Beyond Orange Slices: The Contested Cultural Terrain of Youth Soccer in the United States

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Dedication

My dissertation is dedicated to my family and all of the people in the world who spend way too much time dreaming and thinking about kicking and chasing a ball around a field.

Abstract

This dissertation builds on my four-year ethnographic immersion into the world of youth soccer in the Twin Cities and dozens of interviews with players, parents, and coaches. My dissertation, titled "Beyond Orange Slices: The Contested Cultural Terrain of Youth Soccer in the United States", demonstrates how various spaces of youth soccer in a metropolitan city are social environments where social inequalities, identities, and discourses of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, and community are constructed, challenged, and reproduced. In my dissertation I examine how the field of youth soccer raced, classed, and gendered; how larger social systems of inequality appear and shape taken for granted, but prevalent cultural spaces, such as sport; and how practices of youth soccer serve as a contested cultural site of meaning with regards to parenting culture, families, sporting discourse, youth development, community, identity, and social difference.

The first section of my dissertation focuses on how youth soccer is a social field with seven different sites of youth soccer. Within these different locations of soccer's social field, clubs create, maintain, and define a group identity that is centered on how they "do" youth soccer. Different communities "do" the sport in a manner that is informed by various parenting styles, ideals about community, and visions for proper youth development. The second section of my dissertation is about gender and how different forms of playing and coaching the game are shaped by cultural ideas of masculinity and femininity during youth. Throughout the field of soccer, players, coaches, and parents often intentionally strive to challenge gender norms about who can play and succeed in the game. Yet, many participants often still reproduce gender hierarchy and normativity through soft essentialism.

In the final section I argue that soccer, and youth sport, is a useful and particular sociological window into how the dynamics of race and racism operate in the United States, particularly within diverse (racial and ethnic) social spaces. In this section, I show that in many cases youth soccer is a "cosmopolitan canopy" where social difference is supported and co-exists seemingly with ease and normality. Participants in these diverse social canopies of soccer frequently view such diversity as a positive feature of the sport and reproduce happy diversity talk. However, within these diverse soccer spaces, biological notions of race, racist microaggressions, and other forms of racial marginalization and exclusion appear frequently, simultaneously, and often with no formal challenges or reconciliation. These racist ruptures reveal the tenuous characteristics of diverse social spaces and sport, and highlights the limited inclusive potential of diversity discourse

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Introduction: A Sporting and Sociological Imagination

This dissertation is the result of my four-year ethnography into the world of youth soccer in the Twin Cities Metropolitan area. I entered this project with certain questions about race and its influence on and presence in the everyday practices of coaches, players, and the parents that support, coach, and play the sport. But as many ethnographers know, more research questions, tensions, themes, and paradoxes emerged after just a few months of immersion. After spending a few months on the sidelines, observing and making casual conversation with parents and coaches my interest in the power of race within the sport became more prominent. In addition to race, themes of athletic performance, youth development, coaching practices, group identity, and gender became ever present and demanded that I ask questions related to these social dimensions. But before I describe the process that led me to a final set of questions, ethnographic site(s), and research design this dissertation has roots long before I started driving and biking around to different soccer fields throughout Twin Cities metro area.

This is very much a personal project that deeply connects to my own experiences playing, consuming, and socializing around sports throughout childhood and adulthood. Sports have been and continue to be a prevalent social force in my life. As a child, I spent countless hours in the summer with friends bouncing between whiffle ball, football, soccer, or basketball in my neighborhood streets. Sports were one crucial social vehicle where I made friends, passed time, and socialized with peers and adults. Within my family sports was just as present. Daily life at my grandparents' house was often centered on what time the Seattle Mariners had a baseball game. My grandpa would frequently eat his dinner while sitting on a recliner chair commenting about how bad the Mariners were

(which was frequent) as the rest of us sat at the dinner table. My dad, mother, sister, and I had an annual tradition of attending one NBA game per year, an event that I would, for months in advance, eagerly await. Today, around family dinner tables and text message threads, a conversation about a Seattle based sports team is likely to pop up in between conversations about life events, and politics. Though my relationship with sports was often a male dominated space and served as an easier or more normative way for men in my family and social circles to interact and communicate with each other; it has also one way in which my sister and I bond and maintain a very close relationship. Whether it be planning trips around the possibility of us playing on the same recreational team for the weekend, discussing the success and struggles of women soccer players at the professional level, or how each of us deal with very aggressive and egotistical men in our recreational soccer leagues, the sport remains an ever present part of our lives and relationship.

