"PLAYIN' BALL": THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION
OF PICKUP BASKETBALL GAMES

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ABSTRACT

"PLAYIN' BALL": THE SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

OF PICKUP BASKETBALL GAMES

By

Michael Peter Nagy

I began with a desire to understand how it is possible for a group
of unattatched, though not necessarily unaquainted, men to gather in a
setting and there engage in violently active motions that are mutually
relevant and, for all of them, are defined as "playing a game of basket-
ball."

My method of gathering data was participant observation. I im-
mersed myself in the world of the Men's Intramural Building, trying as
much as possible to be both player and observer. I took the occurrence
of games as problematic. I entered the situation to try to gain an un-
derstanding of what it is that makes the occurrence of basketball games
possible.

I spent a total of approximately forty-four hours observing and
playing pickup basketball games. Thirty-seven hours were spent at the
IM, and I played in sixty-six games there. Seven additional hours were
spent observing and playing (eleven games) at different outdoor basket-
ball courts in the area. The circumstances denied me the luxury of
making notes on the spot. I was forced to make hasty notes upon leaving
the scene and then expand them later in the day.

My major contention is that there is a circumscribed world of meaning that goes with "playin' ball". The person who plays basketball at the IM passes through three different worlds of meaning in the course of his journey through the IM. Initially the person is in the everyday world in which he lives the majority of the time. This is the world in which his actions have consequentiality. When he enters the IM, the person leaves this world behind and enters one of the gyms to play basketball. Immediately he becomes part of a social structure that is focused on organizing basketball games. This structure has its own rules of sociability. The player-to-be finds that his actions no longer have consequences in the everyday world. He has lost, to a large extent, the statuses that he held in the everyday world. And, if he is to play basketball, he must submit himself to the rules of social interaction that operate in the gym. Finally, the individual enters a game of basketball as a player. As a player, the individual finds that his actions once again have consequentiality for his life. Only, this time, the consequentiality is for his life as a player. His actions will affect the results of the game in which he is involved. They are consequential, therefore, not only for himself, but for the others on his team.

The player needs only his player's point of view to act in the situation. The everyday world is forgotten as the player becomes part of the action system of the game. His actions are based on the pattern of men in motion according to specified rules with a specific goal in mind: mainly, the rules of basketball, and the goal of scoring points for the purpose of winning the game. He becomes part of the system as he observes the patterns of movement and synchronizes his movements to

the pattern. Thus, the players are able to synchronize their actions, with differing levels of skill, into the action system that is meaningful for them as "playing a game of basketball."

I discuss the ways in which the action system of the game is maintained by the players. First, the game itself provides a "cut-and dried" system of meaning: a system of measuring time, a definition of spatial properties, and rules for interaction. The social structure of the players provides the organizing capacity for starting and refereeing games. And the "rituals of return" provide for ways in which the game can be continued over breaks in the action. Finally, various subordinate elements: the use of a specialized vocabulary (jargon), explanations of unusual occurrences, humor, and allowable physical contact, reinforce the definition of the situation by taking it for granted. The world of the IM is not totally foreign to its inhabitants. However, the particular content of the forms, relative to each other, and relative to the everyday world, serves to differentiate the two worlds most successfully.

The world of the IM in its entirety is part of the larger world of "masculine activity." The individual who moves through the IM acts in a "masculine" manner as a matter of course. The way in which games are organized and the nature of the game provide modes of acceptable behavior that reinforce "male role" behaviors by taking them for granted as the way of interacting in the situation.

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I. INTRODUCTION

> I ran into Willie today in front of Berkey Hall. He was
> leaving, I was coming, so we didn't converse long. "Hel-
> lo." Myself: "Hi." Willie: "Been playin' any ball
> lately?"[1]

The one phrase, "playin' ball," includes within its meaning a

large realm of social structures and game structures. This paper will

describe the social structures and game structures and show how their

interaction aids men in translating their desire to play basketball

into the actual occurrence of games.

Basketball may be analyzed as a specific example of the more

general phenomenon of play. The games of basketball played at the Men's

IM Building and elsewhere exhibit the characteristic forms of play in

process, forms which serve as boundaries to separate "playin' ball"

from the everyday world. A spontaneous social structure of the partici-

pants aids them in making the transition from the everyday world to the

world of "playin' ball."

I became a participant-observer of "playin' ball" to gain an

understanding of the modes of interaction that form the objective ex-

perience and condition the subjective experience of playing basketball.

The interaction takes place in a setting reserved for that purpose among

men whose only structural relationship to each other is a common desire

to enter the circumscribed play world of basketball. I began with a

desire to understand how it is possible for a group of unattatched,

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though not necessarily unaquainted, men to gather in a setting and there
engage in violently active motions that are mutually relevant and, for
all of them, are defined as "playing a game of basketball."

The rules of the game itself place certain demands on the men if
they are to play it. Teams must be formed, games must be started, and
must be continued smoothly if the desires of the men to play basketball
are to be fulfilled. The social structure that emerges in the setting
helps to insure that the necessary actions to play a game will be taken.
Other modes of relating to people: a specialized language, the use of
humor by the participants, and their explanations of extraordinary
happenings also help to maintain each of the participants' understanding
of the situation as "playin' ball." Added to this is the taken-for-
granted fact that the game will be played only by men. This reduces
the effect of extraneous sexual pressures which might threaten the smooth
continuance of "playin' ball."

In this paper I hope to make clear how play aspects of the game
and the processes of the social structure interact to assure that there
will be games of basketball taking place and that these games will be
started and continued smoothly so that the participants will be able
to "play ball."

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Aspects of Play in General

The relevant literature offers no concise definition of play.
Various authors list various characteristics of play, but many of the
characteristics may or may not be present in any given activity that is
called "play." Other authors try to get at the essence of play by
examining the subjective experience of the "player." Here again, how-
ever, the range of activities and feelings that are part of play are
so varied that any one description of them cannot do justice to the
phenomenon as a whole. I shall examine some of the formulations and
thoughts that others have had regarding play in an attempt to point
out some of the factors that will be seen when the discussion shifts to
the concrete setting in which play takes place.

Play is bounded. It is not "real life." Yet for the players
their play is often more real than anything they do in "real life."
To understand this seeming paradox it is necessary to understand that
we will be talking about play from two different points of view. The
first is that of looking at play from the "outside," examining those
aspects of play that are at the boundaries between play and real life.
Secondly, once we have established the boundaries of play we must move
inside those boundaries to consider how play is carried out and the
boundaries maintained. Gregory Bateson points out the paradoxical
nature of play.

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. . . expanded definition of play: "These actions in which we now engage, do not denote what would be denoted by those actions which these actions denote." The playful nip denotes the bite, but it does not denote what would be denoted by the bite.[2]

Bateson likens this to Epimenides Paradox ("Everything I say is false.") and problems of figure versus ground. He goes on to define the play of two individuals as:

. . . the set of all messages exchanged by them within a limited period of time and modified by the paradoxical premise system which we have described.[3]

The meaning of play for the individuals involved can only be understood from within the boundaries of play itself. Yet the individuals must have some way of knowing that they are within the boundaries of play. It is this necessity of canstantly having to shift perspective from within the boundaries of play (i.e., experiencing the actions of play directly) to outside the boundaries of play (examining what the boundaries are), that makes any overall definition and description an impossible task. Within the boundaries of the "play frame" the actions of the individuals at play are given meaning in terms of the rules of what is being played. These same actions, however, may have different meanings in the everyday world.[4] This ambiguity of actions, whether they are play or not play, presents a continuing threat to the definition of the situation by the players as "play." One of the major tasks of this paper is to explore the ways that individuals maintain the boundaries within which their activities are defined for them and by them as play.

The three authors who deal in the most general fashion with the nature of play are Johan Huizinga, Roger Caillois, and Richard Schechner.

I quote from each of them in turn:

> Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might
> call it a free activity standing quite conciously out-
> side "ordinary" life as being "not serious", but at the
> same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly.
> It is an activity connected with no material interest,
> and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within
> its own proper boundaries of time and space according
> to fixed rules and in an orderly manner.[5]

> Play is defined as an activity that is essentially:
>   1. Free: in which playing is not obligatory:
> if it were, it would at once lose it attractive and
> joyous quality as a diversion;
>   2. Separate: circumscribed within limits of
> space and time, defined and fixed in advance;
>   3. Uncertain: the course of which cannot be
> determined, nor the result attained beforehand, and
> some latitude for innovations being left to the player's
> initiative;
>   4. Unproductive: creating neither goods, nor
> wealth, nor new elements of any kind; and, except for
> the exchange of property among the players, ending in
> a situation identical to that prevailing at the beginning
> of the game;
>   5. Governed by rules: under conventions that
> suspend ordinary laws, and for the moment establish new
> legislation, which alone counts;
>   6. Make-believe: accompanied by a special aware-
> ness of a second reality or of a free unreality, as
> against real life.[6]

> play -- games & sports -- theatre -- ritual
>   Several qualities are shared by all the activities;
> 1) a special ordering of time, 2) a special value at-
> tached to the objects used in the activity, 3) non-pro-
> ductivity, 4) rules. As we move to the right on the
> continuum space is more formally acknowledged.[7]

All these definitions of play deal with play as a bounded activity

separate from "real life" and distinguished from it in various ways that

make it clear to the player that he is "just playing." We see in play,

then, a separate reality where the rules of everyday life are suspended

yet the player feels no lack of directives for behavior.[8] His behavior

takes place in a different context of meaning from that of everyday life.

Let us now examine some of the results of the fact that play is
bounded activity. In doing so, it must be remembered that not only
do certain consequences stem from play's bounded nature, but that these
consequences, in fact, constitute the boundaries themselves. When they
are no longer in operation the boundaries of play have broken down and
play ceases to be. Once again we see the paradoxical nature of play.
Its boundaries are both cause and effect, initiator and result.

Since play is "separate," and "outside ordinary life as being
'not serious,'" the player may reasonably expect that his actions when
at play will not carry consequences for him in his "real life." Sherri
Cavan uses this fact as one of the major means by which she understands
and explains the actions of bar patrons.[9] Since their actions are in-
conquential with respect to their everyday lives, bar patrons evidence
a greater freedom of action within the setting, and less formal inter-
action with the other patrons present. When play begins to have con-
sequences for "real life," when the players begin to feel that their
actions in play "count," they lose the freedom of action within play.
Play becomes serious and ceases to be play.

Play creates a separate reality in which the actions performed
take their meaning from the nature and rules of the play itself. If
the play is of a competitive kind the winning and losing are defined by
the contest.

> It is always a rivalry that hinges on a single quality
> (speed, endurance, strength, memory, skill, ingenuity, etc.)
> exercised, within defined limits and without outside
> assistance in such a way that the winner appears to be
> better than the loser in a certain category of exploits.[10]

For the outcome of the contest to be valid, if the winner is to
truly demonstrate his superiority in a certain category of exploits,

the players must begin the contest on an equal basis so that only their respective expertise will determine the outcome. This requirement has two consequences for play. First, anyone who attempts to subvert the initial equality of the players, either surreptitiously by cheating, or openly by demanding an advantage that makes the players unequal, destroys the basis of fair competition, and thus play itself.

The second consequence is that when two players engage in competition the only thing that should be important about them is their relative skill at the task that is the basis of competition. Ideally, all other facts about the players are superfluous except those that bear directly on the outcome of the contest. In play, the forms of social life take precedence over the contents." Only the player's skill with the forms matters, not who he is. Goffman deals with the same problem of extraneous social statuses when he talks about "rules of irrelevance."[12] In playful contests it is the individual's social characteristics which are irrelevant, only his competitive skills are important for the game. To place the game on a fair and equal competitive basis, a more skillful player often gives an advantage to his less skillful opponent. The player who uses his everyday status to take advantage destroys play. The player who, because of his game skill, gives advantage encourages play.

> Social life is still a game itself, but its outcomes, its victors and losers, are all profane, deceptive illusions, while on the field of sport outcomes are "sacred," that is they reconcile "essence" and "existence," they make that which appears-to-be, real.[13]

It is exactly because play is separated from the everyday world, that within the play world all social statuses are irrelevant, and

because the players begin the contest on an equal footing, that out-
comes of play contests appear more real than anything that occurs in
real life. The degree to which the "rules of irrelevance" of play can
be maintained by the participants affects the degree to which they are
able to consider themselves "at play," and the degree to which the
results of playful contests are "real."

In play the actions one takes are inconsequential for everyday
life. To discover the attraction of this circumscribed world we must
enter into it in an attempt to discover what holds the player's attention
and creates for them and through them a real world. Returning to the
formulations of Caillois for a moment, he states one of the defining
aspects of play to be uncertainty. The course, and therefore the out-
come, of the playful contest cannot be determined beforehand. The players
must "play out" the contest to determine the victor. The tension gen-
erated by this uncertainty is one of the important factors that allows
players to move wholeheartedly into the play world. If we once again
look at the issue of player equality we see that it takes on renewed
importance in light of the requirement of uncertainty of outcome. If
the players are not equal at the start of the contest except for those
attributes that will determine the outcome of the contest, then there
is "no contest" and the foreseeable result destroys the tension of play
and play itself.

> . . . should the final score come to be predictable, as often
> happens near the end of the play, concession by the loser is
> likely, terminating the action in the interests of both the
> play and gaming encounter.[14]

Also in many sports we see the institutionalized practice of
handicapping to equalize the players and make the result of the contest

uncertain. In team contests the teams are often balanced by changing

personnel to insure an unpredictable outcome. The determination of

the players to achieve an outcome in a playful contest is essential if

the players are to become completely immersed in the play world, and

thus be able to achieve an outcome.

> Play is going. It is what happens after all the decisions
> have been made—when "let's go" is the last thing one
> remembers. Play is action generating action: a unified
> experience flowing from one moment to the next in contra-
> distinction to our otherwise disjoint "everyday" exper-
> iences.[15]

The individual at play is totally involved with his play. He

maintains only the player's viewpoint, all other viewpoints being

irrelevant and unnecessary. He is able to maintain a unity of thought

and action, he does not view his actions from the point of view of one

who is not playing. His actions are determined by his perception of

the game situation, the possibilities for action in that situation, and

his capacity as a player to carry out his program of action.

> Play is experienced when it is impossible for the actor to
> differentiate projects available by voluntary fiat from
> assessed situational possibilities.[16]

When the individual is able to become so engrossed in his activity

the boundaries of play lose their problematic nature and the individual

is able to maintain the boundaries simply because he has lost any sense

that he is in a circumscribed reality. The play field becomes his world,

the players, that world's population, and the rules of the game its laws

of nature. This state of conciousness is not one that is easily attained

and easily maintained, however. The nature of play as a paradoxical

system must be remembered. There are always factors that threaten to

destroy the world of the player by their intrusion into his conciousness.

The engrossing nature of play is the reason why play must be freely entered into. Much as one cannot be commanded "Be spontaneous," so also play on command neglects the fact that the individual will have to maintain his "non-player" view of the situation as carrying out a command and thus fail to become totaly engrossed in his play. People can only be allowed to play. That is, they may be excused from having to maintain an "everyday world" outlook. They cannot be forced to attain a "play world" outlook.

Within the world of play, the rules of play are the paramount guides to action. The rules of the game, if that is the particular form of play, define for the players how they may institute action to attain victory. Submission of one's try from victory to action within the rules of the game is the initial social agreement of the players implied in the commencement of any game.

