a lot of almost fights, but no. Close fights don’t really even happen every day. A lot of times, I mean most of the time people are cool when they come up here and play, but every once in a while you got some knuckleheads that wanna come up in here and try to start something - trying to act hard. I mean, sometimes people from Bryan, people from some other schools, people that don’t go here in general. I mean, I think it’s wrong - it’s kinda wrong to typecast them for being, in general, from being from Bryan, and bringing the controversy like that because anybody can bring controversy like that. But, a lot of times it’s a few cats from Bryan that do cause trouble. Really, I don’t know why. I don’t know what the problems is. I think that they handle it differently, and that they don’t want people trying to run over them up here or, they think somebody’s trying to run...to get over on them when they come up here. Like talent wise, I mean... like trying to take advantage of them, I guess... mentally, you know what I’m saying? They just feel like they have something to prove when they’re in here, you know, not going to school here. I know that just cause some of the guys go to school here, they might think that they are better than other people, and that this gym is their gym when they really don’t run the courts like that. Some of the outsiders know that when they come in here, they have like a chip on their shoulder. They feel like whoever can play better is who really runs the courts. When they wanna fight, a lot of times I try to step up and break it up, and tell everybody to chill out... just play ball. A lot of times that will work, but there are some hardhead people out here.”

This interviewee's comments affirm much of the other comments of the interviewee's above, specifically his statements about those outside of the TAMU Community (the non-TAMU student players that are assumed to be from Bryan). This interviewee's comments also highlight how many TAMU student players perceive Black males who are unknown to them as Bryan outsiders because they are non-regulars, and because they hold different dispositions, demeanors, and attitudes. Much of these players differences are: 1) related to their access to resources as played out in their lack of familiarity with the norms and patterns of play that is rooted in particular interactions, and 2) related to the role of race in their lives as played out via their perceptions of their athletic abilities. This interviewee's remarks also demonstrate the cognitive cultural framing of players who he perceives to be hardheaded, despite these players' approaches and attitudes that are products of their broader cultural environments.

My last interviewee in this section told me about a fight he was in on one of the courts. His comments are telling of much of the problems players face with day to day issues of masculinity that are related to race, perceptions of athletic ability, and access to pick-up' basketball opportunities and resources.

Tay Caster, a 19-year-old Black American male, So., General Studies major from Houston, said,

“Yeah, I have seen a few fights and I have been in a couple myself. There were these two dudes from Bryan this one time. I ain't gonna brag, but you can ask anybody standing over there... you can ask them. I don't want anybody thinking I'm trying to brag. These two dudes from Bryan, I got into it with one of them -

one of the guys. The one guy, he went up for a lay-up...later I found out that the two of them—they were cousins. You know, I found out they were cousins because you get to know everybody who comes in here, and they let it be known that they didn't go to school here and that they were from Bryan. So, they came in and... he was playing, and he went up for a lay-up. I fouled him, and basically we got into a little dispute. After he got fouled, he said something like next time somebody fouls me I'ma have to whoop somebody's ass. He was referring to me, but he wasn't my man. He went past me for the lay-up, and another guy on our team came over on my side and tried to... he was playing pick-up defense and he fouled him. He was really referring to the guy who fouled him, not me though, but he was talking to me. So, the guy went in a second time for a bucket, and when he went in again, I fouled him. Just before that he was all mad and so we decided to switch players on defense. I switched with another guy on my team, and now I was guarding him. I said I would get him on d(efense) because he was starting to talk loud, all wild and being all aggressive. I was just trying to keep the game going without any problems. When I switched up, he ended up pushing me when I was walking over. The game had stopped, and we'd checked the ball back in at the top of the key. When he pushed me... me being me... being small and all, I just couldn't let that happen. I threw my arms up and it threw him off. He thought he could just push me and get away with it. He was a little bigger than me, probably like a little shorter than me back with my braids. The other guy, his cousin, was a little short guy, dark skinned. He had a few tattoos on him.