Even though I had no formal training or real understanding of what sociology was, sports were consistently an entry point for me to understand social categories, norms, discourse, and inequalities. My immersion into sports culture also showed how sports were influenced by larger systemic and cultural forces. For instance, in middle school, the material resources and willingness to specialize in one sport became apparent through my experiences in baseball and soccer. After the age of 12, participation in baseball became heavily dependent on the willingness of families to invest hundreds to thousands of dollars a year to play year-round in private travel leagues that played around the state of Washington. My parents were not about that life and could not afford to make such an investment in a youth sport. A similar pattern of privatization and class privilege

appeared in youth soccer. As high school inched closer, friends with more material resources began to join more expensive, and mostly white, travel teams. The neighborhood based recreational team lost players, and myself along with one of my good friends chose not to join travel soccer clubs because of cost and the racial and class dynamics of many club teams. This choice was made despite each of us being good enough to play for these higher ranked private youth clubs. We did not participate in structured and adult organized practices. Instead, we played hours and hours of one-on-one vs each other on our own in public parks; we organized games on our own in places where most Americans would not expect to play soccer (ex: On Friday nights we would bus down to Freeway Park, a walking park that goes over Interstate 5 and street bridge, and play in a confined square between two concrete walls).

As I entered high school athletics it became even more clear how sports were defined by dimensions of race, class, and gender (it took me a bit longer to grapple with the role of ableness and sexuality). My high school was shaped by residential segregation, because of its location in a historically Black neighborhood (due to gentrification the neighborhood is now majority white and upper-middle class), anti-racist political struggle, educational tracking, and ideals of social difference and diversity. The school, hailed for its social difference along lines of race and class, constantly had to deal with the ramifications of a stratified educational system where neighborhood based working class Black, Latino/a, and Asian youth attended classes separate from predominately middle class secure white student. White students came from all across the city and attended the high school in order to have access to the "gifted" advanced placement academic program. This tracked educational system helped create a sense of

two different schools that fell along lines of race and class. Sports was one place where such differences and inequalities were magnified and reproduced, yet at times challenged. Sports such as swimming, ultimate frisbee, cross country, soccer, and baseball were majority white and middle class, whereas sports like football, wrestling, softball, basketball, track and field had more students of color and more inclusive for the entire student body.

For two years I played high school football and it was incredibly telling how the culture of the sport differed from my experiences in baseball and soccer. Since I spent time in "higher achieving" classrooms, I spent a significant amount of school time around mostly white upper middle-class kids, but on the football field the racial environment was defined by blackness and working-class backgrounds. Middle or upper middle-class kids were the exception to the norm. In this sporting environment I felt more socially comfortable compared to classroom settings and issues of resources or specialization were much less relevant in comparison to other sports within the school. Part of this was due to public schools subsidizing costs to participate, but it also had to do with the culture surrounding football, which in this case was associated with people of color and working-class people.