The rules of the game prescribe that certain concrete actions take place. The continued occurrence of these actions is essential if the game is to continue. They are the visible evidence that all the players are within the world of play as they must be if play is to proceed smoothly. Other actions often come to be associated with games and help maintain for the players their identification as people who are playing. These actions may not be strictly required by the rules as set forth in rulebooks (if there is a rulebook for the game). They are rather on the order of etiquette and are performed as rituals. As used in anthropologic and psychoanalytic works, ritual refers to a practice that once had a relationship to a task to be accomplished but is now something that is done almost compulsively, a reflection of times

past.[17] I use the term "ritual" in a broader sense, to refer to a repeated action that mutually indicates to people their similar view of a situation, and their mutual submission to a higher task. Thus, ritual is not an end in itself, nor can a unique act be termed a ritual. A ritual may or may not be the best way to accomplish a task, but it does indicate to the interactants their mutuality of orientation in trying to accomplish the task.

Closely related to play is humor. Both play and humor can give the interactants involved the subjective feeling of a mild euphoria. Like play, humor relies for its effectiveness on the element of paradox. Individuals have a particular perspective on a given situation. Perhaps, as in a joke, the perspective is created by the humorist. The moment of humor comes with the "punch line", the moment when there is a sudden shift in perspective that shows the individual that what he had previously taken to be reality was, in fact, an erroneous assumption.

> . . . when the joke breaks open and the implicit levels have been touched, and have met each other, and the oscillation has occurred, the laughter verifies an agreement that this "unimportant," it is "play," and yet, within the very situation which is defined by the laughter as play, there is a juxtaposition of contrasting polarities, which contrast may be compared to commission and correction of an error. The laughter lets those who laugh know that there is a common subsumption of how they see the universe.[18]

Humor, and its indicator, laughter, are much like play in their aspect of inconsequentiality. Yet with the fact that there are conflicting perspectives on reality, there is a threat to both of the realities. Laughter lets the laughers know that there are others who have the same precarious view of the world. Humor is the futile attempt to synthesize two incompatible perspectives on the world so that the only way to overcome the insecurity is to "laugh it off," admit the

insecurity and incompatibility and carry on. Humor and play are close to each other. Both involve paradox and thrive in situations where the prevailing definition of the situation is threatened.

In summary: Play is bounded. It is activity that is set-off from the everyday world. Certain aspects of play follow from its bounded nature, and in fact serve as the boundaries which must be maintained if play is to continue as play. These aspects include:

1.) Inconsequentiality (the actions that one takes in play do not "count" as far as the individual's everyday life is concerned, but derive their meaning from the nature of what is being played;)

2.) Equality of participants within the circumscribed world of play (only the player's skill at the game counts, his everyday social statuses are irrelevant;)

3.) Uncertainty of outcome (the course and outcome of the game cannot be determined in advance; with the practice of handicapping and equalizing competitors to help maintain uncertainty);

4.) Unity of thought and action (the participants in the course of a game are able to unify their mental and physical processes);

5.) Single required viewpoint (players need only pay heed to the game conditions and take actions according to those conditions; the limits and possibilities for action in the game define the player's world);

6.) Ritual aspects (repeatable actions by the players mutually demonstrate their continuing focus on the course of play).

With all this, play is paradoxical. Since the actions of the players have meaning only within the circumscribed world of play, the players must constantly understand that they are within the world of play. They

must continuously give meaning to their actions and take meaning from other's actions as involved in play. The aforementioned aspects of play are ways in which players indicate the context of their actions to be that of play. Closely related to play is humor which also deals in paradox and incompatible realities. The instant of humor is the instant at which the individual realizes that previous assumptions of reality were wrong and that other ones are at least as valid.

Note on Non-Problematic Sports

This paper deals with a particular sport, basketball, as a problematic occurrence. We do not take it as inevitable that games of basketball will take place. Rather, we look at the event and examine the social structure through which games are organized and the definition of the situation as play is maintained by the participants. Most of the literature that deals with sports takes the occurrence of the event "a game of basketball," or other sports as given and proceeds from there. Thus, the literature deals with the technical problems of winning the game, the political aspects of sports, the psychoanalytic analysis of motives in sport, and sport as a laboratory.

> Athletes who survive the high attrition rate associated
> with sports competition are characterized by all or most
> of the following traits:
>   1) They have a great need for achievement and tend
> to set high but realistic goals for themselves and others.
>   2) They are highly organized, orderly, respectful of
> authority and dominant.
>   3) They have large capacity for trust, great psycho-
> logical endurance, self-control, low resting levels of
> anxiety and slightly greater ability to express aggression.[19]
>
> Twelve Traits Which Aggressive Coaches Possess
> . . .Every move he makes must be for the good of his players.
> He drives them with only one thing in mind--to make them
> better men. The aggressive coach.... (2) is a stern disci-
> plinarian: one man runs his program and practice schedule,

and <u>he</u> is the one, (3) is demanding, and will require more
physical exertion from every boy on his squad than any nor-
mal human being can give, ... (9) does not like weakness
and shows little sympathy for chronic injuries, (10) never
brags about any of his players until they graduate and then
talks about them constantly and has a deep affection for all
of them, (11) must despise losers and losing...[20]

These traits of athletes and coaches are presented by their authors
as a part of discussing "the technical problems of winning the game."
Two things may be said about them. First, the two groups of traits
are complementary, bordering on identical. Athletes and coaches pos-
sessing these traits would be expected to get along with each other and
work together quite well. Secondly, presented in this manner, the traits
appear to be objective descriptions of those qualities necessary for
success within the circumscribed world of play.

Critics of American sports organization (perhaps best typified by
Jack Scott) maintain that the congruence between the descriptions of
winning coaches and athletes is not coincidental or objective. They
maintain that the hierarchical nature of sports organization means that
these traits will be selected and fostered by those in authority as the
<u>only</u> traits for winning athletes. Notice the degree of similarity between
the traits of winning athletes and coaches and the traditional ideal
of masculinity in America: aggressiveness, demanding and driven, pater-
nalistic authoritarianism, and an obsession with not losing. In terms
of the previous discussion, the confrontation between critics of the
sports hierarchy and its supporters may be thought of as dealing with
the rules of irrelevance in organized sports. Critics maintain that the
masculine traits emphasized by American sports are irrelevant to actual
competition, but that by requiring these traits the hierarchy of organized
sports denies athletes who are competent on the field but no "masculine,"

the opportunity of competing.[21] So we see athletes confronting the sports hierarchy over matters of racism, and life-style. Traditionalist maintain that the traits are not irrelevant, that only masculine athletes are worthy of competing. Critics maintain that this only appeared to be the case because there was no counter-reality to call the selection practices of coaches into question.

Another area of literature on sports is the psychoanalytic analysis of motives. Sports provides psychoanalysts, professional and amateur, with fertile ground for growing their theories.[22] For purposes of this paper, however, such theories are not important. We will not be interested in the motives that men have for entering the IM to play basketball, but only in the social and game structures that enable them to do so.

Finally, because it is a circumscribed world, sports provides an excellent laboratory for researchers.[23] The criteria for success in sports events are well defined. The rules dictate exactly the manner and method of victory. Organizational sociologists especially have used sports as a laboratory where they can vary organization and personell to find the combination that produces success (victory).

I have made this digression not only to do some justice to the growing body of literature on unproblematic sports, but also to indicate that sports play a large part in American society. As I write this, the bill in Congress which has received the greatest coverage in the popular media of late is one which will forbid hometown television blackouts of professional football games if the game is sold out. I don't think that it is at all coincidental that the image of masculinity and the image of the winning athlete are identical. All this sets part of the context in which the social structures and game structures at IM exist.

Methodology

My method of gathering data was participant observation. I emmersed myself in the world of the Men's Intramural Building, trying as much as possible to be both player and observer.[24] The paradoxical and problematic nature of play at the IM does not lend itself to research techniques that would take the occurrence of the game for granted. Only by interviews or participant observation could one discover the dimensions of the social and game structures. And only through participant observation can one see the structures in process.

I spent a total of approximately forty-four hours observing and playing pick-up basketball games. Of that total, approximately thirty-seven hours were spent at the IM at various times of the day and evening. Seven additional hours were spent at other location (such as the outdoor courts on Alton street, and on campus). The average length of each observation period was ninty minutes (thirty observation periods). The length of observation periods ranged from a halfOhour to two and one-half hours. During the period of observation I played in seventy-seven games of basketball, sixty-six at the IM. Probably little more than two-thirds of the time was I actually playing games. The rest of the time was spent between games, watching from the sidelines when I wasn't playing, and "shooting around." The circumstances denied me the luxury of making notes on the spot. I was forced to make hasty notes upon leaving the scene and then expand them later in the day.

In succeeding pages I hope to make clearer the social structure of "playin' ball at the IM." As a prelude to that analysis, let me describe my position in the social structure. Although the men who play basketball at the IM are not permanently attatched to teams, there is

a network of players who form a group of "regulars" at the IM. These
players are distinguished by their frequent attendence and their gen-
erally higher than average skill in the game of basketball itself.
Often players in this core group enter the gym in pairs or small groups
indicating their "outside" aquaintanceship. Another group of players
attends with varying degrees of regularity, but most often alone, and
are characterized by average skill at the game. I was one of these
players. Another group of players that is relatively rare is the large
group of four or more men who are primarily "non-basketball" friends and
who come to play as a group in the IM. The social structure that I
will describe, then, is seen from the point of view of one of average
skill who entered the structure alone.

III. THE IDEALIZED GAME

Physical Boundaries

The primary boundary of "playin' ball" is provided by the walls of the Men's IM Building. The course that one travels to get to the area of play cannot help but impress upon the participant (in Goffman's sense, the subjective being behind the game player) that he is entering a specially set aside area.[25]

The first indication of altered, or special reality is the need to travel to a particular place rather than being able to enter the game just anywhere. The Men's IM is a large building that is located in an area of the compus that seems, by design on one side by the football stadium, and on the other side by the ice arena. Behind the building is the outdoor pool, next to that, and obliquely from the building is the outdoor track. Across the street, behind the present ice arena, is another one now under construction. The whole area is quite separate from the academic and living areas of the campus.

Within the building also, there is a separateness of reality. Probably the first indication is olfactory. There is the noticeable smell of sweat throughout the building. Vicual factors are also different from those found in other university buildings. Trophy cases line the corridors proclaiming the past victors in various intramural events.

Approximately 85 to 90 per cent of the people who play basketball at the Men's IM wear special garments when they play. These garments

include a wide variety of T-shirts in different degrees of decay, shorts and sweatpants, most brands of gym shoes, and some airtight plastic or vinyl garments designed to produce the maximum amount of perspiration and weight loss. The large majority of players-to-be, therefore pass through the locker room area to change their clothes before starting to play. The locker room serves as a transitional area. There one takes off the clothes of everyday life and puts on the clothes of the player. I must hasten to add that although this transformation takes place in the locker room, it is not a sudden transformation. The whole building, in fact the entire area in which the building is located gradualizes the change which is most abruptly indicated by the change of clothing.

The locker room suggests other themes besides the one of purely play. For one thing, the locker room is a totally male place. It is distinguished from most everyday settings in that men can walk around nude in each other's presence. Withing the locker room, metal lockers are arranged in rows parallel to the main walkway. The showers are opposite the walkway on the other side of the lockers. The locker room is divided into two separate half-rooms connected by the walkway and the showers. In between is a courtyard with a cement floor. Men sunbathe here nude in the Spring and Summer rather than using the pool, where suits must be worn.

Facing onto the main walkway is the "cage," so called because of the thick wire mesh that prevents direct access from the walkway. On each occasion when I observed at the IM there were at least two men working there. In exchange for an ID and/or a small rental fee, it is possible to rent a locker, towel, basketball, handball, paddleball paddle, or any one of various other sports related equipment. Although

I do not know the names of the men who regularly work at the IM, their presence helped to continue the definition of the situation as play and male. Requests for articles, in my case basketballs, were on occasion met with humorous retorts.

> Myself: "May I have a basketball?" Man: "What have you done for us lately?" He turned to get the ball.

> Myself: "Do you have a pump that I can use to blow up this ball?" Man: "No, but we have a pump that _we_ can use to blow up your ball."

The most noticeable thing about the nature of this humor is its aggressiveness. In the first instance, a request for rental service is redefined (but not "really") as a demand for payoff prior to reciprocation in a _quid pro quo_ exchange. In the second instance, a request for a loan, which was perhaps badly stated, was redefined as a service to be rendered, with the implications of private university property to be used and lack of trust or competence of the requestor to use it. The redefinitions were stated aggressively--masculinely.

There is one very strong thread of information that loosens the definition of the situation as play in the IM. This is in the form of signs at the end of every other row of lockers, along the front wall, and on the doors that say in large red letters: "Do Not Leave Personal Belongings Unattended or Lockers Open Even For One Minute!" The immanent possibility of theft intrudes upon the play reality reminding one of a grimmer side of the everyday world--the world where precautions must be taken actions may have untoward consequences. However, in this situation the intrusion is limited, since proper precautions can be taken with a minimum of effort (like locking valuables in a locker).

There are three gyms in which one can play basketball at the IM.

Gym I is located below the level of the main floor. Gyms II and III
are located on the second floor of the building. The corridors at the
IM are large, probably twelve-by-twelve feet cross sections. However,
each of the hyms contains two full sized basketball courts about four
feet apart, side-by-side, and bleachers along the side walls. The gyms
are very large rooms, and when one enters, one can sense a noticeable
change in pressure, temperature, and acoustics. The "interaction mem-
brane" that must be traversed to play basketball has a very real physical
counterpart.

Game Boundaries

Basketball, in its pure form, that is, only according to the rules,
without the addition of flesh and blood players, provides further boun-
daries that operate to transport the players into the world of play. The
game and the setting require of the players that they change their "nor-
mal" ordering of the world with respect to time, the value of objects,
and the reckoning of space.

Schechner distinguishes three kinds of special time orderings:
symbolic time, set time, and event time.[26] Symbolic time is used pri-
marily in the performing arts. It is the maleable time of performance
where we may see people pass through a lifetime during the performance.

Set time is the time ordering used in many sports, including or-
ganized basketball; in these sports time fixes the boundary of play.
The events that determine the outcome of the game are performed in
their manner for a specified length of time. At the end of the time
the winner is declared according to the scoring rules, regardless of the
total number of events performed or scores made. Thus in college

basketball the game is over at the elapse of forty minutes of playing time, as determined by the time-keeper. The winner is declared to be the team with the most points, regardless of whether the score is 30-28, or 130-128. In the case of a tie, additional periods of specified length are played until a winner can be declared.

In IM basketball event time is used. It is the occurrence of events, rather than a fixes period of time that bounds the game. The game ends following the occurrence of a predetermined number of specified events, regardless of the length of time required to perform the events. In IM basketball, games are ended when one team reaches a certain predetermined number of points (usually fifteen) regardless of whether the game took ten minutes or thirty minutes to complete. Ties are impossible under such a scoring system. However, the winning team must have demonstrated their superiority over the losers to the extent of "winning by two." A score of fifteen-fourteen is not a winning score. Before they can be declared the victors, one team must have at least fifteen points and also two more points than their opponents.

In set time games, tension is generated by the "race against the clock." The uncertainty of the game's outcome is resolved, amid increasing tension, as each team trys to perform as many scoring events as possible before "time runs out," and the game ends. In event time games, tension is generated by the confrontation of the teams, each trying to perform the required number of scoring events before the other.

> There got to be a crowd watching the game as more people
> came in...When one team could have won the game on a shot
> members of the crowd would yell, "Game!" When Chris missed
> a layup that could have ended the game, I heard a, "He choked."
> As the game went into overtime and the chance for victory

moved from team to team, Chris began saying, "You got to give it everything you have now," "Don't give up now," when we moved up the court on offense, or fell back on defense.