I guess he thought that that would intimidate me, or whatever. After he gave me the push and he saw that I didn't back down, he started running his mouth. Nique jumped in and slapped his arm up, and then slapped him in the face... big faced him. He hit me just as Nique came in between us. His little shorter friend, his cousin, came and hit me in the back of my head when I turned. Nique hurried up and pushed the dude back, but I guess, me being me, I ended up running up on him and hitting him twice. Another little short guy name Dre grabbed me. Dre grabbed me and the other guys came and hit me real quick. I was pretty mad at Dre for grabbing me, so Dre let me go. Dre ended up getting mad because after he grabbed me, one of the guys hit Dre by accident and ended up pissing off Dre. When he grabbed me, me and Nique ended up backing him down and hitting him a couple of times. Later I got into it with my roommate because he's my roommate and he didn't even jump in... Nique jumped in instead. I got mad at my roommate for not jumping in. Some guys, some of the officials, they were walking around - the recreational officials. They came over and asked what was going on, and I was like, nothing. I mean I only got hit twice. There was no blood or nothing like that. I didn't bleed even though I got hit in the mouth. We just ended the game, and when we ended it... Well, we didn't end the game. They were walking off the court, and that's when the guys from the rec came over and said, hey what's going on? I'm glad that the rec officials didn't see it. I know that somebody reported it. They wanted to talk with me, but I basically said nothing was going on and continued playing basketball. The Bryan cats, they were



getting their stuff and they were actually leaving. They asked again, the rec officials were asking everybody, and everybody was saying that everything is good, everything is fine. I made myself look like a somebody, like a Big Dog cause many people were watching. It's just a matter of respect, the way I was raised. I was raised to fight back.”

What is especially important to me about this respondent's comments is his attitudes and demeanor regarding the players involved in the conflict. All the people involved in the fight demonstrated different versions of hegemonic and Black masculinities in sport. These masculinities complicate a clear understanding of the players' responses and reactions (Messner 1988, and Atencio and Wright 2008).

### **Conclusion**

Pick-up basketball players' race, and their interracial interactions and relations with others, operate as significant micro-level social forces. These forces are manifest in players' selection and in their avoidance of selecting particular players as opponents and teammates, and in their choosing of particular courts and social settings as playing contexts. Players' use of race in their interracial interactions with others is one way they approach, understand, and contribute to an ideology of natural athleticism. Beliefs about the natural athleticism of Black players are linked to broader perceptions and interpretations of hazardous, criminal, playing environments. Players' exercise of this kind of racial logic taints their impersonal and interpersonal interracial interactions with

others - this is easy to observe especially when these interactions occur among competitive highly charged mixed race groups of players.

When competition is tough, and when it takes on an aggressive and assertive physical form, players often interpret the actions, interactions, and behavior of those outside of their race using a racial logic based on racial frameworks of thinking and perceiving. Many of these racial perceptions in pick-up basketball are expressed as explicit and implicit racist beliefs, values, and attitudes in the actions, interactions, and behavior of players. Much of these expressions are rooted in pseudo-scientific beliefs and perceptions about the natural aptitude and attitudes of Black and White players. The meaning that players' give to their perceptions of others' actions and attitudes contribute to broader socio-cultural patterns that comprise micro-level interracial interactions. These forces significantly influence player's decisions in games and about their participation on particular courts. Players' interracial interactions also illuminate a great mixture of perspectives and interpretations that frequently account for players' sociohistorical experiences with people of other races, which also influences the positive and/or negative interracial interactions and experiences they have with others. The positive interracial interactions that players have with others that is rooted in their common goals and ritual participation in particular games and social settings is able to reduce many of the recreational basketball regulars' sense of race as a chief factor in Black and White players aptitude and attitudes.

When competition is tough, and when competition takes on an aggressive and assertive physical form, players often interpret the actions, interactions, and behavior of

those outside of their race in a racial manner. Many of these racial interpretations in the context of pick-up basketball are expressed in explicit and implicit ways as racist beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors. These interpretations and expressions are also rooted in notions of the natural aptitude and attitudes of Black and White players. The meaning that players' give to their perceptions of others' actions, behaviors, and attitudes contribute to broader socio-cultural patterns that comprise important micro-level racial forces. These racial forces significantly influence player's decisions in games and about particular courts, social settings, and contexts. Players' interracial interactions also illuminate a great mixture of perspectives and interpretations that frequently account for players' socio-historical experiences with race that also influences the positive and/or negative feelings they take away from their interracial interactions and experiences.