In certain moments within this masculine social space, differences and inequalities of class, educational status, and race seemed to become less rigid and important. There seemed to be more room to breathe and be. Now, when the team was positioned against other schools from around the metro area issues of class and race became even more obvious. The lack of elite youth programs to serve as feeder programs into high schools, and parent/alumni booster programs placed us at a disadvantage

compared to resource rich suburban schools. Moreover, when we travelled to suburban and mostly white schools, we frequently had to prepare ourselves for racist aggressions on the field or from the opposing crowd. I vividly remember our head coach speaking to us at a Friday practice about how dealing with racist treatment from opponents was a reality for players and coaches from Garfield High School 40 years ago, and it is the same for us. At the start of each season he shared what happened conference coaches' meetings. According to Coach Roberts, opposing coaches would tell him to his face about our naturally "athletic" abilities, but that we lacked discipline or even the intelligence to succeed as a collective. Coach Roberts was trying to motivate us and also teach us about how racism occurs. The lesson stuck and the racist rhetoric from opposing white coaches was laughable for so many reasons, one being that the white and suburban schools we played against regularly produced college level players who were physically strong, fast, quick, and agile. For most games, our team was smaller in weight, strength, speed, and had less organized football experience.

The contrast of how race and class worked within soccer at my school was incredibly telling and enlightening. Soccer was not overtly hostile for me and other people of color on the team, but the environment did not have the same collective energy or inclusiveness as the football team. The players and coaches were majority white with 3-4 players of color. Race talk was minimal because it was not legible within the culture of the team or the cultural/sporting landscape. The suburban schools we competed against did not drastically differ from us in terms of racial demographics or class backgrounds. Our group identity was built around the notion of being a "city school", but the larger

racial and material systems and histories that made such an identity distinct and deep amongst the football team, was thin and more ahistorical for the soccer team.

In high school soccer, cleavages of class and race were just as apparent within the team. There were kids who had more insider status, capital and privilege due to their participation in organized and select travel soccer. Those particular kids had insider connections to the coaches and often comprised the majority of the roster on the varsity team. Soccer at my high school missed particular groups, specifically the substantial Ethiopian, Somali, and Oromo communities. Players from those communities did not play in organized travel soccer teams, but rather local and less formal structured soccer environments. Their social location within the sport did not lead to active inclusion into a school-based team that in theory should represent the entire student body. Instead, upper middle-class and mostly white players, who were immersed in organized travel soccer and with active parents behind the scenes, were centered within the soccer program.

For the few players of color on the team, we were subjected to racial logics that are deeply embedded within sporting environments. My best friend on the team, who racially identified as Filipino and Black, was consistently placed in positions on the field and described in a way that reflected biological notions of race and athleticism. Lonnie was quick, creative, technical, and dynamic with the ball. He was also short, slight of frame, and thus not the most physically strong. Given his skillset and physical frame his best position would likely in the center of the field where he could control the game, keep the ball and distribute it to teammates, and make everyone's life easier on the field. As coaches and peers latched onto Lonnie's "natural" speed he was constantly positioned as a wide forward, a position the coaches associated power and speed, not necessarily

creativity and technique[1]. In addition to the actual position of play, during practice sessions white coaches and peers constantly described his game in terms of his speed rather than any of his other creative and technical soccer skills.

Ultimately, Lonnie and another Black player (Jabari), were positionally stacked into sporting positions that are associated with racial stereotypes about black bodies and natural physical ability. Personally, I was not stacked into a spot on the field generally associated with "natural" 'black' physical abilities during high school.[2] But even though I was placed at a defensive midfield position my skills on the field were constantly discussed in terms of my physicality, not my foot skills, passing ability, communication skills, or effort. I was praised for my ability to win a header in the air (jumping), ability to win a ball off an opponent (strength), and speed to close attackers down. I considered my skill set fairly similar to other white players on the team, but the way I was talked about was definitely different. Whether it was through stacking or how our soccer ability was discussed by our peers and coaches, all three of us experienced racist logics and paradigms as we tried to play the game and contribute to the team.

My high school experience with soccer was fun, but not entirely satisfying because of these lingering social dimensions of belonging and the ways in which race and class worked within the sport. Despite my lack of deep social satisfaction with my high school team, my passion for the sport remained. This passion burned bright for multiple

[1] In terms of on the field success, this was a waste of talent. Lonnie would play forward and never get the ball enough, and when he did it get it, he'd never have anyone with him to provide support or a passing option. He would then get yelled at if he ever made a mistake since he was labeled as a purely individualist and attacking player.