Within the frame of the game, the objects of competition take on a special symbolic value that attatches to them only in the course of the game. In basketball the two material requirements are a basketball and a basket, ten feet high, and supported by and aligned with a backboard.

The value of the basket is such that one "guards the basket" on defense to prevent the other team from scoring. On offense one "goes to the basket" to score. As one player put it to a new teammate, "Chip, just remember, during the game, always break for the basket." The basket becomes the goal sought by the players, and in spatial terms, the focal point of the activity. The action of the game is characterized by alternating movements of the teams up and down the court to cluster beneath one basket, then the other, until (from the offensive point of view) the goal is won, a basket having been made, or the goal is frustrated by the other team taking possession of the ball.

The basket is the goal of the players, and the ball is the means by which the goal is attained. In this respect the ball becomes the extension of the player. It is his vehicle of achievement. The ball is thus the immediate object of attention for the players. In the majority of cases, the rules of the game concern which team shall have possession of the ball, and the manner in which the ball may be legitimately manipulated to achieve the goal, a basket. Notice that the penalty for an illegal manipulation of the ball is loss of possession.

Since the players contend with each other in order to obtain

possession of the ball, it assumes a quality between the symbolic one of the game, where the physical aspects of the particular ball are irrelevant for its point scoring ability, and the everyday world value that can be measured by dollars and cents. The physical aspects of the particular ball become important since the players must manipulate the ball. It is necessary that the ball be within a narrow range of characteristics of size, weight, inflatedness, and surface texture to be easily manipulated by those accustomed to manipulating basketballs. When manipulating the ball the players should not have to contend with disturbing characteristics of the ball. A bad ball introduces problems into manipulation that are irrelevant for outcome of the game but result in chance assuming too great an importance for a contest of skill, and interrupting the smooth flow of the game. Deciding which ball will be used when there are more than one available becomes an issue that must be settled before the game begins. The ball with the best physical properties is preferred.

> When the second game was to start, there was some question
> as to the ball. Marvin: "Where's the ball we were using?"
> "He took the good one over there. He's got to take it with
> him when he leaves." Marvin: "Which one we going to use?"
> Phil picked up an IM ball, "363, that a pretty good ball."
> (IM balls, those owned and loaned out by the IM, are num-
> bered for identification.) Marvin wanted to quit halfway
> through the game, "You want to play for me?" Myself: "Do
> you want to quit?" That was the last he said to me. Next
> time down the court he yelled at the men shooting at the
> other basket, "One of you guys over there want to loan me
> your leather ball?" He didn't get the ball, but he kept
> playing.

Marvin was one of the most proficient manipulators of the ball that I observed. Perhaps to him, therefore, the ball used was especially important. However, there was apparently enough wrong with the ball

being used to warrant an attempt at change, but not enough to warrant

quitting when a change was not made.

> Just then a man came into the gym with a brand new ball.
> Robert: "Here's another man now. You want to play?" "OK."
> He approached the basket where we were gathered. Vern:
> "You want to warm up a little first?...We're pretty warm
> already." In answer he took a shot. I think everyone
> took a shot with the ball. After each, the shooter made
> a brief complimentary remark, "Nice ball." Vern carried
> the ball back to start the game.

In this case, the new ball was used by silent consensus. No one

suggested it be used instead of the ball used for the previous game.

It was "obvious" that it should be used. Also, no one asked permission

of the owner to use his new ball in the game. By his consent to play

in the game, he had given tacit approval to the use of his ball.

In basketball, as in other sports, there must be formal recognition

of space in order for the game to take place. Just as the game is

bounded in time, so also there is an "out of bounds." The basketball

court is a large rectangle with baskets on each end, in the middle of the

short sides. The two end sides are the "baselines"; one moving past

his man to the outside down the baseline is said to "go in the back

door." In front of the baskets there is another rectangle with a

semi-circle on the end. This is the "key," or the "lane." At the end

of the rectangle is the "foul line"; the rim of the semi-circle is the

"top of the key." The court is divided in half by a line across the

middle. In half court basketball this line becomes the end of the

court, and thus an out of bounds line. The area close to the basket,

within ten or twelve feet is "inside", or "underneath." The area away

from the basket is "outside." This may be further divided into "out

front," which is toward the middle of the court, and "the side," which

is toward the sidelines. "The corner" is the area near the juncture of the sidelines and baselines. Space is acknowledged by the jargon of the game, even as it is provided for in the rules. The rules specify that a ball going out of bounds, that is, past the limit of the court is "out of play" and must be put "in play" by the team other than the one that last touched the ball before it went out of bounds. Thus, letting the ball leave the area designated for play is penalized by loss of possession.

I assume that the reader is generally familiar with the rules of basketball to avoid a digression necessary only for purposes of differentiating organized basketball from IM basketball. There are three major differences between organized basketball, as know to spectators, and IM basketball. The first difference is that IM basketball lacks formally organized teams. This means that teams must be created on the spot for the occasion of a game. Somehow, teams must be organized from a group of unattatched, but no necessarily unaquainted, men. Secondly, there are no referees in IM basketball. The games are unsupervised as far as having any person of authority who can make rulings and enforce them. Therefore, interpretation and enforcement of the rules falls to the players themselves. Third, space restrictions at times make it impossible for all those present to play unless some of the games are half court. Half court games are just that—two games can take place simultaneously on the same court. The mid-court line becomes an out of bounds line. The greater ambiguity of the fules dealing with out-of bounds plays that results from the changing definitions of the play space must be ironed out.

These three differences—lack of teams, lack of referees, and

changed rules because of changed play space—present problems in or-

ganization for those who come to the IM wanting to play games of bas-

ketball. The ways in which these problems are solved help comprise the

social structure that makes possible the reality of "playin' ball."

IV. "PLAYIN' BALL": GENESIS OF GAMES

There are basically two ways that games can be formed at the IM.
First, unattatched individuals or small groups may organize themselves
into teams. Alternatively, once a game has been played, according to
the custom that has developed, challenge teams may form to play the
winners of the previous game who remain as a team until they are de-
feated.

During the period of my observation, I played in sixty-six games
of basketball at the IM. Of these sixty-six games, twenty-five were
newly formed out of a collection of individuals with no previous team
connections. In thirty-one games I was either on the winner's team
continuing on the court, or on the challenger's team taking on the
winners. In ten games I was added to an ongoing game, or the game
changed from half court to full court with the addition of other players
(four cases).

New games may be formed at any size. Sixteen games were half
court, ranging in size from two on two (i.e., teams with two players
each) to five on five. Nine new games began as full court. There are
two ways that new teams can be formed. Each of these emerges from
another activity with its own social rules. This activity is known to
the players as "shooting around."

"Shooting Around"

Since games take from twenty to thirty minutes to complete (usually),
those individuals waiting to play often shoot at an unused basket, if

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there is one. On other occasions there are no games in progress in the gym because there are too few people present. On these occasions people in the gym shoot at one or more of the baskets.

The men at a basket use all the balls being shot at that basket to shoot with themselves. Thus, there is no personal possession of balls. Once an individual takes a shot at a basket where others are also shooting he must expect that his ball will be used by the others to shoot with also. Balls circulate among the players. No one objects to this because, for the purposes of shooting around, all balls are equal in quality. Since there is no game, no competition, all the movements that are necessary to escape from the man guarding you in a game are unnecessary when shooting around. The ball does not have to be handled with speed and alacrity so it does not have to be of the same quality as a game ball. Shooting around is characterized by an absence of body tension that goes with cooperation and sharing of resources. Players shoot at the basket, shag balls that bounce away, and rebound individually and non-competitively.

There are two situations in which the shooters do not share the balls in play. The first case is when there are as many balls in play as there are shooters to use them. In this situation, when a ball is shot at the basket there is no one who does not have a ball, therefore, there is no one to take possession of the shot ball so the shooter must chase his own shot. This effectively ties up all the individuals present in shooting or chasing balls and reinforces the individualness and lack of sharing. However, in this case there are "services" rendered between the participants.

One man was shooting at the near end, right. I went over
to that basket. We both had our own ball so we did not use
each other's, although each of us stopped the other's re-
ciprocal one. Even when the other man was quite close to the
ball the one would stop the ball and flip or bat to the other if
he was closer.

The following incident illustrates the naturalness of the shift from

exchanging "services" to sharing balls.

Meanwhile, on the other half there was a group shooting at
either basket. Not a word was said between the participants,
but everything went smoothly. There were three guys and three
balls, so each man shot only his own ball. Each time a ball
came near, or looked as if it might roll away onto the court
or far back, one of the shooters would stop the ball and
throw/tap or ball-block it back to its rightful owner. One
of the participants left. He was replaced by a balless
shooter. Then all three used the two balls indescriminately,'
even though I and the other had refrained from doing so only
minutes before.

The other occasion when balls are not shared is when someone delib-

erately refuses to enter into the common action of shooting around with

another.

I went over to one basket where three men were shooting,
doing more talking than shooting. They were discussing gym
shoes on a cost/value basis. I started shooting at that basket.
I could not integrate myself into the group, so I went to
the other basket. I define integration as a mingling of objects
of interest, in this case basketballs. That is, they did
not use my ball, I did not use their's. Since I was but one, my
ball was "in play" as soon as I shot it. So one of the others
would have had to take it out of play, control it, for me to
use the other ball.

In the integrated group, taking together is reinforced by the

common use of a ball. As I was not a member of the conversational

group, so also, I was not able to make use of the conversational group's

ball.

Starting a Game

There are three ways of organizing teams to oppose each other in a

game. The men may "shoot for teams," or teams may be "picked up." Of

Of the twenty-five new games that I played in, eleven times teams were made by shooting, fourteen times by picking up. There were two cases in which full court games were started by a mixture of both. Two groups of over five both shot to determine which five members of the group would get into the game.

Previously I defined "ritual" as "a repeated action that mutually indicates to people their similar view of a situation, and their mutual submission to a higher task." On the basis of this definition, shooting for teams is a ritual activity. The basic procedure of shooting for teams varies little from incident to indident. When one person asks that a game be started by shooting for teams and the procedure begins, the men go through the performance smoothly. Each man who takes part realizes that the ritual will end with teams determined. This is the "higher task"--to organize teams so the game can begin. And by participating in the ritual the players demonstrate that this is their task also, and that they share a desire, individually and collectively, to generate a game.

> After a few minutes of warm-ups, Robert said, "Let's shoot. First five." He shot and missed. The other men clustered around the circle, two others stood at the botton of the key.

> The physical arrangement and pace had changed noticeably (from shooting around). Men were standing around the lane and the key, a cluster of four or five right in back of the shooter, a couple standing on either side near the foul line, and one man under the basket to retrieve the balls. The number of balls in play had been reduced also, and the man at the line was the only one who was doing any shooting...Each man took a shot in turn. If he missed he moved bask into the pack at the back of the day. If he hit he moved forward towards the bottom of the lane... Shooting continued until five men had hit. After the first round of shooting there was a second. Before starting it the man who did asked, "Everybody taken one shot?"... Someone asked, "How many have made it?" The men indicated by a movement and "I have."

> After shooting for a few minutes, one of the men, Pat,
> said, "How about playing a game?" Steve: "How many guys
> we got?" Pat (calling down court): "Hey, you guys wanna
> play a game?" They came down court. Steve: "We got nine."
> But one man remained at the other end of the court. I
> was very aware that after Pat called for a game those pre-
> sent around the basket held the balls and directed their
> attention to the foul line. Pat: "First five to make it?"
> He began the shooting.

These three examples could be added to with others. The course

of events is very similar in each case. When there is an even number

of men at the basket, anyone may call for a game simply by suggesting

or asking that shooting take place. Those wishing to engage in the

game show their intention by holding the balls they've been shooting

sround with and lining up to shoot.

Although anyone may call for a game, the man who does is usually

not the best player, nor the worst. The man calling for shooting to

take place generally shoots first. He must therefore be aggressive

enough to take upon himself the initial generation of action, and

this places him among the most aggressive players. The most aggressive

players generally continue to exhibit these aggressive qualities in a

variety of other ways, in situations that require assertive action on

the part of at least one player if games are to start and continue

smoothly.

The ritual of shooting for teams helps maintain the boundary

between play and everyday life. One trait which differentiates play

from everyday life is that the players begin the contest from a situation

of equality. The victory of one team demonstrates that team's superior

ability, and not operation of "extraneous" advantages it may have had

at the outset. Shooting for teams is the way in which equal teams are

originally organized. In the absence of information about the actual

abilities of the players, or if the abilities are known to be about
equal, the players let chance dictate the composition of the teams.
Any team is assumed to be as equal as any other team. The logical
alternative, therefore, is to decide teams by chance rather than try
to make decisions on the basis of very limited information. The one
factor that might prejudice a game's outcome is a large height dif-
ferential between the two teams. When, there are two men taller than
the rest who would probably be able to control the game if they were
on the same team, the practice at the IM is to place the men on dif-
ferent teams and let the rest of the players shoot.

The unstated reason behind organizing equal teams is that the
players desire an uncertain outcome at the start. The outcome must be
discovered through playing the game. If the outcome is discernable
at the start, why play the game? Thus, players often remark after
teams have been made and the game is about to start, "We can switch
around after this game." That is, "I assume these teams to be equal.
However, if the game should demonstrate that one team is vastly superior,
the outcome of subsequent contests would not be in doubt. Therefore,
in the event of such a demonstration, I suggest we decide now to ex-
change players on the basis of more information to re-equalize the
teams." I never observed the player's statement to be denied.

"Picking up"--the other way of organizing a team--is a simplified
version of shooting. For the purpose of easily identifying and dif-
ferentiating the teams, one team wears shirts, the other team plays
bare chested. If it happens that the players are roughly divided into
teams on the basis of shirts and skins prior to the organizing of a
game, shooting may be dispenced with. Teams are simply those with shirts

versus those without shirts.

> Finally, with ten men present, the older of the two black
> men called for a game. He did so by asking each man in
> turn, "Do you want to play a game?" As the men were asked,
> and agreed, they held their ball so that a relative order
> was established. At this point one man asserted himself,
> "Nick, why don't you take off your shirt, then we'll have
> five on five." "We going full court?" "No, we can just
> go half court."

Picking up teams is also based on a chance arrangement of men.

The assumption is made that wearing (or not wearing) a shirt is in no

way related to skill. Picking up teams in this manner is a more ad hoc

way of determining teams. The players must be roughly divided in

advance or they are faced with the problem of making numerous decisions

as to who will take off (or put on) a shirt.

The final way that teams are picked up is when two or more pre-

existing groups of men start a game. The groups are retained for the

game. This occurs most often in cases when the gym is uncrowded so

that there are small groups at different baskets. When there is more

of a crowd, games on other courts force the unattatched players into a

crowd to begin with,

> The two of us left shot for a while. Then two other men
> came over, both older. "You guys want to play a little
> two on two?" "Yeah," we looked at each other almost simul-
> taneously with the agreement. "You young guys want to
> take on us older guys?" "OK." "We'll play age against
> youth. Of course, we prefer to call it experience.

> At this time the guys from the other end of the court
> came cown toward us led by a 6'8" man, "You guys want to
> go full court?" Ralph: "Alright, we'll have to shoot to
> see who plays." We shot and they shot. The original court
> groups were maintained.

Making teams from already constituted groups is the easiest way

to make teams since it involves no decisions except the one to retain

the groups. It also provides players with an opportunity to play on

the same team with friends, or at least with people they have experience

playing with.