Many players use of race as proxies for natural athleticism is based on what they have learned via sport-based socialization, and from what they take away from their everyday social experiences with players outside of their race. These experiences play a large part in how players' make racial sense and meaning of others in their everyday interactions. Players also actively create, re-create, and police boundaries of particular courts and sidelines in ways that maintain and contribute to de facto racial segregation. De facto racial segregation is an important criteria that players' use in their quest for playing in competitive games with competitive players on particular courts, however much of this form of segregation is based on the self-seclusion of players related to perceptions and interpretation of talent, competition, and attitudes.

Race is often amplified in the interracial interactions of players during tough competition, especially when different players have and give different meanings to the actions and interactions of others. Race is magnified when players' expressions are inflammatory reactions to particular pick-up basketball norms. When players of different races use different norms on the courts and sidelines, race often becomes a central feature of interpretation that contributes to factions among some Black and White groups of players. When players move towards minimizing race as a central feature of the meaning-making and decision-making processes that is expressed in their interracial interactions with players in games, these often contribute to racial division among small Black groups of players. One interviewee highlighted how race played a major role in another player's perceptions and interpretation of a tempestuous interaction. This interviewee's comments demonstrate how different interpretations of race among Black players often operate as conflict that causes social factions among different Black groups of players.

Dale Roco, a 23-year-old Nigerian American male, Sr., Structural Engineering major, from Round Rock (north Austin), said,

“This one time, I did have some guy complain to me about race. Yeah, some guy came at me with one of those arguments that I was kicking him off the court because he was Black. The guy was like, oh, it's just because I'm black, I'm black, blah, blah, blah. I was like, yeah, yeah go ahead and say that! Why did I kick you off, because you're black? How does that make any sense to you? It

literally made no sense to me! Yeah, he told me that! I was like, what, your logic is messed up! I mean, I can for a second understand that, if I was White, but I'm Black. I can understand you saying that maybe if I was White, and... if I sided with the White guy that you were arguing with, but I'm Black. But, he kept saying, naw, you doing it because I'm black. I'm Black too... it didn't make any sense to me. They were just arguing about it back and forth and they kept arguing, and it was like going on for about 5 or 10 minutes. That's when they came and got us, got me. It's like no one was getting off the court. And it's basically who had next that got to be on the court. I talked to like, almost, everyone out there and they were like, oh, yeah, they were on. The other (Black) guy just walked up and acted like he had next. They just said he walked up. Some of them said they saw him running on the other court just a few minutes ago. After that, I kicked him off the court, but, I didn't kick him out of the gym just for that. Just off the court. (Researcher: Did you know him?) Naw, I don't know him. I've never seen him in here before, but it...when I kick people out, I kick people out."

This interviewee's comments reflect the tension that a player may feel (which is common among many of the non-recreational basketball regulars who are non-TAMU Black student players) about a broader sense of racial injustice in their opportunities in pick-up basketball settings like the TAMU SRC. This interviewee's remarks also demonstrate that his use of the established norms of particular players on particular courts often runs contrary to outside players' perceptions and interpretations of the

norms that can result in racial interpretations and conflict. When players' use race, and amplify race as a feature of their interracial interactions with others, players like Dale are forced to make meaning and decisions about race and the use of norms that are based on the ritual interactions of particular broader groups of players. This can exacerbate racial conflict between and among particular individuals and groups of players.

When players like Dale are placed in a position of authority to informally monitor the altercations and physical conflicts on particular courts, these matters can often lead to racial hostility and antagonism from those who believe that the norms are coded in a racially biased manner. Dale's comments contribute to a better understanding of how race manifests itself in the perceptions and interpretations of players from different racial and social class backgrounds.