[2] I was positionally stacked during the one season I played at a lower level "select" or travel soccer team. I was the only Black player on the team and was placed at forward because I was one of the faster players on the team. This was despite the fact that I played central midfield or defense most of my life. I do not consider myself that fast of a player.

reasons. First, soccer has become a defining presence in my life ever since I began watching the World Cup in 1998. The spectacle of its global popularity, and incredible on field performances, atmosphere in the crowds were spellbinding. That hook included fun ways to learn about geography, nations, and thin introductions to culture and politics. From civil war in Serbia; multiculturalism debates surrounding the French national team; working class politics in Argentina through historic clubs like Boca Juniors; anti-fascist clubs in Germany, to the dangerous and desperate migration of young West and Central African male soccer players to Europe: twenty years later I still use the sport as an entry point to learn about cultures and politics across different global contexts.

The actual physical playing of the game remains deeply enjoyable and is as important for my continued obsession with soccer. I continue to try and play the game every week and I've been able to play in soccer environments that continue to provide much emotional, physical, and social satisfaction and joy. After leaving high school, I was able to return to playing in soccer environments that existed outside of the dominant youth soccer structure. I played in informal intramural spaces at Howard University with players from across the Black diaspora. When I returned home to Seattle for summers, I played with immigrants from Cameroon in a tournament called the all-nations cup. This was a tournament where thirty plus national and ethnic communities celebrated culture and soccer for two weekends during the summer. Each time I played with the group of Cameroonians and matched up against various immigrant communities within the Seattle area (Ex: Vietnamese, Oromo, Argentina, Bosnia, Russia, Brazil, Mexico, Palestine) I became more aware of how different nationalities and cultures engage with the sport, both on and off on the field, got an interpersonal window as to how various immigrant

social communities form within U.S. cities are, and I increasingly realized that the dominant suburban, white middle image of the sport within U.S. was not nearly as pervasive as portrayed in US culture. In short, the multicultural potential of the sport became a lot more real.

Today, I continue to seek out such diverse and multicultural soccer environments. In Minnesota, I play in Latino leagues, play pick up with Somali-American men at the park and organize a year-round men's league team with players with familial roots in Nepal, India, Colombia, Russia, Mexico, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and faraway lands like Utah. Beyond social interaction with people from various ethnic, racial, national backgrounds, my soccer participation is also linked to struggles against larger forms of oppression and marginalization. In the Twin Cities I am an active participant in a radical community collective that uses soccer to challenge imperialism, hegemonic masculinity, and heteronormativity, ableism, and racism; both within the sport and beyond. In this space, not keeping score, actively encouraging LGTBQ people to play, intergenerational play, and inclusion of all skill level are implemented as ways to culturally disrupt the ways in which soccer can reproduce hierarchy and exclusion. This collective has been crucial in helping me see soccer not just as a place for multicultural social interaction that often reflects heteronormative masculinity and gender binaries. But also, a site where one can challenge and disrupt dominant social relations and ways of being.

These social dimensions of the sport continue to captivate and fulfill me at a personal level and serves as a connecting link to different communities, politics, and ways of social life. These experiences remain important to me, both personally and in terms of sociological curiosity because they do not reflect the ways in which whiteness

and racism significantly shaped my experiences with organized soccer when I was an impressionable teenager. This relational dynamic coupled with the constant relevance of the sport is likely the reason why I continue to care so much about the game and spend hours thinking about the relationship between soccer and society.

Where Does the Research Come into Play?

Given my experiences with soccer, and its role in helping develop my sociological mind and curiosity, I knew that I had a general topic of interest as I considered applying to graduate school. Motivation for this project became obvious to me as I watched the 2010 World Cup on my laptop during an undergraduate summer research program. The US Men's national team (USMNT) had just been knocked out of the tournament by Ghana and four pundits (all men), gathered around the table and began diagnosing what was wrong with men's soccer in the United States. As the segment continued Jurgen Klinsmann, who would later become the head coach and technical director of the USMNT, gave the following diagnosis about the lack of international success and glory US men's soccer.