When there is a game in progress, a different set of ritual actions

are required to get into a game. There are signs posted on the walls

of the gym that say:

SHARE THE FACILITIES
—Play a full court 15 point game when others are waiting.
—Winners will remain on court.
—Losers drop out and may get in line again to return to court.

This bit of authority from the IM has been operationalized in a

social custom in which one man calls the next game. He calls the game

merely by saying in a loud voice,"I got next game." He then becomes

the captain of the team of challengers with the right to choose the

players he wants on his team.

> After the game ended we asked, "Who's got next game?" The
> guy in the chair got up and went over to the court. Four
> others, including me, followed. Wes: "Where's your team?"
> He seemed reluctant to name a team. He said nothing. Roy
> said, "There's five guys here. He was here, so was he, and
> him. You mean that one guy can come in here and call next
> game when there's already five guys here?" Gary: "If none
> of them has called it he can." Wes: "That's the way we've
> been doing it."

The ritual for getting into a game when the team of challengers

is captained by a stranger is similar in form to the ritual of homo-

sexual solicitation described in Laud Humphreys in Tearoom Trade:

Impersonal Sex in Public Places:

> Every encounter reduces, ultimately to the basic steps of
> positioning, signaling, contracting, and payoff: but no
> two of them quite alike.[27]

In a public restroom the would-be participants in sexual encounters

must be guarded in their intentions and careful who they approach because

not everyone entering the restroom does so to engage in homosexual
acts. Approaching a plainclothes man may even result in arrest and
disgrace. The tearoom participant therefore positions himself to
indicate an interest in sexual encounters. There is no such stigma
attatched to activities in the IM. However, the IM gym is not as
accessible as a public restroom; men do not enter the gym unless they
intend to play basketball. By his presence alone, the individual
entering the gym expresses an interest in playing basketball.[28]

Humphreys uses the term "signaling" to refer to the overt ex-
pression of a desire to engage in homosexual activities. In the case
of the men in the IM, signaling is the overt expression of a desire
to enter a particular game, the next game, made to the captain of
the challenger's team. The intention is expressed as a question
directed to the captain, "You got next game?" The question indicates
a desire to play and is responded to with a simple "Yes" or "No". If
the answer is no the would-be player must continue questioning people
until he finds the individual who does have next game. His search is
usually simplified by the fact that the first man questioned usually
knows who does have the next game, if he doesn't.

If the would-be player succeeds in signaling his intention to
play to the captain of the challenger's team he must still contract with
the captain to play on his team. As Humphreys points out, the partici-
pants in such a ritual sequence, although they have expressed desire
to interact, have given little actual consent to do so. Both the
would-be player and the captain must be certain of each other's con-
sent to play on the same team. Otherwise there may be too many or
too few men to play the next game when the time comes. The payoff for

for both parties, of course, is playing in the next game.

> Ollie was seated on the sidelines, far left. I went over
> to him and asked, "You got next game?" "Yeah." "Got five
> guys?" "We got four. You make five."

> I asked Larry "You got next game?" "Yeah." "You got five
> guys?" "Yeah, we got a team." When the game ended, that
> team went over to play. I walked down to the other end
> of the court and asked Benjy, "You got next game?" "Yeah."
> "Got five?" "If our friends come down from the locker
> room, we got a team. If they don't, you can play. We
> aren't going to take any of the guys who are playing."

> I had asked Hank, "You got next game?" "Yeah." But I had
> not cemented the contract any tighter than that. I had
> assumed I was playing the next game. But when I started
> to make moves like I was going to play the next game: I
> got up, put on a shirt, and moved out to the area in front
> of the basket where people were shooting. Hank: "I pro-
> mised five guys already that they could play."

This ritual is replayed time and again at the IM. The custom of

"captainship" is a strong one. When there are already games going in

the gym, an individual must be on a challenger's team if he is to play.

The middle quotation suggests the "abuse" that the custom is subject

to. The captain of the team has the authority to pick the men that he

wants on his team. He can pick men from the team that just lost the

game, if he wants to. This means that a relatively small group of

men can control access to games by picking the same men continuously

off the losing team to form a new one. Although I did not witness

anyone openly oppose the use of the custom of captainship, even when

it resulted in restricted access to games, awareness of abuses, and

bitterness over the system was present. Both of these sentiments are

reflected in these comments during a private chat with one of the players.

> Phil: "The only way you can get into the game is to call
> the next game first. They always pick teams from the losers,
> instead of getting other guys, they just make teams from the
> losers. Even when there are guys waiting to play, the same
> guys will play another game." Myself: "I think that's from

this idea of a captain picking his own team. I wonder
how that got started?" Phil: "Sometimes, even when
you call the next game, some other guy will say he called
it first, even when you know he didn't. So you still
don't play."

The way of fielding teams I have described allows controlled
access to the playing of games. This is where my social position as
a person who came alone was most acutely felt. People cannot be
faulted for wanting to play basketball with their friends, but in this
case, other people are eliminated from the competitive use of the IM
courts. The system of controlling access to games is instrumental in
the emergence of a hierarchy of players that can be ordered on the
basis of access to games. A closer examination of the social hierarchy
necessitates a brief discussion of how games are ordered on the basis
of their preferability.

Preferential Ordering of Activities and Social Groups

The basketball players at the IM prefer contests that are close
in numbers of players and amount of space, to full court, five on five
games. (Rather than fewer players playing half court). Any contest is
preferable to shooting around. Hence there is a preference of different
activities.

Shooting around is the least preferred activity. It is considered
primarily as a warm up, or a diversion while waiting to enter a game.
If both courts are being used for full court games, men shoot at the
baskets when the teams are at the other end of the court. When the
ball changes hands and the teams come toward their end of the court,
the shooters hold their balls and move off the court. Thus, use of
the court space for a game supercedes use of the court space for shooting

around.

> One of the players suggested, "How about a little two on
> two?" Bruce declined, "Those guys down there always play
> full court." The one: "They're just fuckin' around.
> They don't want to play." The same man made the same
> suggestion a little later and was dissuaded by his friend,
> "They don't want to play two on two."...Finally Bruce
> decided to go down to the other end and talk to the
> three. He spoke for about five minutes, quite a while
> to arrange a game. He came back, "Well, they're going to
> play, but they want to keep the same five guys. They don't
> want to lose."

The group, acting as a unit, had the power to make or deny a game for the separate individuals. For this reason, the group was able to control the level of preferability of the activity they entered into ("Those guys...always play full court.") and also control the selection of teams ("They want to keep the same five guys.") Their power was a function of their solidarity as a group in opposition to individuals in a situation of low population (at this instant in time there were less than a dozen people in the gym). Apparently, the group was content with the non-game alternative of group interaction and "shooting around." The alternative for the separate individuals was a two on two game. For the separate individuals, the price for moving from a low preferability, two on two game, to a high preferability, five on five game, was letting the group remain together, with the expected outcome, "They don't want to lose." The individuals were willing to pay the price.

Players can be ranked according to the level at which they enter the activity order. The ranking of individuals in this manner is closely related to friendship groups that can also be traced. Two reasons for this are indicated above. First, a group requires the addition of fewer players to play full court five on five than any individual. Therefore,

a group can make a game by its participation, or deny a game by its forbearance, something an individual is hard put to do. Secondly, a group has the additional alternative of non-game social activity, along the sidelines, while individuals must engage in game activity.

In the course of my observations I found that there were at least sixty-one people whom I observed playing at least twice. (I say "at least" because there may have been some people I did recognize as seeing more than once, or an occasion on which I did not note the presence of an individual. This would have occurred only with individuals who were not present very often.) I saw two men playing on ten different occasions. They were present together every time except once each when they were present alone. They always entered and left the gym in close time proximity, called each other by name, and were observed to engage in "banter".[29] They formed the core of the social group of black players that regularly played at the IM. I saw another black player on nine occasions. He always entered and left alone. Although he was well known to the players, he was not a member of the black group of players that was most often present in the late afternoon--he played earlier. One man, John, was observed eight times. This individual seemed to me to be the best known man in the IM. He was on a name basis with men of different groups who did not appear to know each other. Three men whom I observed early in the study, but who subsequently disappeared from the IM, formed another group. Other men who were around frequently included other members of the black social group, and the white players who formed the core of the white "regulars". Three men whom I saw frequently entered and left the gym alone. These men seemed closest to me in social position.

Friendship groups would be determined primarily by who entered
and left together, or in close time proximity; by use of names in
address, greetings and good-byes upon entering or leaving, and by en-
gagement in "banter."

I have mentioned the hierarchy of preferability of activities
from shooting around to full court, five on five contests. One measure
of the status of social groups and individuals is the level at which
they enter the hierarchy of activity preferability, that is, the size
(in number of players and court space used) of the games they regularly
play in. Of the members of the balck social group, I observed one
member, one time, engaged in less than a full court, five on five
contest. John was observed shooting around once, on a Saturday, when
the population of the gym was under ten. As has been noted about the
three men mentioned previously, they "always play full court."

Another indication of an individual's status in the world of the
Men's IM is the amount of time it takes him to get into a game once he
enters the gym, and the number of games he plays. As has been dis-
cussed, the custom of a captain choosing his own team makes it possible
for an individual or group to play numerous games in succession.

> John and his friend talked to the guys on the bench for a
> while, then went over to the other empty basket. A guy
> came over and yelled to them, "Next game, you two are in!"
> I walked over to the bench and asked Rich,"What are the
> teams?" "Oh, there's about two or three teams." There
> were only six non-players in the gym, so his statement
> was obviously in error unless some people were on more
> than one team...Bronson played in every game while I was
> there. John and his friend played every one but the first.
> The game would end and the losers would break up with two
> or three new players joining with two or three of the
> losers to form a new team.

This incident demonstrates the difference in social position
between myself and John. He and his friend were solicited for a team

shortly after their entrance, I was told there were "two or three"

teams already formed.

For the individual in a social group, as opposed to an individual

alone, the ritual of approaching a captain to get on a team is different.

Players who are known to each other are less formal in their inter-

action. The newcomer is as likely to be approached by the captain as

the other way around.

> I went over to the man who had next game. "You got five?"
> He: "I only got one." "Need another man, then?" He:
> "I might take some from these guys." (Those already in
> the game.) ...A man walked in who was apparently known to
> the captain. He: "Charles, what's happening? You want
> to play ball?" ...After the game I walked over to the
> captain, "Got your team?" He just nodded.

The social situation I have described was not lost on others. For

example, here are excerpts from a conversation with one of the men

who, like myself, was a social loner in the IM:

> Tucker: "That's the difference between playing over here
> (there was a game of individuals going on), and over there
> (there was a game involving social groups). Over there
> you could argue for a half hour." Myself: "Yeah, those
> guys come over here all the time and they take the game
> very seriously." Tucker: "Yeah, I've played eight man
> games with them." Myself: "Eight man games?" Tucker:
> "Yeah, the same eight guys play over and over again."

One of the largest problems and major disappointments of this

study was my inability to be able to describe the framework of social

structure from the point of view of those belonging to a social group

of players. Doing so seemed to be virtually impossible from my pos-

ition of observation. The origin of the social groupings depends not

only on the non-basketball friendship structure, but also on the player's

skill. It is the player's skill which makes him a desirable teammate.

The prerequisite for entering a social group, barring the existence of

a non-basketball friendship (which I didn't have) is the skill at the game itself to be picked off of losing teams as members of the social groups are. And I am a player of moderate skill.

I mentioned that there are three organizational problems that must be overcome if games are to take place at the IM. The first of these involves the fielding of two teams. The social structure that exists at the IM, both in terms of the rituals involved in beginning games and the social hierarchy of skill and friendship, is the mechanism by which would-be players coming to the IM can be sure that there will be games played. Actual involvement of the individual in the games remains problematic and dependent on his use of ritual enterings and/or membership in a social group. The social structure serves not only to insure that games take place, but to prevent some people from playing. In Goffman's terms, the social aspects of the gathering for one group spoils the focused gathering for another group.[30]

V. "PLAYIN' BALL": CONTINUANCE OF GAMES

Teams must be organized before a game of basketball can begin. When an individual comes to the IM, changes his clothes, and enters the gym with the intention of playing basketball, he leaves behind his "everyday selves" and assumes the self of the "basketball player". The focus of his activities shifts from the consequential world of everyday life, to the world of the IM which is inconsequential for his "everyday" activities. With the start of the game he is participating in, the individual's actions once again become consequential. This time, however, the consequentiality of his actions is limited to the narrow world defined by the game. The player enters the world of play. Once the game starts, the only viewpoint that he needs to maintain is that of the player.[31] He becomes engrossed in the game. He experiences a unity of thought and action defined in this case as "playing a game of basketball."

Basically the individual's experience at the IM is divided into two parts. The first part is defined in a negative way. The journey to the IM, a different set of clothes, a different social structure, and different rituals of action that characterize the pre-game experience serve primarily to separate the individual from the world of everyday life rather than to immerse him in a new world. With the start of the game, however, the transfer is complete. The individual has left one world and entered another. Play is fleeting, however, it

threatens at every moment to lose itself in boredom, explode into serious aggression, or be destroyed by an intrusion of the "real world." The players must be constantly assured that the game is progressing as basketball games normally do, that it will continue to progress correctly, and that the only viewpoint they need to have is that of the player. If the players lose this viewpoint, then play has ended, at least temporarily. The play world must be continuously recreated by the efforts and belief of the players. In this section we shall examine the ways in which the players mutually recreate for themselves their definition of the situation as "playin' ball."[32]

Technical Decisions

Technical decisions are of the type that must be made before the game can start. The game is well bounded in time. Its beginning can be exactly determined. However, the game is gradually led into by the preparatory decisions. These decisions may be made in any order. However, the decision about which team will be shirts and which team will be skins is usually made first, and the decisions about guarding are made last. In between, three other decisions are made: which ball to use, which team first gets possession of the ball (this is called "first outs" by the players), and the respective baskets that the teams will guard.

People entering the gym to play basketball generally wear a variety of types of gym clothes; or occasionally street clothes: there is uniformity of clothing on a team only by the rarest chance. If the game is to continue smoothly, the players must be able to make decisions about their play on the basis of information concerning the

whereabouts and movements of their teammates and the opposition. To do this they must be able to instantaneously distinguish between the two teams. There is no homogeneity of clothing, no uniforms, as in organized basketball. There is, however, one very effective way of telling the members of opposing teams apart: one team plays with their shirts on, whatever their style, the other team plays bare-chested.

As I pointed out earlier, the ball used in a game does affect the play. However, in most cases there is a choice of balls, all of which meet the requirements of the players. Some players have balls which they bring to the gym. John, for example, brought a ball that was of such good quality it was inevitably used in the games in which he played. Although there is an objective basis for deciding which ball to use, any player is competent to make the decision. Very little acquaintance with basketball is needed to be able to tell a good ball from a bad one.

IM basketball lacks the services of an impartial referee to supervise a jump ball at the start of the game. Therefore, one team or the other starts the game by putting the ball in play, by taking the "first outs." Direction is decided along with first outs. Whichever way the team with first outs decides to go makes the decision for both teams.

> "Who's skins and who's shirts?" Pat: "Skins made it."
> A short man stood at half court with the ball. Mickey:
> "We going to play half court or full court?" Pat: "We've
> got four on four." Shorty: "Let's play half court."
> (definite) He started the game by passing the ball to one
> of his teammates.