Race, as manifested via players' interracial interactions, plays an important role as a micro-level force in players' broad perceptions and interpretations of games, courts, and settings. When race is made known in explicit and implicit ways, it shapes the perceptions, interpretations, and experiences of different players, differently. This makes pick-up basketball players and games inside of the TAMU SRC an ideal social site and informal activity for exploring and understanding how race operates in the day-to-day interracial interactions of players.

## CHAPTER VIII

### COMPREHENSIVE SUMMARY

Pick-up basketball is a complex recreational game, sport, and informal physical activity. When pick-up basketball games occur, they illuminate a lot about the informal interactive socio-cultural processes at the micro-sociological level related to particular social settings and contexts. As complex recreational games, pick-up basketball also transpires as disputable activities and micro-level structural processes that are reflective of the contested ideologies of players and groups. The meanings and decisions players give to games varies greatly from one context to another. The variation in players' meanings and decisions is largely based on the informal organization of everyday structured practices. The contested nature of games on particular courts and sidelines also illuminate a lot about the personal preferences of players, and a lot about the broader social forces that influence the issues of small groups.

Players play in pick-up basketball games by mimicking the formal organization of games, and by creating and re-creating games according to their individual and collective interests. Many players' interests are shaped by their histories and firsthand experiences outside of the TAMU SRC, and by their social interactions with players inside of the TAMU SRC. These players routinely fuse their previous socialization experiences with their re-socialization inside of the TAMU SRC by relying on their perceptions of interactions with particular players on specific courts and sidelines. These players' perceptions further shape their social interaction and behavior in games.

Players' interpretations of place and space significantly influence their meaning making and decision-making processes, which in turn, influence their everyday actions, interactions, and responses to others. Players' use of place and space is also based on a mixture of long-term and short-term contexts, and how these contexts develop into players' perceptions of appropriate and inappropriate use of physical and social boundaries.

Players also create and negotiate cultures and subcultures via small group interaction. Some ways players describe how they make meaning and decisions about culture and subculture is based on: 1) their use of material objects and items like attire, 2) their contestation of other players' attitudes and social dispositions, and 3) their creation and re-creation of physical boundaries that are social and symbolic. Players' use of boundaries reflects different cultural and subcultural attitudes that also tell of players' interpretations of cooperative and competitive sports dispositions. Different cultural and subcultural groups usually form specific social bonds and close relationships as small groups that carry over into routine interaction inside and outside of the TAMU SRC.

The games created and re-created by players in small groups are based on players' negotiations of competitive micro-level structures within the context of specific courts and sidelines. Players also use preexisting relationships to inform the ways they make routine sense, meaning, and decisions about others, specifically, where and how they play, and whom they typically play with and against. These players preexisting relationships are the bases of players' social networks that enable access and opportunities (and limit particular players' and groups' access and opportunities) to



specific courts. Players use and reliance on groups also explains the routine creation of informal order, status-like positions, and the correspondence of particular social roles. Players' creation of order and social positions operate as indicators of informal leadership that help to perpetuate normative cultural patterns and conformity to these patterns that maintain and support micro-level order.

Race operates as a micro-level social force in games and on sidelines. The race relations and interactions of specific players make up a wide range of different racial perspectives and interpretations that significantly influence players' interracial interactions, dynamics, and experiences. Black and White players' socio-historical racial experiences and everyday interactions are a significant way players make sense and meaning of other players, games, courts, and sidelines. How players manage and negotiate race as explicit and implicit forms of racism influences how they think, how they deal with tension and hostility in games, and how they resolve or dawdle interracial conflict on the courts and sidelines.

Notions of race linked to natural athleticism also influence players' selection and avoidance of particular teammates and courts, and players' active re-creation and policing of particular courts and sidelines. Black and White players' interpretations of social class also influence players' interactions, experiences, and perceptions of TAMU students and non-students. In many ways players and groups produce and reproduce a wide range of micro-level cultural and subcultural norms via everyday interaction that structure race and race relations, which are routinely contested social activities linked to broader disputable ideological terrain.

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