> "How do you develop the players? It is very difficult within the American culture to talk about that topic because you are the only country in the world that has the pyramid upside down. You paid for having your kid play soccer because your goal is not that your kid becomes a professional soccer player, but because your goal is that the kid gets a scholarship in high school or college, which is completely opposite from the rest of the world. It is a tough one because soccer is very similar to basketball, you need {players} out of the lower-class environment and soccer worldwide is a lower-class environment sport…. I compare it to basketball because when you look at all of these guys they are coming from the inner cities. So, we need to find ways to connect with Hispanics and everybody in the soccer environment in the U.S. and get the kids that are really hungry and get the kids on a technical level that are able to perform [at a world class and professional level]."[3]

[3] The Future of US Soccer http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07O6qsZT7lc June 27th, 2010

Klinsmann's rich statement and critique of U.S. soccer is fascinating because a person with considerable power and visibility discussed intersections between race, ethnicity, and class, and elite sporting success in very open terms. In front of a national audience race and class were named without code words, and the idea of soccer as a sport just for upper class, suburban, and white families was critiqued. Here, sport, or in this case soccer, was a rare, yet reasonable and highly visible social arena where one could critique the dominance of class and racial privilege and homogeneity. Yet, as Klinsmann's analysis of U.S. men's soccer culture reflects a popular narrative of sports stars usually coming from humble beginnings, he is also reproducing particular class and racial logics about sports being a "natural" match for people of color and working-class kids. His diagnosis reinforces the idea that there is a pool of poor, yet talented players that need to be pulled into the sporting system. His critique does not link to how soccer and other extracurricular activities in the U.S. are becoming increasingly privatized and more dependent on family resources but advises better top-end recruiting and relying on the desperation or "hunger" of future poor to working class players to boost the professional side of the game.

Given that soccer is fairly new and not dominant in the United States sporting context, and operates very differently than Europe and Latin America, it provides a vibrant sociological arena to observe how social dynamics play out and unfold in the making of a sporting environment. Soccer, and sport at large, is a place where discourses of race and class can appear with more ease, comfort, and transparency. This unique relationship between sports and race, coupled with the particular social and cultural history of soccer in the U.S. is one of the driving motivations for this research. What is it

about sports that facilitates more blunt and looser talk about race and class? Additionally, as U.S. soccer culture grapples and spends a great amount of attention to becoming a better soccer nation, gender is often not stated, but significantly important. There is less hand wringing about and attention towards women's soccer at a national and elite level due to their success, but girls and women are crucial to the sport's history and existence at all levels of the game. As I continue to interact with soccer culture in the U.S., the places where gender informs discourses, practices, and understandings becomes more relevant.

In addition to my motivations to further explore how larger social categories of race, class, and gender are understood and operate within U.S. soccer, the attempts to change the institution and culture of such a prominent youth sport is very interesting sociologically. Klinsmann's criticisms of U.S. elite youth, collegiate, professional soccer, and broader U.S. sporting norms surrounding youth development have been recognized and even somewhat addressed at an institutional level by U.S. soccer. There is much more discourse and resource allocation towards producing better American soccer talent. This includes both in terms of sporting development, but also issues of class, racial, ethnic, and immigrant inclusion.

In response to international competition, the United States Soccer Federation created soccer legislation that enforces youth soccer players associated with MLS and other developmental academies to commit to a yearly 10-month soccer schedule (Borden 2012). Youth players under this structure are not allowed to play for their high school team and the 10-month schedule is indicative of the players, families, and franchises commitment (Laroue 2012). Currently there are boys' and girls' development academy

clubs in the United States and all 24 of the MLS clubs- 21 of which are located in the United States- are running youth academies for boys. As of 2019, there are 197 USSDA sanctioned clubs located across the country that have teams who compete at the U12, U13, U14, U15, U16, U16/17, and U18/19 age groups (US Soccer 2019).