Notice that in this case four decisions were made in the space of a few seconds and with few words: shirts or skins, half or full

court, the ball to use, and first outs. These decisions are essen-
tial but unimportant. That is, in order to play a game it is essential
that teams be distinguishable from one another, that the play space be
determined, that one ball be chosen for use, and that one team actually
begin the game by taking the first outs. From the standpoint of the
players, however, these decisions are unimportant, since the actual
decision itself will not affect the outcome of the game. The
decisions are generally made by fiat. The assertive action of one man
indicating his decision on a technical matter is enough to decide the
issue. The distribution of decisions made among the members of the
group is not random, however. Some men are more inclined to make
decisions, to take assertive action than are others. Further, as I
previously discussed, the men who play in the gym on a regular basis
are not total strangers. In this situation of prior knowlege, some
men assert themselves on a regular basis and other players begin to
expect certain men to make the technical decisions. For lack of a better
term, I will call these men "team leaders." By making the technical
decisions essential to the occurrence of games, team leaders may be
thought of as those men most responsible for the organization of
games at the IM.

The technical decisions made prior to the start of a game ac-
tually involve two decisions: the technical decision itself, and a
"meta-decision," a decision about deciding, which most often means
who will be the one to make the technical decision. Three different
fieldnote excerpts illustrate this point:

> The game started with Claude designating the take out. He
> did the same thing at the start of each game. "Shirts
> take the ball out." He did.

> One of the opposing players: "Which ball do you want to use?" Ralph: "We don't care. You decide."
>
> When we came down the court Eddie asked, "Which ball do you want to use?" He passed me his ball, I was holding mine. Myself: "I don't care." Eddie: "Let's use yours, that one isn't very good."

In the first case, Claude by his assertive action makes both the meta-decision about who will make the technical decision (he will), and the technical decision (his team takes the ball out first). In the second case, the opposing player declines making both the meta-decision and the technical decision. He does make the meta-decision, in a sense, by posing a question. However, Ralph makes the meta-decision very definitely, and thrusts the technical decision back upon the man who had initially declined to make it. In the final case, both men decline to make both of the decisions. Each trys to make the meta-decision negatively, by refusing to make the technical decision. Eddie makes the technical decision, putting an end to what could have become an endless chain of negative decision making through refusal to decide.

These sequences describe power relationships. I use "power" very loosely: exercise of judgement in the present which changes conditions and creates the circumstances under which future action will take place. In the first case, one man takes power. He makes two decisions and thus implies a power relationship with himself as the most important and powerful member. In the second case, Ralph gives power. He also implies a power relationship with himself as the powerful member, able to delegate decision making authority. In the final case both men refuse power, implying an equality of powerlessness, with Eddie finally making the technical decision.

The final technical decision relates to guarding. During the time just prior to the beginning of the game, each man must enter into a special dyadic relationship with a member of the opposite team. These men are said to "guard" each other. Each one attempts to overcome the other during the game. Each tries to stop "his man" from scoring when on defense, and to score "on him" when on offense.

Players match up on the basis of height. Short men guard short men, tall men guard tall men. The team that takes the ball out first has a less problematic time of getting guarding assignments. The other team will be on defense first, so they will be matched with a man when they come down court. In every game but one, when there was a "man-on-man" defense the dyad remained stable regardless of which team was on offense. In each case, each man would follow the dictum, "take the man who's got you." As long as the assignments are fair on the surface, that is, no great disparities in height, the decision of guarding fades into unimportance.[33]

Decisions are made in three ways: by continuance (if the same two men are playing in consecutive games they retain the guarding relationship through both games); by choice (one man calls out his choice among the opponents); by parcelling out (the team huddles and mutually makes the decisions).

Decisions about assignments offer another occasion for the emergence of team leaders. Men who call out their choice of opposing players to guard, or who are most instrumental in the parcelling out of assignments often turn out to be the same men who made earlier decisions. These same men continue to provide organizing capacity during the game by encouraging their teammates and by coordinating

their movements. The following fieldnote excerpts illustrate "choice" and "parcelling out."

> Jason picked the man he wanted to guard, the guy who was the best ball handler. As the game was about to start he pointed at the man he wanted to guard and said, "That's my man right there!"

> "Skate", Hank and Arnie gathered at the foul line to talk strategy. Hank: "How do you want to work this?" I sidled over to them. Arnie: "I'll take the one in the light blue. You're (me) tall. Why don't you take the man in the blue trunks?"

A final decision that must be made involves the special case of half court games. In half court games the play space of the court is cut in half with both teams shooting at the same basket. To prevent the game from turning into a chaotic mass of men shooting, teams are required to play the ball from the back of the key (or other agreed upon place) each time a basket is made. And they must "take back" the ball to that line whenever possession of the ball changes between the teams.

Two different games are possible: "possession" (the team making a basket retains possession of the ball) or not "playing possession" (the ball changes hands after a basket). The negative definition of the second game attests to its rarity. Of the sixty-six games I played at the IM, thirty-two were half court and only one was not possession. Yet there is sufficient ambiguity that a team leader may take it upon himself to announce the rules.

> Ralph stated the rules loudly enough for everyone to hear. "Play to fifteen. Call your own fouls. Take everything back."

There are a large variety of rules to choose from. What is important is not which variety is played, but that everyone is playing by the same rules. When cases of ambiguity come up during the game, and, hence,

to prevent continuing ambiguity.

> One of our men went past the half court line to get a
> ball. Fred: "Our ball. You went out of bounds."
> Ted: "That's not out of bounds." "Let him have it. He
> didn't know." This from the bearded man...Myself: "Are
> we playing half court out?" Fred (sarcastically): "We
> usually do when we play over here." Myself: "Well, we
> usually play possession, too." Fred: "That's true."
> He then raised his arm and said loudly: "From now on,
> a ball back past half court is out."

Rule-Covered Breaks

The rules of basketball provide for different occasions when the
continuing movement of the players up and down the court stops. The rules
also provide for the manner in which the ball is to be returned to play
and the flow of the game reestablished. IM basketball does not have a
referee to supervise the actions of the players in breaking and re-es-
tablishing the flow of the game. Therefore, players have developed con-
ventions for continuing the game once a break has occurred.

When the game is broken up by a rule infraction, there is a
well defined "ritual of return" that must be played through before the
rythmic up court and down court movement can be re-established. This
ritual is referred to as "taking a check on the ball" or just "check".
"Checking" involves two primary parts and eight subordinate ones, and
each player must take part if the ritual is to come off smoothly. When
an incident occurs that requires a "check" in order to re-establish the
"game flow" (the uninterupted movement of teams up and down the court),
a member of the team to receive possession of the ball must stand out
of bounds and throw the ball inbounds to one of his teammates. In
organized basketball, the referee holds the ball to prevent the offense
from taking unfair advantage of an unready defense. In IM basketball,

this task falls to the defensive team itself, there being no referee to regulate the play. When the ball is to be played inbounds the man playing the ball in will give it to the man guarding him. The defensive man retains possession of the ball until all his teammates are ready. Practically speaking, he holds the ball until the other eight men are in their "guarding dyads," standing in close proximity to one another and not running around. He then returns the ball to the offensive man, sometimes with the words "Ball in," or "Ballgame" to indicate the change of hands. The offensive man then passes the ball inbounds and the game continues. T

The "check" is one means by which the players maintain the boundaries of play for themselves and each other. When a break in the game flow occurs as a result of adhering to the rules of the game, the players do not lose their players' viewpoint as they do at the end of the contest. This type of break is only a "time out" in which the players lose the unity of thought/action the game flow provides, but not their definition of the situation as "playing a game of basketball." The smooth operation of the ritual of return of the ball to play assures each player that the other players see the situation as essentially the same, i.e., as a "time out," and a way to return to the game with the correct team getting possession of the ball.

The ritual is a product of the actions of the players. The smooth operation of the ritual depends on the players taking action in a complementary fashion. The two primary parts to be played are complementary: someone to throw the ball in and someone to "check" it. The eight subordinate parts are also complementary: the defensive and offensive players matched in guarding dyads. The ritual breaks down if

players attempt to assume the same parts rather than complementary ones. When the ritual of return breaks down, or threatens to, the "game frame" is threatened also. The game cannot continue with the ball "out of play," and the ball cannot be returned to play unless the ritual of return is followed through. When two players try to assume the same part in the ritual, there are nine other men who also must take their parts (one of the two trying to take the same part is "correct"). The parts that the other men take will be complementary to the part one of the men has taken, the other man will find himself "out of tune" with the other nine men. Pressure is thus applied to the "out of tune" man to take another part. For if he does not, the game cannot continue and he will be responsible for destroying the game for the other nine men. In this manner the rules are enforced by a majority "vote" of the the players. Whatever parts the majority of the players take forces the other players to either take complimentary parts or destroy the game.

> Another argument occurred when Paul went over Ben's head to slap a rebound out of bounds. The ball bounced against the wall, Ben got it. Paul also stepped out of bounds, turned toward the court and said, "It's our ball. I hit down, you hit it out! I ain't movin' 'til you give me the ball." Ben: "Well, we're going to be here a long time then." The two men remained, both in the same position with respect to continuing play. Both had assumed the role of "thrower in." They stood side-by-side for a few minutes, perhaps while everyone caught their breath. Then one of Paul's teammates moved in front of Ben to "take a check on the ball," thus ratifying his position. Paul moved back on the court, without a word, to pick up his man.

> The ball went out of bounds, apparently off Ken (my teammate). Everyone turned and moved back up court. We were all accross the half court line when I turned to see Ken had to check the ball. Ken saw everyone up court and called, "Hey! It's our ball. It went off him!" His man nodded assent. We went back down court. It was an occasion of humor. Ken laughed especially.

The last incident demonstrates that it is the two men most directly

involved with the ball when it goes out that control the return to play. Eight thought that Ken hit the ball out, but the knowledge of the men "at the scene" decided the matter. Humor was generated by the "commission and correction of an error." The frame of reference shifted as the error in perception was discovered and corrected by the men. Ken and his man had the additional humorous experience of seeing eight men "ridiculously," (in the light of their knowledge) run up and down court.

The game is threatened if the ritual of return fails to come off smoothly. After the flow of the game has been stopped, if the players do not assume complementary parts in the playing out of the ritual, the flow of the game cannot be re-established. The game can also be threatened from the "other side." If one of the players, or teams, feels that a violation or foul has occurred which should stop the flow of the game and require a ritual of return, the refusal of the other players or team to stop the game flow also generates friction which threatens the game.

The most frequent occurrence that stops the flow of the game is when the ball goes out of bounds. This occurrence definitely stops the game flow. It is obvious to all the players what has occurred; the only disputable fact involves which team should receive possession of the ball upon completion of the return ritual. The other occurrences that stop the flow of the game are fouls, violations, and jump balls. Jump balls are rare occurences; I witnessed only three in the time I was observing. Violations take place at about the rate of one per game (although this varies). Fouls are more numerous, and out-of-bounds plays

account for about sixty per cent of the stoppages of play.

When a player feels that he has been fouled or a violation has occurred, it is up to him to make his feeling known to the rest of the players. He does this by withdrawing from the flow of the game himself and loudly calling out the foul or violation. The ball ceases to be the object of his immediate attention. He retains a position of immobility with respect to the movements of the others who are still assuming new positions in a continuously changing configuration, their moves dictated by the movement of the ball and the other players. The more obvious the foul or violation, the easier it is to stop the flow of the game, because other players will also withdraw themselves from the flow in anticipation of the call.

> I think the confrontations began with Chris making a call
> of travelling on the other team. They refused the call
> outright...The verbal exchange: Chris: "I got travelling!"
> Oscar: "He wasn't travelling." The other team went on just
> as if the call had not been made. That is, they did not stop
> the flow of the game by holding the ball, etc. Which, since
> they had possession, they could do. About three rushes later:
> Chris: "Travelling again. I'm sure they won't take it." It
> is significant that no one on our team backed the man up.
> (Our team also continued the flow of the game, rather than
> stopping the game by withdrawing and forcing into the ritual
> of "taking the ball out.") The call remained on the level of
> a call made and ognored by the other team.
>   There were numerous disputes about the score. Every few
> rushes some one would shout out the score and someone on the
> other team would dispute him. One of the longest disputes
> in terms of time, was at eight-six. Bert: "It's eight-six." Oscar:
> "What do you mean? It's seven-six. You guys aren't up by two."
> Then the recanting of the baskets started. Bert: "He just made
> that layup down there." Oscar: "That's the only one you made."
> Bert: "No, there was that jumpshot that this man made before."
> Myself: "We agreed on six-six (previous dispute) and we've
> made two since then." Bert, who was the most embroiled re-
> peated my statement in a louder voice, and no further protest
> was made by the other side.
>   The calling of fouls also got to be a disputed matter.
> Chris called a foul after a drive and was questioned by Oscar,
> "Who hit you?" No response. "You can't even say who hit you."

> But he was allowed to take the ball out without any further
> protest. One of the opponents called a foul on a rebound
> tip. Chris: "you got to call them quicker than that."
> Bert: "Let him have it." I think he realized that he had
> fouled. Jim B. went up for a shot. He called a foul while
> the ball was in the air, but it went through. Chris: "He
> called the foul! Take it out." There were "Aw's" from the
> crowd waiting and watching. Chris: "He can't have his cake
> and eat it too."

In this case the game was threatened by the refusal of the teams

to stop the flow of the game and reintegrate the players back into the

flow through the ritual of return. The game became a fragmented contest

interrupted by unresolved disputes that were merely passed over. The

players' trust en each others' integrity and mutual submission to the

rules of the game diminished, and with it the smooth continuance of

the contest also became disrupted.

The fieldnote excerpt also indicates the small number of men who

were actively involved in the dispute. There were ten men playing, but

only three, Bert, Oscar, and Chris, were actively engaged in arguing.

By their aggressive action, these men took upon themselves the position

of team leaders. To further quote from the same day's fieldnotes:

> Chris was the only man on the team that really did any
> talking. He yelled orders as the course of the game
> demanded, mostly stuff regarding getting back on defense'
> and, "Com' on big men, you got to run!" and "Move big man,
> move!"

One other fact about the disputants must be made and discussed.

All three men mentioned (Bert, Oscar, and Chris) were black. They were

not the only black players in the game, but the players who argued the

most were all black. I did not find in my observations that games

involving black players were more filled with arguments than other games.

Most argumentative games followed a pattern of increasing tension and

decreasing trust as described above. I did find, however, that in those argumentative situations, and in other situations of team leadership, black players were more likely to argue and to lead than white players. Any cultural explanation of this fact is beyond the scope of this paper. I might offer the hypothesis that in the IM gyms, since they are free of any outside authority structure, black players feel free to act in an aggressive manner which they might not do in a more structured situation.

> We were leaning against the wall watching the game in
> progress. Phil: "I hate playing with those bastards."
> I think he meant "black bastards," but I'm not sure (Phil
> is white). Three members of the black social group, and two
> other blacks, not in the social group were playing. "They
> argue all the time, and they're always right. No matter
> what they say, they're right."

Thinking such as this has implications for play. One aspect of play is that all statuses of the players in their "everyday life" should be irrelevant. If the play world is to successfully be maintained by the expectations and actions of the players, they must maintain their player's viewpoint, which, in this case, demands that they ignore extraneous characteristics of the players, like color. Each player must maintain the boundaries of play in himself and others and the entrance of "outside" statuses weakens the boundaries of play, and threatens to destroy it.

Breaks Outside the Rules

Breaks in the game which are outside the rules have been mentioned briefly in the previous section. They include disputes regarding the content of the rules (such disputes are not covered by the rules themselves); and scoring disputes (there are rules regarding scoring, but a dispute over what the score is is a "bookkeeping," memory dispute).

In this section I shall discuss two other kinds of breaks, both caused by changes in the games participants. One is the voluntary entrance or exit of players. The other is in involuntary exit of players via injury.

Of the sixty-six games I played at the IM, I entered six while they were in progress. I played in four others that changed from half court to full court with the addition of other players. Whether or not a game in progress will be destroyed by the entrance of another two players (players always enter in pairs to keep the sides even), is difficult to predict. The game is destroyed if the score reverts to zero since a new development of tension deriving from the uncertainty of the outcome must begin, although by the time another pair of men joins the game, the players may have a fair idea of what the outcome is likely to be. If the score is low and almost even, the new players will likely join and the game continue where it left off.

> I got back just as Jim entered, so there were two people
> waiting. The game stopped for us. Paul: "Time out. We'
> got two more guys now." Ben came over on his way to the
> drinking fountain and said, "We'll take this guy, you got
> the guy with the ball." There was a man sitting on a chair
> on the other side of the gym, he had been setting up the volley-
> ball nets. Paul went over to him, "I'm sorry I didn't see you
> sitting there, or I'd have asked you to play." "I don't want
> to play anyway."

The ecological structure of "playin' ball" is such that persons in the gym give what Humphreys calls "consent to copresence."[34] Since it takes time and effort to get to the setting, it is a reasonable assumption that those in the setting are there for the purpose of playing basketball. Therefore, when a group of players desires to increase the number of men involved in the game, it is reasonable to ask those men in the gym, but not actually involved in a game, if they want to play.

Invitations to play are often refused. The man refusing an invitation does not need to offer any excuse for his refusal; often men simply shake their heads. One of the major aspects of play is that is an activity freely entered into; no one can be forced to play. Freedom of entry is recognized and respected.

Rarely do players leave a game while it is in progress. On three occasions I observed players exiting from a game while it was going on. In all three cases, the exiting players had made a "provisional contract" to play in the game. Before playing they had given notice that they would play only so long as the game on the next court continued. The game entered was in each case a half court game. The "provisional player" was a member of the challenger's team in the full court game on the other court and desired to play half court only as a time-killing device until he could play full court.

For the player, injury represents an intrusion of the everyday world into the sphere of play. When an injury occurs the pain is real enough, bu it is pain in a circumscribed world. After the exit from the play situation the pain becomes real in the sense that the activities that one normally carries on must now be carried on with an added bit of feeling, and perhaps a bandage. Perhaps then, this is an intrusion of the play world in the real world, but that isn't the way it feels, there is no "fun" involved. Injury is the way that the activities of play carry consequentiality for the individual beyond the play world.

For the players, serious injury, that is, injury serious enough to cause a withdrawal from the game, constitutes a threat to the game frame. The exit of one of the players leaves an odd number of men.

The alternatives are for a game of "x + 1 on x," or one member of the

other team to drop out. Notice that if there is a man waiting to play,

this threat does not exist since any player is as good as any other

player from the standpoint of continuing the game, although the re-

sults of the game may be dramatically affected.

> The game ended when one of the players drove across the
> middle and stopped to shoot. His foot stopped too quickly
> under him and he twisted his ankle. He fell to the floor.
> The players around him from both teams moved back from him
> and looked at him. No one asked if he were all right.
> Gary: "Let's drag him off to the side and we can play three
> on three." Everyone just stood for a few moments, then
> moved further back. He remained on the floor about three
> minutes, then he got up to one foot and hopped to the side
> of the court. It was only then that one of the players,
> Jeff, asked him, "Is it bad?" I heard no reply, but he
> began to make his way out of the gym. Jeff said, "I think
> I'll call it quits." Bob and I looked at each other, Bob:
> "Do you want to leave?" Myself: "Yes." And we left.

> After only a few baskets, an opposing player tried to save
> a ball at the baseline. He flipped it back, not hard, and
> it hit one of our players. Someone behind me said, "That
> was a mouthful." The hit player started looking around on
> the floor. He: "I gotta get to a hospital quick! I gotta
> get to a hospital and get root canal work done!" He had
> had a tooth knocked out. He: "Anybody got a car?" "Go
> downstairs to the office. They've got trucks. They'll
> take you right over." He rushed out. There was a pause
> in the action. Nobody that I could see was talking about
> the incident. Two of the opposition moved off the court
> and picked up their balls and shirts. One of our men said
> loudly, "Ball game!" and started dribbling up court. The
> opposition questioned, "We going to play five on four?"
> The black guy who had been shooting with me said, "I'll drop
> out." ...The game continued, four on four.

Perhaps the most important thing to notice is that on each occasion

the first response of the players was humor. The tragic possibilities

of the incident were made light of, much as if to say that no real con-

sequences could derive from the play world. In an ethnographic study

of gynecological exams, Joan Emerson points to this function of humor:

> ...humor provides a safety valve for all parties whereby
> the sexual connotations and general concern about gyne-
> cological examinations may be expressed by indirection.
> Without taking the responsibility that a serious form of
> the message would entail, the participants may communicate
> with each other about the events at hand...If a person can
> joke on a topic, he domonstrates to others that he possesses
> a laudatory degree of detachment.[35]

The occurrence of an injury presents the players with a situation

of ambiguity. Two definitions of the situation are present at the same

time—one tragic, the other, which has been maintained and is now threat-

ened, one of play. By treating the situation with humor, participants

are able to admit the ambiguity. Concern with the possibility of injury

is "expressed by indirection." Humor allows threatening events to be

dealt with by "defusing" them. Participants show an awareness and con-

cern for the threat, and at the same time demonstrate their detachment

from it.

One further point should be made concerning the occasions of

injury. In the first incident the game ended with the injury. The game

was shattered by the loss of a player. In the second incident the game

continued, but it continued from where it left off. One of the men simply

started the game up after a pause by going right into the flow of the

game. Since injury is not a "rule break," there were no "rituals of

return" to get the game going again. It started on an ad hoc basis.

One man just "picked up the action," and the others joined in, with one

man dropping out.

In-Game Continuances

During the flow of the game there occur and reoccur many actions

that serve to keep the game on the level of friendly competition. These

"courtesies" continue the definition of the game as play, rather than a

"win at any cost" contest. During the flow of the game, also, the team leaders exercise another aspect of leadership by giving organization to the team effort. All the players I saw at the IM were familiar with the rules of basketball and were at least competent enough at the skills of the game to play it. However, those more aggressive and more than marginally competent ball players whom I have called "team leaders" serve as the "floor generals" of their teams.

I have described the threat which major injuries pose to the context of play. Minor injuries do not pose such a threat. Probably three-quarters of the times that I went over to the IM I was sitness to at least one minor injury. On most occasions there were two or three. The major type of injury numerically was eyepokes. I never got jabbed in the eye, probably because I wore glasses when I played. Of course, I had my glasses broken, repaired them, and had them broken again. Another popular injury was "jammed" fingers. The basketball hitting on the end of a finger produces a painful, but not crippling injury.

Minor injuries do not stop the game and threaten its continuance; rather, they cause a pause in the game. That is, the flow of the game stops for a minute or so while the injured player regains his composure. The injured man generally breaks from the flow of the game. He stiffens up, touches the injured part of his anatomy, perhaps with words of pain or swearing until the initial pain passes. All present, however, realize the momentary nature of the pause. There is an expectation of return to the same game within a minute or so. Often the ball is just held by the man in possession when the injury occurred, and the game picks up right where it left off.

When a serious injury occurs, its severity is usually obvious; a

player stretched out on the ground, or looking frantically on the floor for lost teeth is obviously hurt. Minor injuries can cause an injured player to break from the flow of the game, but the seriousness of his injury is hard to determine. Therefore, when a minor injury occurs (or what turns out to be a minor injury) the man closest to the player when he is injured asks him if he is alright. During the course of play I lost my glasses four times. On each occasion, the man who had bumped me asked, "Are you OK?"

In fact, asking a player if he is OK can become a "psych." Players frequently bump into one another, especially on "picks." A pick is "set" when one of the offensive men stands still and the man with the ball passes close to him. The idea is that the man guarding the man with the ball will run into the pick, and the dribbler will be able to shoot or drive without interference. If you are a picker and a defensive man runs into you, or vice versa, asking the other player if he is allright implies a strong—weak relationship between the players. I cannot be positive that this was the intent of many of the players who asked opponents if they were allright. But I think that many times the question was superfluous, even as a matter of courtesy.

Almost every time the ball is brought up court either compliments or apologies are offered. The compliment is a brief statement of regard for the play of another. It is confined to two or three words directed at an opponent or teammate. The quality of the event can be seen from the number of people offering the compliment. Teammates are quick to offer compliments; any shot that scores is an occasion for a compliment: "Good shot," or "Nice move," or "Pretty tap," depending on the exact circumstances. If a teammate passes the ball, enabling a man to score

easily, the scorer, virtually without exception, mentions the quality of the pass, "Good pass," or "Way-ta look." By the same token, if a bad pass is made or the ball dropped, the "Offender" apologizes, accepting the blame, "My fault." Opponents are not as quick to compliment as teammates, and the man guarding the one performing well almosts never compliments.

> John was guarding Steve and harasses him verbally. When Steve hit three long shots in a row, John said, "You can't miss today," and "Whew, are you hot!"

Both of the players involved were well above average in skill, but John attempted to define the situation as one of magic, and luck smiling upon Steve rather than giving him credit for the performance. Usually the "victim" of a good play says nothing. He tries to maintain the appearance of an evenly matched duo, not wishing to highlight his being beaten. He may try to define the situation as a lapse in his own, generally competent play, rather than a good play by the opponent. "My fault. I _gave_ him that one." In a particular situation this may be true. However the excuse wears then quickly. No one wants to "give away" too many.

The final compliment offered by each team to the other is the expression "Good game," after the game, This expression is a relative formality, unless the game was a rout, in which case the expression would be taken as sarcasm.

> After the last game Claude, who was on the winning team each time, went to each of our players and said, "Nice game, babe." Although I had not considered the games good, of course, I was on the losing team.

> As we started for the drinking fountain I asked Benjy, "Want to go again?" Benjy: "Yeah, it was a good game."

Leaders provide another game flow continuance. They serve as

"floor generals," coordinating the movements of their teammates. The

men who play at the IM know the movements of the game, but often situations

arise when those movements must be coordinated.

> "Superstar" never smiled, never changed facial expression. His
> talk was limited to, "Take your man down court," "There's only
> two men back on defense, com'on!" And other directions.

> We went to a zone the second game. Steve: "Your're under-
> neath on that side." He also "directed" the play. "Pinch
> out front." "Get back, get back. Alright, good work."

Coordinating orders given furing the game are not resented by the

players. There is no formal authority involved. Coordinating orders

are situationally generated, and no authority beyond the situation is

retained. Those players who are the informal team leaders are generally

better than the average players and can gain respect on that basis. Also,

respect that players might have for those who are team leaders serves

to preclude resentment, since they are considered knowledgeable con-

cerning the strategy of the game itself.

VI. BASKETBALL AS PERFORMANCE

Basketball players, as well as other sports players, are often referred to as performers, and in many ways, IM basketball is a performance. In basketball, the term "performer" can be used in either of senses. First, there is performance defined as: the projected definition of the situation, including his own place in it, that the individual desires others in the situation to accept.[36] Second, performance may refer to the individual's objective actions and success on the basketball court.

The basic "line" that individuals at the IM take in regard to basketball is that they are competent practitioners of the game, individuals who are capable of providing competition, and thus enjoyment, for the other players present.[37] The setting in which the performance takes place gives surface reinforcement to that projection. The physical location of the IM Building and the gyms, set apart from the rest of the campus, gives an initial credence to the participant's claim to competency as a ball player. He has entered into a situation knowing that his projection of being a competent ball player will be tested. He cannot "talk a good game," because in the situation he will be required to demonstrate his competence on the court. Achieving the physical setting, being present in one of the gyms, requires a journey for the individual that takes him out of his way, in space, in clothing, and in rules of sociability. For an individual to undertake the journey purely out of a desire to be in the setting, to talk a game rather than play one,

seems ridiculous. Therefore, the initial claim which is generally accepted, is that if the individual has undertaken the journey into the situation, he is competent to perform.

When more players are needed in a game, they are solicited from among those who may be present in the gym. Although players may reject games, games never reject players. That is, although men refused to enter games, I never saw anyone not solicit a player because "he doesn't know how to play." Nor was anyone asked if they knew how to play. The level of competence within the game might differ, but there was never any question as to whether an individual could enter into a game.

> (There were five men who wanted to play.) I suggested,
> "Why don't you ask that guy down there, and we can play
> three on three?" Larry: "I don't want to play with that
> guy." But a few minutes later he did ask, "You want to
> play?" Garbled reply. "What he say?" Larry: "He's got
> a pulled hamstring." Larry also asked a couple of black
> guys sitting at the other game in street clothes. "You
> guys want to play?" "Naw, we're just leaving." Just
> before I left, I was accosted from across the court. "You
> want to play?" "No thanks, I was just leaving."

The first interchange represents the closest I saw to an initial rejection of an individual as a ball player. Notice that in all three cases the question is phrased as a desire, "Do you want to play?" not as a matter of competence, "Can you play?" Initially competence is assumed.

Once the game starts, though, the degree of competence is tested. In IM basketball the division of labor on the team is basically dichotomous. In organized basketball, there is a much greater division of labor. All five positions may be chosen on the basis of the compatibility of the player with the actions and skill he will need to play the position.

In IM basketball, guarding assignment and general area of play are determined by height. Basically, one plays "inside" if he is tall, and "outside" if he is short. The projected competence of the player extends into this area of choosing where to play. It is very difficult for a short man to project height, and vice versa. Therefore, on the basis of height, the initially assumed competence is also assumed for a given area of play. And the players assume that the individual will choose his game position on the basis of his height.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to project a level of competence higher than that which the individual actually has. The performance of the individual is objective. It is possible, however, to at least shade the relationship between projected competence and objective performance.

> "GI" missed his first shot, and said, "Shit, I need some warmups."
>
> He threw his first shots up short. "I just been lifting weights and my arms aren't used to this."

Excuses are offered. Frequently, an individual swears when he misses a shot. This demonstrates his separation from the poor performance, and shows that he is as upset with the poorly performing self as his teammates might be with him. His anger treats the poor performance as an aberation, as not measuring up to his own standards of what his play should be like. After all, if the performance is to the best of his ability, what cause is there for anger?

There are many ways of demonstrating competence within the flow of the game. Players make "moves" during the game, some of which are harder than others. For example, one move is dribbling the ball behind your back. The ball is thrown down with one hand, bounces in back of the

player, and the dribble is resumed with the other hand. This is an objective measure of skill, since one cannot "perform" a behind-the-back dribble. It is done or not done.

> Benjy tried to go behine his back—missed. John: "Take it easy, Benjy. You're not ready for that yet."

The way John states it, going behind the back represents a developed level of competence, and posits an accomplished player—novice relationship between those who can, and those who cannot dribble behind their backs. Other methods of demonstrating competence are less objective. These include "style" moves like throwing the ball back to a man between your legs, or behind your back after a check.

> One man, when his turn to shoot (for teams) came, swished a jumper from the middle of the circle.

He demonstrated his casualness about shooting for teams. Other men might stand right at the foul line and take time over their shot, but he shot a jump shot and put it through without touching any of the apparatus. This particular man demonstrated his competence in the game, also. He confirmed objectively the competence that he had projected.