There are a substantial amount of youth players and families interacting within a new youth sport structure that, based on public discourse, emphasizes professional development and discovering/nurturing soccer talent for the purposes of improving their professional product rather than the connection between sports, education, and social development. Players, parents, and coaches are now constantly involved in a soccer philosophy and structure that counters common sport and youth discourse and practice. There are thousands of young players and families who participate in new soccer development clubs or, at least, are aware of this emerging system. But we rarely hear or know much about how they navigate, understand, and exert their own agency in these competitive sport environments, or simply what their lives are like. As the institutional set up and cultural logics of soccer are becoming more contested and potentially transformed around elite success, I find it crucial to explore and understand what this looks like in everyday social life because of its links to parenting, youth, and sporting culture. My dissertation research attempts to paint that picture.

The Importance of the Sociology of Sport

The reasons for sociologically investigating soccer reflect the motivations for why sociologists and scholars from other disciplines have spent substantial time interrogating a wide range of subjects that exist within the social institution of sport. Organized

sport(s) continue to be globally popular, hold economic weight, and contain political significance. Currently, sport (and youth sport) is increasingly lucrative, intensely competitive, and an industry in of itself (Coakley 2017; Hyman 2012; Rowe 2016). The relationship between sport and society offers a multitude of topics for scholars to interrogate: governance of sport organizations; state and private funding of sport; sport's environmental impact and contribution to urban inequality; the effect of professionalization and commercialization on sport and its communities; sport's relationship to social classification and hierarchy, notably class, race/ethnicity, sex/gender and sexuality; the exploitation of sport by gambling; the exploitation by sport of vulnerable people, including aspirant and actual sports workers; hyper-competitiveness in sport; and sport's role in the making and unmaking of cultural citizens (Rowe 2016). Soccer, the most played and consumed sport in the world, is reason enough to warrant serious sociological consideration and investigation. Soccer is the most visible example of the social power, presence, and pervasiveness of sport in society.

Beyond the cultural presence and social power of sport, sport is a unique social institution and site that can provide new insights into the complexities of social life. Sport itself is an arena of patterned behaviors, social structures, and interinstitutional relationships (Frei & Eitzen 1991). It is a place where to research crystallized forms of social structure, structured conflict, and competitiveness exist seemingly controlled setting, something that is rarely found in other aspects of social life (Frei & Eitzen 1991; Luschen 1990). One crucial reason for why sport is a compelling social institution to interrogate larger sociological topics is because of its unique social and cultural characteristics. Sport holds much mystique, nostalgia, and cultural fixation, that is rarely

matched in other social institutions. Yet, coupled with the cultural mystique and power of sport, it is very much defined by paradox and built on its contradictions (Eitzen 2012; Hartmann 2003). Sport is a social form that is serious and not serious, trivial and insignificant, yet also weighty and deeply meaningful; this paradox how sports derives significant cultural power (Hartmann 2003). Sport is a fantasy that offers a diversion from the realities of work, relationships, and it entertains. Yet, we take it so seriously because it mirrors the human experience and elaborates in its rituals on what it means to be human, through play, risk, trials, collective impulse, strategy, physicality, strategy, and uncertainty (Eitzen 2012).

Clifford Geertz, an American anthropologist, labeled this paradox and social phenomenon as 'deep play' in his analysis of Balinese cockfighting (1973). 'Deep play' is defined as "play in which the stakes are so high that it is irrational for men to engage in it at all" (Geertz 1973: 432). One can understand 'deep play' as a sociological phenomenon that reflects very real and important facts about the social world. Interrogating the contradictions of 'deep play' and sport can exist at a variety of social levels. This can include cultural ideals about fairness and proper play coupled with cheating, greed, and contempt for opponents; healthy bodily activity existing simultaneously with bodily related injuries, performance enhancing drug abuse, and extreme dieting; and ideals of youth sport, fun and play constantly being in tension with hyper-competition and adult direction. It is very rare to identify another social activity and institution that paradoxically combines playfulness with intensity, and ideology with structure (Frei & Eitzen 1991). These paradoxical features of sport make it a very useful

site to study broader sociological topics/areas such as, group dynamics, culture, social bonding, subcultures, socialization, organizational networks, and structured inequality.