The individual presents a "face" of competence that is threatened by poor play, and defended with excuses or self-criticism.[38] As a group, players on a team also present a "team face" of competence. This face breaks down in the course of a rout. If the team is badly defeated by another team, it becomes impossible to maintain the face of team competence. The tension caused by the uncertainty of the game's outcome disappears, and with it the attempt to maintain face.

Concession comes when the members of the team realize that even if they should score every time they get the ball, they still would not

be able to prevent the opponents from scoring enough times to save the victory. The team feels unable to maintain the face of equally matched competition when they are trying to prevent the opponents from scoring. The team stops hussling. The members relax their body posture, and make only half-hearted attempts at guarding. The most obvious sign of concession is that men stop running toward the defensive court. The opponents are left to score baskets at will. The game is never terminated short of a total of fifteen points for the victors, but once a team gives up, it doesn't take long to reach a conclusion. The losers have failed to objectively substantiate the face of competence that their presence as a team implied.

On the other hand, there are occasions when the face of team competence is only somewhat less than substantiated. I referred previously (pages 39 and 40) to an incident in which a group of men was able to control the level of preferability at which they entered a game, as well as the composition of their team. One of the men opposing the group team suggested a motive for this control: "They don't want to lose." The face projected by the group team was confidence of victory; implied was a higher team competence than that of the opponents. However, the unfolding of the game did not fulfill expectations. The "underdog" team won.

> Julie: "We got to stop screwin' around and start working."
> Randy: "You've been saying that for the last twenty minutes."

They were losing. The statement implied, however, that the team had not been trying their hardest ("Screwin' around"), and that increased effort would produce victory. Effort or not, they lost the game by a narrow margin.

After the game Randy said loudly enough to be generally
heard, "It was like playing the world champions of karate.
They were always hacking at you. Everywhere you'd go, they
were on you like a swarm of mice."

The implication is that the team whose face of superior competence

had been broken was still, in actuality, the better team, but they

were the victim of overly aggressive play. The next game was a rematch.

This time the "overdogs" won a close contest.

Randy: "Look at that. Those guys are going crazy...That's
the only way they can win."

The "underdog" team demonstrated hussle that more than made up for

whatever difference in competence there might have been. Randy separates

hussle from competence and tries to save his team's face by degrading

the competence of the opponents. He implies that the opponents lack

competence and must try hard to win. A further implication is that a

victory that must be hussled for is not worth winning since it does not

demonstrate superiority, but abnormality ("Those guys are going crazy.").

A more than substantiated team face is another matter. The team

in question had two players who appeared to be still in high school, and

one who appeared to be long out of college. He looked about thirty-five.

Just before the second game started, one of the men opposing the
"highschoolers" and the "oldster" said, "Are we going to
take on these sorry specimens?"...The game on the other side
ended with the same team that had won before winning again, a
minor upset...The other team showed a lot of team spirit. "Let's
hold 'em!" "Com'on, let's get going!" We lost the game. At
the end they evidenced as much cheering as was ever shown "Yay!"
"Alright!" "We're the super team!"

The confirmation in fact, of a face better than the one expected

to be confirmed, is cause for celebration.

Probably eighty per cent of the games played fall between a rout

and an upset. In these cases one team demonstrates superiority, but

both teams maintain face. Upsets can occur only if one team is the favorite, that is, if they project a face of expecting to win. They may be cast in the role of expected victors by virtue of height. Part of the expectation in the incident involving Randy and Julie was due to the fact observed by "BD". "We're giving away a little height."

Routs occur less frequently as the skill of the players increases because more highly skilled players are able to score points and remain "in the game," even if their opponents are also scoring. More skilled players and teams of more skilled players can therefore maintain face more regularly than unskilled players. Notice that maintaining face is a matter of objective skill. In the IM, false faces, at least concerning basketball, cannot long be maintained. The face everyone projects is of competence, by virtue of their entrance into games. Some maintain this face better than others. Faces are more often lost than gained.

VII. SUBORDINATE ELEMENTS

I have tried to show how the definition of the situation as "playin' ball" is maintained by the social structure, rules of the game, social continuances, and performances of the players in the IM. I shall now deal with some elements which are subordinate to the overall definition, and which serve to maintain and strengthen it. These elements are general ones and may be seen in a variety of social situations. What is important is that their use in this particular social situation reinforces the overall definition of "playin' ball."

I shall discuss four such elements: 1) use of a specialized vocabulary (jargon); 2) explanation of unusual occurences; 3) humor; 4) physical contact. These four elements, in various forms, are part of many different social situations. They are contextual in nature. A specialized vocabulary makes no sense in the absence of the specialization it refers to. The explanation of unusual occurences depends on unusualness existing to be explained. And what is unusual depends on the overall context. Likewise, what is humorous, and what physical contact is allowed depends on the context in which the humor and contact take place. The subordinate elements reinforce the overall definition exactly because they take it for granted. They can be reconstructed and changed, but they only make sense within the overall definition of the situation as "playin' ball."

Jargon

Group activities that continue over time with regular participants often develop a specialized vocabulary that succinctly describes the social and action situations that are common experiences for the group members.

Basketball, as is true for other sports, abounds with jargon. The rules of the game invent and redefine words which have meaning only in the context of basketball. Withing the context of the game, "ball," "basket," and "court," take on new and game-specific meanings. Words like "backboard," and "fouline" have meaning only within the specific context of basketball. Words for action possibilities are also numerous: "dribble", "rebound," and "shot" ("jump," "set," and "hook "). Other words refer to whole sets of complicated, coordinated actions. "Zone defense," "man-on-man," "press," "dog-in-a-box," and "trap" refer to different patterns of action that the team on defense can try to act out. Violations of the rules also havd a very specific designation: "taking steps," "double dribble", "reaching in," and "foul on the arm." These possibilities for action are named, and can take place, only as violations of rules which themselves have meaning only in the circum- scribed world of basketball.

Many of the jargon phrases are shortened versions of longer ex- planations that become recognizable units of communication; set phrases that communicate information about a group of actions. For example, "first five" is a phrase used just prior to shooting for teams. It is a set phrase (used often, in the same situation, and with the same words) referring to the whole series of actions that divide men into

teams. "The first five men to make a foul shot will be on one team, playing against the five men who do not make the foul shot, who will form the other team." The phrase "first five" might have a very different meaning in many different situations. But in the IM it designates a specific program of action for the players. In this way it reinforces the overall definition of each player's situation as "Playin' ball," since each man mobilizing himself into the action program can realize that all the other men present see the situation the same way he does; the men can see themselves as a whole group that is "playin' ball."

"Hot"

If someone makes a number of shots in a row, or a very high percentage, say eighty percent, he is "hot". "Hot" is a concept that explains, for the players, a break in the normal course of the game where the success of any shot is highly problematic.

> One of the players made five baskets in a row; one of them
> when it appeared that he was just trying to pass the ball.
> Since we were playing possession, his streak was even more
> pronounced than it might have been otherwise. This incident
> provoked laughter and "Oh no's." Jeff: "I'll just stand
> here and let him shoot." After five, he missed and remarked,
> "The magic's gone."

> The man I was guarding had been really hot. One of the men on
> our team asked the man's brother, "Does he always shoot like
> that?" "When he's hot."

"Hot" provides a one word explanation of phenomena. All sports and games have a place for "hot": a run of good cards, a batting streak, or four birdies in a row. I think that "hot" is a recognition of the tenuous nature of the physical skills involved in sports. Some players are without a doubt better than others. But the time interval when all the skills

come together for a string of successes possesses the quality of a

magical happening. Note the first man's explanation of his success.

In the IM, "hot" can take place only within the context of a basketball

game. To say a player is "hot" presupposes the existence and functioning

of the entire apparatus for "playin' ball." "Hot," therefore, reinforces

the prevailing definition of the situation by taking it for granted.

Two people who find meaning in "hot" must also find meaning in the rest

of the social situation that permits "hot" to exist.

Humor

Humor often functions to reinforce the situation. Bateson de-

scribes humor as occurring when a paradox is created that necessitates

a shift in perspective by the participant which shows his previous view

of the situation to be in error and a new view to be correct.[39] Humor

involves a change in points of view, and thus a threat to situational

definitions. The humor of the IM is like this. However, the shifts in

points of view and threats occur within the definition of the situation

as "playin' ball." The humor takes its meaning from the world created

in the play situation; and by being meaningful, and thus "funny," within

the situation, it reinforces the definition of the situation as "playin'

ball."

As far as number of instances go, outlandish comparison was the

most frequently used type of humor. It consists of calling a player by

the name of a well-known "star" player. The humor involves the fact

that the IM player is not able to accept the comparison without arrogance.

He is not able to identify with the "star" characteristics implied in

the comparison, so he is left with his humble self in the shell of
greatness, the son lost in the overcoat of his father.

> Chris was left-handed. When he came over to the basket for
> the start of the game, one of the players who was there said,
> "Goodrich." after he shot. One of the men took in a rebound
> after a shot and drew the comment, "Wes Unseld."

> Paul was left-handed. After the first game, Stanley said,
> "We're going to have an interview with Gail Goodrich."
> During the game, when Paul hit a shot, Stanley yelled,
> "Goodrich!"

This was the most frequent comparison. Left-handed ball players
were equated with Gail Goodrich (of the NBA L.A. Lakers), who, at this
time, is apparently the best known left-handed star. In the second
quotation, the situation of a well-known sports commentator interviewing
the game's star in front of millions of dollars worth of equipment and
millions of fans is substituted without qualification into the "real"
situation of the IM. Stanley's action, in playing the interviewer, in-
troduces the paradox of that possibility, generates a shift in perspective
(from the IM, to national television, and back), and, thus, humor.

> Tom was talking about must have been the 440. "I have the
> potential to do forty-four or forty-five." The four sit-
> ting around him must have heard that before. They all
> turned to him and made a short comment in a derisive voice,
> "He's being Jim Thorpe again." "Hey, Jim."

Tom is brought down to size by the comparison with Jim Thorpe.
The others have equated his self that can run a quarter-mile in forty-
four or forty-five seconds with the legendary athlete. For him to con-
tinue to claim that capability, he must "seriously" compare himself with
Jim Thorpe--arrogance beyond belief.

> The black guys, especially Tom were talking about "givin'
> shit," or "fuckin' with." Tom was working on Bronson: "I
> love to give that guy shit. He says he's givin' shit...but
> but he can't." John tapped a rebound in when Bronson had
> position under the boards. Tom: "Hey, Bronson, you pickin'

your nose that time?" "Yeah." Bronson attempted to take a
ball away on the dribble, but slapped it out of bounds.
Tom: "Hey, you know you shouldn't be going and stealing any
balls. Your're not coordinated enough...You got no coordination."
He went on to tell a story about high school. One guy, "they
were talking about him so bad that he just walked out and
went back to the bus. Next time, he knew that they'd be
talking about him, so he just sat over in the corner and
didn't say anything. They started talking about me. I told
'em, 'Kiss my ass.'"

Looking at the remards Tom made, they are not in themselves funny,

they are insulting. The humor in "givin' shit" does not come from the

remarks so much as from the situation of their expression. The shifting

frames of reference are friend--enemy, joke--insult. If I am your friend,

then I am joking. If I am not joking, then I am not your friend. In

this case, it appears that Tom might have used the ambiguity of the

situation to express true hostility, or at least superiority. Insult

humor, as practiced among blacks, goes by the name of "playing the dozens,"

or "joning." It has been discussed in a number of places.[40] Ulf Hannerz,

one of the authors who discusses joning makes this point:

> An enemy who jones on you becomes a little more of an enemy,
> as your resentment grows, but a friend who is joning is a
> friend you are playing a game with.[41]

The humor is in the shifting perspective of "what if he were

serious?" and "is this play?"

> When he missed three shots in one rush, John: "Nhya, nhya,
> na, nhya, nhya, Steve missed three shots." Done in a sing
> songy voice.

> When "Doc" stepped to the line "Garb" said, "I hope you
> don't make it ("Garb" already had made it)...If "Doc" makes
> it, it's first three. Otherwise the teams won't be fair."

These two incidents were in such a voice that although they were

"givin' shit" in content, they were not ambiguous. The tone used by the

speaker in both cases, especially the child mimicry of John, demonstrated

that in each case the speaker was "only kidding." The humor was
generated by the same serious--kidding ambiguity, but the ambiguity in
these cases was more obviously false. Although I am sure "Garb" would
have preferred to play with someone else, in another game he was "Doc's"
teammate. The humorous attempt, in the way it was stated, revealed it-
self to be as much a veiled acceptance of the person, as a veiled attack
on him.

> Harry repeated twice when the teams were about to be picked,
> "Let's do this democratically...First two to make it pick."
> Ron shot from the top of the key. He made the shot, but went
> over to the bleachers and sat down again. Willie missed.
> Harry hit. Harry: "Who else has made it but me?" Ron: "I
> made it." Tom came off the bleachers and made the shot. Tom:
> "I'm the shortest, so I pick first." Harry: "No you don't. I'll
> shoot you for it." Tom missed. Harry prepared to shoot. Tom:
> "This is do or die." Harry: "You wish it was." He missed.
> Tom missed. Harry missed. Tom missed. Harry missed. Tom
> missed. Willie was getting the rebounds and throwing the ball
> back to the shooters. Willie: "You two want to move in here
> a little closer?" Harry: "You didn't even make the first
> round." Willie: "I'm saving all my points for the game."
> Harry: "You sure you're going to play?" Everyone laughed.

The exchange at the end is an example of shifting definitions, attacks
on projected faces, and competition that all lie within the larger de-
finition of "playin' ball." Willie asks the shooters if they might like
to move closer to the basket. He attacks the projected face of the men,
that they are competent to shoot from the distance they are, in an ob-
lique way that shifts the definitions of the men rather than confronting
them directly (e.g., "You guys can't shoot from there.") The reply re-
defines the situation as a continuing contest that Harry is in, but
Willie is already out of the running. Willie's reply to that is a rather
standard statement. He defines himself as having the ability to hit
whenever he wants, but he is "saving himself" for more important things
than the continuing contest that Harry spoke about. Harry's final comment

re-establishes the primacy of the contest by giving it power over Willie.
He may be saving himself for a chance that never comes because he blew
it the first time. The laughter of the others finalizes the exchange.
Any "comeback" that Willie might have attempted would have been lost in
laughter. Harry is the "winner" of the exchange by acclamation. Notice
that all of the projected faces as competent ball players, the final
threat to face, that Willie may not even be competent to play, and the
reason for the shooting in the first place, all take for granted the
overall definition of the situation as "playin' ball." Of course, Willie
did play. The position he took during the competition, retrieving the
shots, and the verbal exchange, all demonstrate his secure position in
the social structure.

> I could tell the men were friends mainly by the competi-
> tive aspect which they introduced into the shooting around.
> They did a lot of roughhousing while they shot; grabbing
> one another, bumping, trying to block shots. In short,
> they took liberties with each other's free access to the basket,
> and bodies that strangers simply would not. Even during these
> periods, there was little conversation. Most of the remarks
> had to do with the course of the action. "I thought I'd bump
> him to see what would happen." ..."Good defense." "Yeah."
> He raised his arm like a railroad crossing barricade. That
> had been his defense.

Notice again that the humor follows the action. It takes its
cues from what is going on, and what is going on is shooting around. By
taking the action for granted and commenting on it, humor reinforces
the attention that the men pay to the activity. Thus, humor reinforces
the overall definition of the situation by involving the men more
deeply. It strengthens the boundaries of play by making them unprob-
lematic for the men within them.