Overall, sport can be an excellent microcosm of society and in turn useful for better understanding of larger sociological phenomenon that is prevalent in other social environments. I find this approach to be useful and sport provides a dynamic social space to dive deeper into my sociological interests in topics of race, gender, families, and socialization.[4] Yet, as scholars of sport argue, it is crucial to grapple with the unique social-cultural features of sport and sport's relative autonomous dynamics and histories (Carrington 2013; Hartmann 2003; Frei & Eitzen 1991). Sport is a semi-autonomous social institution or social field and it is distinctive in how it operates and intersects with other dimensions of society (Bourdieu 1991). We cannot understand sport without placing it its proper socio-historical context.

CLR James (1993[1963]) *Beyond a Boundary* is a foundational text for the critical sociology of sport and demonstrates the importance of taking sport seriously as a distinctive and at times atypical social formation. In his analysis and reflections about Cricket in the West Indies and its relationship to anti-colonial movements, James makes it clear that sport is a profoundly contested and political space where actions are imbued with deep social significance (Carrington 2013; James 1963). Aesthetics and politics are embodied in the stylized performance and playing of cricket (and sport at large). To have a substantial and complete understanding of a society's culture or politics, it is necessary to have a critical analysis of the one cultural form that moves the general population in

[4] Some argue that sociologists and sociology can attempt to save sport from itself because it can puncture sport's most problematic mystifications and offenses (Rowe 2016).

body and mind (Carrington 2014; James 1993[1963]). What makes *Beyond a Boundary* so important is that it centers questions of power within the particular and unique cultural features of sport. Using Gramsci's conception of hegemony Hall (1981) argues that cultural content and forms (marginalized and dominant) are not fixed, but an ongoing process of dynamic tensions, struggle and constant movement and interchange given shifting power relations. This approach requires that analysis has to be relational and be comfortable with unstable balances in different social arenas, which tend to be favorable or unfavorable in certain directions. Hall applies a similar theoretical paradigm to understanding categories of race and ethnicity and a Gramscian and relational paradigm of sport is necessary for a critical sociological engagement with intersections between sport, social categories of race, class, gender, and culture.

Amongst current scholars, the analytical concept of contested terrain has become a useful and common framework for conducting research about sport. Following the work of Stuart Hall and CLR James, Hartmann argues that sport is a 'contested terrain' within the arena of race because it is "not just a place or variable whereby racial interests and meanings are inhibited or advanced, but rather a site where racial formations are constantly and very publicly contested over (Hartmann 2000: 241)." With regards to race, Hartmann advocates that scholars should understand sport as a social space where racial images, ideologies, inequalities are prominently constructed, transformed, and struggled over (Hartmann 2000). Sport is a social arena where racial dynamics are positive and negative, progressive and conservative, and defined by the possibility for agency and resistance, and conversely constraint (2000). This theory of sport and race can encompass symbolic functions of sport and on-the-ground practices. Further than being

just applicable to race, understanding sport as a contested terrain has been applied by gender scholars. Similar to race, sport is also a contested terrain where gender is constructed in complex and contradictory ways (Messner 2009). And specifically, it is often a locus of tension between change and continuity with regards to larger gender relations (Messner 2009).

In my sociological investigation into the world of youth soccer I apply this theoretical conception of sport to not only gender and race, but also to cultural ideas of families, youth development, and practices of sport. Throughout my dissertation I understand the relationship between sport and social categories and institutions of race, gender, families, and culture from the critical paradigm. The critical paradigm understands sport as a socio-cultural institution embedded in Western capitalist societies, which are defined in relation to colonial empire and exploitation. It centers questions of discrimination, exploitation, and inequality and looks closely at the ideological dimensions and effects of racism and other oppressive ideologies (Carrington 2013).[5] Such forms of exploitation are expressed through sport, and sport can play a pivotal role in such popular cultural expression. Importantly, in order to theorize sport as a social site of contestation and creative human freedom, analysis of sport from the critical paradigm recognizes and takes seriously the agency of actors (players, fans, coaches,