I found more use of all types of humor among friends. The attempt
at humor of any type is a shift in definitions that can be best carried

off among friends, among people who have a degree of seeing situations

the same way already. In his discussion of humor, Gregory Bateson

makes the observation that humor is important in comfortable relations

with others.

> That freedom, the freedom to talk nonsense, the freedom
> to entertain illogical alternatives, the freedom to ignore
> the theory of types, is probably essential to comfortable
> human relations.[42]

Likewise, in relationships in which one feels comfortable, with

friends, one is more likely to feel free to entertain illogical alter-

natives, talk nonsense, etc. With friends, people can be secure in the

knowledge that they will neither be taken seriously, nor considered

stupid. Friends will accept the shifts in perspective and allow them-

selves to shift their own perspective, to see the humor in the situation.

Physical Contact

Basketball is a contact sport. It is impossible to play a game

of basketball without touching other players.

> At one point Lance drove the lane, stopped and shot. An op-
> posing player got under him. Lance came down on top of him.
> He rested his full weight on him for a second. They laughed
> in the spirit of comradeship.

> Before the first game, Benjy and Paul engaged in a mock wrestling
> match. One man (who appeared to be in high school) said, "Look,
> they're wrestling." They stood bent over with their heads to-
> gether and their hands on each other's arms. The first quick,
> aggressive move ended the match. Paul grabbed for a hold and
> Benjy shook him off. Both of them straightened up.

During the game, touch is inevitable. But is is regulated by the

rules regarding fouls. The setting procides a "safe" opportunity for

close contact, both in fun (as the wrestling match), and in aggression,

comes within the definition of the situation as sport. Contact is "part

of the game."

> Ralph came over to me between games: "If I bother you too much, just say so and I'll lay off. I sometimes bump and shove, and some guys get pissed off. So if it gets to be too bad, just say so." Myself: "No, I expect a certain amount of that. I figure it's part of the game." Ralph: "Well, some guys get pissed off." Myself: "If I get pissed off, I'll let you know."

My statement seemed to satisfy him as a set of ground rules for the dyadic guarding relationship. I also felt he might be, in part, trying to "psych" me.

Another very noticeable fact of "playin' ball" is the olfactory awareness of the smell of sweat. A group of men, each trying to get a rebound or loose ball, packs close together, and the smell generated by the group is noticeable to those in it. On that level, then, the game becomes a sensuous experience in the "intimate" senses of touch and smell, all within the frame of "playin' ball."

VIII. CONCLUSION: BASKETBALL AS MASCULINE ACTIVITY

Throughout this paper, my major contention has been that there is a circumscribed world of meaning that goes with "playin' ball." The person who plays basketball at the IM passes through three different worlds of meaning in the course of his journey to the IM. Initially the person is in the everyday world in which he lives the majority of his time. This is the world in which his actions have a consequentiality. In the everyday world reside families, Master's theses, and traffic congestion.[43] When he enters the IM, the person leaves this world behind and enters one of the gyms to play basketball. Immediately he becomes part of a social structure that is focused on organizing basketball games. This structure has its own rules of sociability. The player-to be finds that his actions no longer have consequences in the everyday world. He has lost, to a large extent, the statuses that he held in the everyday world. And, if he is to play basketball, he must submit himself to the rules of social interaction that operate in the gyms. Finally, the individual enters a game of basketball as a player. As a player, the individual finds that his actions once again have consequen- tiality for his life. Only, this time, the consequentiality is for his life as a player. His actions will affect the results of the game in which he is involved. They are consequential, therefore, not only for himself, but for the others on his team. The player needs only his player's point of view to act in the situation. The everyday world is forgotten as the player becomes part of the action system of the game.

His actions are based on the pattern of men in motion according to specified rules with a specific goal in mind; mainly, the rules of basketball, and the goal of scoring points for the purpose of winning the game. He becomes part of the system as he observes the patterns of movement and synchronizes his movements to the pattern. His movements gear into the pattern as a part of the basis for movement of the other players. Thus, the players are able to synchronize their actions, with differing levels of skill, into an action system that is meaningful for them as "playing a game of basketball."

I have discussed the ways in which the action system of the game is maintained by the players. First, the game itself provides a "cut-and-dried" system of meaning: a system of measuring time, a definition of spatial properties, and rules for interaction. The social structure of the players provides the organizing capacity for starting and refereeing games. And the rituals of return provide for ways in which the game can be continued over breaks in the action. Finally, jargon, "hot," humor, and physical contact reinforce the definition of the situation by taking it for granted. The world of the IM is not totally foreign to its inhabitants. However, the particular content of the forms, relative to each other, and relative to the everyday world, serves to differentiate the two worlds most successfully.

Just as the subordinate elements reinforce the definition of the situation by taking it for granted, analogously, the social situation at the IM reinforces sex segregation by taking it for granted.

> We drifted back to the door of the gym from the "Tartan Turf" arena. Myself: "What kind of class is that--basketball?" Bill: "Yeah. They ought to let us in so they can watch some pros do it." Jeff: "I wouldn't want to be in a class like that (co-ed), and have some girl put the moves on me. It

would be embarassing." Bill: "I wouldn't mind having some
girl put the moves on me."

This remark derives its humor from the shift in definitions; from
"move" in basketball, a maneuver to overcome the defense, to "move", as
sexual aggression. It also changes the position of women from competent
competitor (Jeff admitting the possibility of being beaten on defense),
to sexual partner.

> We slipped into the gym and sat on the floor, on either side
> of the door. By the time the class ended, there were about
> a half dozen men watching. It was a professional class, for
> phys. ed. majors. The instructor talked about "your kids."

The class was composed of approximately forty students, about half
of whom were women. I assume all the students were aspiring physical
education teachers. The other gyms were in use with classes just starting,
so the waiting ball players congregated at this gym.

> When the class ended, quite a few stayed from the class to
> play. I couldn't tell exactly how many since others were
> also coming in.

The fieldnotes go on to describe the games that developed. No one
mentioned the women, and no women from the class stayed to play. Even
though, as members of the same class on basketball, they presumably were
as aquainted with the game's rules as were the male class members who
did stay. One aspect of the social system of the IM is that it is only
entered into by men.

The social structure and nature of the game provide a setting in
which the acting out of the "male role" is the easiest course of behavior
for men to take. Thayer Greene discusses three aspects of the "male
role" (among others) in Modern Man in Search of Manhood: 1) men have
the "hunger to be a hero;" 2) men do not make personal disclosures; 3)

men do not form deep personal relationships.[44] The social structure and nature of the game are such that men entering the IM can "play ball" for hours, engaging in violent motions, yet synchronizing the motions into a complex action system, and all time be acting out the aspects of the "male role" mentioned above. The nature of the game is such that the player knows the part he played in victory or defeat. He is hero or goat. And if he finds himself solicited as a player, he may consider himslef, at least in this setting, a hero. Likewise, I have mentioned the circumscribed nature of play. An individual entering the IM loses his "everyday self." For purposes of the game, the only thing that matters is his skill in basketball. He need not provide any personal information--his play "speaks for itself." Lastly, I have pointed out the ritualized manner in which men at the IM can relate to each other and still accomplish their desires, to "play ball." Although some relationships begun at the IM may become deep relationships elsewhere, for purposes of "playin' ball" developing a deep relationship would be a waste of time. The way in which games are organized and the nature of the game provide modes of acceptable behavior that reinforce "male role" behaviors by taking them for granted as the way of interacting in the situation.

FOOTNOTES

1. All Quotations, unless otherwise cited, are from my field-notes. The names used are fictitious.

2. Gregory Bateson, "A Theory of Play and Fantasy," Psychiatric Research Reports 2 of the American Psychiatric Association, (1955), 41.

3. Ibid., 46.

4. The most obvious examples of this relate to contact sports. A cross-body block on an opponent during the course of a football game has a different meaning (and will be reacted to differently by the person blocked), than a cross-body blosk executed on a patter-by in the street. The actions involved in less active games, like bridge, often have no meaning outside the context of the game. The person who "played bridge" outside the context of the game (by himself at a lunch counter, using imaginary cards, for example), just making the motions of the game, would li-ely be considered bizarre, if not just crazy.

5. Johan Huizinga, Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture. (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1949), 13.

6. Roger Caillois, Man, Play and Games, (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, Inc., 1961), 9-10.

7. Richard Schechner, Public Domain: Essays on the Theatre, (New York: BobbsOMerrill Company, Inc., 1969), 73-74.

8. "Everyday life" is used in an almost monolithic manner throughout this paper. It becomes, for all practical putposes, every-thing that is not "play". This unwarranted cleavage of life is one of the major shortcomings of the literature on play, also. All activities are in some way differentiated from other activities. To group all non-play activities under the one phrase "everyday life" is unjustified, except from the standpoint that this paper deals with one of the more strongly differentiated aspects of life. For convenience sake, all those activities that individuals normally caryy on ar "everyday life." It must be remembered, however, that these activities are, themselves, varied and differentiated.

9. Sherri Cavan, Liquor License: An Ethnography of Bar Behavior. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1966), 9-13.

10. Caillois, Man, Play and Games, p. 14.

11. Georg Simmel, "Sociability (An Example of Pure, of Formal Sociology)," The Sociology of Georg Simmel, edited by Kurt Wolff (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), 40-41.

12. Erving Goffman, Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction, (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1961), 19-26. Goffman makes clear that "rules of irrelevance" is a generalizable concept. Different social encounters have different rules of irrelevance.

13. C.E. Ashworth, "Sport as Symbolic Dialogue," Sport: Readings From a Sociological Perspective, edited by Eric Dunning (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 45.

14. Goffman, Encounters, p. 67.

15. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and Stith Bennett, "An Exploratory Model of Play," American Anthropologist, 73 (1971), 45.

16. Ibid., p. 46. Emphasis in original.

17. "Ritual is a form of prescribed and elaborated behavior and occurs both as the spontaneous invention of the individual, especially of the compulsive neurotic, and as a cultural trait...Ritual according to the accepted usage of the term does not include acts of routine provision of physical necessities...Ritual is always extra-necessitous from the technological point of view." Ruth Benedict, "Ritual," Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences Volume 13, edited by Edwin R.A. Seligman, and Alvin Johnson (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), 396.

18. Gregory Bateson, "The Position of Humor in Human Communication," Cybernetics: Circular Causal and Feedback Mechanisms in Biological and Social Sciences, Transactions of the Josiah Macy, Jr. Foundation, 1953), 28.

19. Bruce C. Ogilvie, and Thomas A. Tutko, "If You Want To Build Character, Try Something Else," Psychology Today, 5 (October, 1971), 61.

20. Robert M. Davis, Aggressive Basketball, (West Nyack, New York: Parker Publishing Company, Inc., 1969), 4-5.

21. Two critics from within the sports hierarchy who have achieved some noteriety are Dave Meggyesey and Jim Bouton. See Dave Meggyesey, Out of Their League, (Berkley, California: Ramparts Press, 1970), and Jim Bouton, Ball Four, edited by Leonard Scheter (New York: World Publishing Company, 1970). A more analytically oriented criticism dealing with the authoritarian and racist aspects of American sports is found in Jack Scott, The Athletic Revolution, (New York: The Free Press, 1971).

22. Slovenko and Knight provide an edited volume of over four hundred pages which presents a psychoanalytic approach to numerous and varied sports and games. See Ralph Slovenko, and James A. Knight (eds.), Motivations in Play, Games and Sports, (Springfield, Illinois: Charles C. Thomas: Publisher, 1967).

23. See, for example, Fred E. Fiedler, "Assumed Similarity Measures as Predictors of Team Effectiveness," and Michael Klein, and Gerd Christiansen, "Group Composition, Group Structure, and Group Effectiveness of Basketball Teams," both in Sport, Culture, and Society, edited by John W. Loy, Fr. and Gerald S. Kenyon, (London: Collier-Macmillan, Ltd., 1969), 352-364, and 397-408, respectively. Also, Oscar Grusky, "Managerial Succession and Organizational Effectiveness," A Reader On Complex Organizations, edited by Amitai Etzioni (2nd ed.; New York: Holt, Rinhart and Winston, Inc., 1969), 398-410.

24. The Men's Intramural Building contains athletic 'facilities for the use of the university's students. A few of the facilities for the use of the university's students. A few of the facilities are: an indoor swimming pool, an artificial grass floored gymnasium, four hardwood floor gymnasia, weightlifting room, handball/paddleball courts, and steam room. The building also contains a few of the offices of members of the athletic department.

25. Goffman, Encounters, pp. 35-37.

26. Laud Humphreys, Tearoom Trade: Impersonal Sex in Public Places, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1970), 78.

27. Schechner, Public Domain, p. 75.

28. This is not strictly true. The gyms are used for other purposes. But in the absence of a physical education class, or group of men playing volleyball, all those men who are in the gym intend to play basketball.

29. Banter is mild teasing. I discuss it more fully on pages 79-84. I found that gtoups who were otherwise recognizable as friends (by entering together, use of names, etc.) engaged in banter far more often than those who did not appear to be friends.

30. Goffman, Encounters, pp. 7-8.

31. The player's viewpoint is the only viewpoint he needs to maintain, although he may simultaneously maintain other viewpoints. All the "rules of irrelevance" of the IM (or any other play situation) are never completely maintained.

32. I use the phrase "definition of the situation" to refer to participants' mutual recognition that they are engaged in one instance of the activity "playing a game of basketball." Those in the gym, but not actively engaged in a game, mutually recognize their activities to be among those customarily engaged in prior to, between, or after "playing a game of basketball."

33. Actually, it is the inequality of ability in the guarding relationships that, to a large extent, determines the outcome of the game. The team whose members are able to "win" in the guarding dyads, wins the game. However, before the game starts, the outcome of each

dyadic contest cannot be foreseen. Also, different contests may be "won" by members of the opposite teams. The overall balance of the victories cannot be pre-determined.

34. Humphreys, Tearoom Trade, p. 179.

35. Joan P. Emerson, "Behavior in Private Places: Sustaining Definitions of Reality in Gynecological Examinations," Recent Sociology No. 2: Patterns of Communicative Behavior, edited by Hans Peter Dreitzel (London: Collier-Macmillan, Ltd., 1970), 90.

36. Erving Goffman defines "performance" as "all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants." Erving Goffman, The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life, (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), 15. My own use of the term indicates activity by the given participant for the purpose of influencing the other participants to accept the projected self of the given participant.

37. "a line—that is, a pattern of verbal and non verbal acts by which he expresses his view of the situation and through this his evaluation of the participants, especially himself." Erving Goffman, "On Face Work," Psychiatry, 18 (1955), 213. Performance, as I have defined it, is achieved through taking various lines.

38. "face may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himslef by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact." Ibid.

39. Bateson, "The Position of Humor in Human Communication," p. 28.

40. Roger D. Abrahams, "Playing the Dozens," Journal of American Folklore, 75 (1962), 209-220. John Dollard, "The Dozens: Dialectic of Insult," The American Imago, 1 (1939), 3-25.

41. Ulf Hannerz, "Growing Up Male," Soulside, Ulf Hannerz, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 133.

42. Bateson, "The Position of Humor in Human Communication," p. 5.

43. I cannot over emphasize that the "everyday world" is not a unified system. There are different sub-systems of meaning within the "everyday world" which can be distinguished, much as I have distinguished the "play world." Dealing with one system of meaning, as I have been, however, limits my ability to distinguish others without becoming too complex and verbose.

44. Thayer Green, Modern Man in Search of Manhood, (New York: Association Press, 1967). Especially chapters 2-4.

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