[5] The critical paradigm exists in contrast to two perspectives, the orthodox Marxist approach and the functionalist-evolutionary approach. The orthodox Marxist approach offers little analysis of sport and race, sexuality, or gender, except to diminish its revolutionary potential and spirit of the working classes. In stark contrast is the evolutionary perspective, which views sport as separate from society, and claims that issues of social inequality and larger politics do not mix with sport. There is little theorization about power and from this viewpoint sport is perceived as an unequivocal meritocracy with its own logic of fair play (Carrington 2013). Carrington (2013) also acknowledges that the critical approach is the result or synthesis of the dialectic between the "pro-sport" functionalist evolutionary paradigm and "anti-sport" orthodox Marxist perspective.

administrators). I aim to build and contribute to this tradition of critical orientation towards sport throughout this dissertation.[6]

Returning to soccer in the U.S. and Jurgen Klinsmann's diagnosis of its national sporting culture (page 9), I see soccer a phenomenon where larger issues such as race, class, and gender get articulated; but it's at the same time a space where other social institutions and norms filter through (e.g. families, youth development, meritocracy, elite performance). Following the path paved by scholars within the field of sociology of sport and cultural studies, I see soccer as a contested cultural terrain and an important site of where social inequalities, categories, and discourses are constructed, reproduced, challenged, and at times transformed. Soccer is a contested terrain with its own contours, histories, and particularities that is not only a microcosm of the racial, gendered, and class structure of youth Sports in the US, but also a useful lens to better understand the dynamics of race and racism, gender and sexism, and class outside of sport. Soccer on its own is a social force, a force that can tell us a great deal about society and culture.

> *The important thing about football [soccer]--is that is not just about soccer*. - Terry Pratchett (2009)

Motivating Questions, Areas of Contribution, and a Road-Map of What is to Come

My dissertation is guided by the following general research questions. In each chapter I will provide a few more specific questions to provide more depth and grounding.

[6] These paradigms of thought about sport and society are not exclusive. They can blend into one another and have a relational quality (Carrington 2013). My tendencies of analysis of sport generally fall under the critical paradigm, but I can have moments of analysis that reflect the orthodox Marxist approach or the functionalist perspective.

1) What is the relationship between parenting culture/logics and various practices and social spaces of youth soccer? Are different orientations and ideals of families and youth development on display and contested through different cultural practices of sport?
2) What is the relationship between youth soccer and the construction of community, local culture(s), and group identity? How do these particular local cultures of the sport connect to larger social structures and discourses?
3) How is the field of youth soccer raced, classed, and gendered?
4) How are images, categories, identities, systems, and discourses of race, class, and gender contested over within the social field of youth soccer?
5) Does soccer itself hold a particular semi-independent social power? And if so, how and why?

The Social Field of Soccer, Idiocultures, Families, and Community

In the first section of the dissertation, I provide a broad overview of youth soccer culture in the United States. I use the Twin Cities as an emergent case study to detail the varied cultural practices of different youth soccer communities that exist within this sporting landscape and thus push beyond a binary analytical framework that has generally been applied to this social arena. In chapter 1, I present a methodological narrative to demonstrate how I identify and summarize seven distinct, but interrelated spaces of youth soccer that when coalesced make up a multi-dimensional social field. I utilize field theory (see Bourdieu 1985; Dyck 2012; Martin 2003) and an emergent-case study research process and analytic logic (Hartmann 2016) to make sense of prominent and varied cultural dimensions that organize the social field. Through this process I argue that there

is substantive relationality throughout the field of youth soccer. Such relationality is tied to how larger systems of economic stratification, broader social categories and identities, and organizational funding structures, but also to the ways people, who occupy different social positions, interpret and practice the sport in everyday life. I model this chapter off of scholars who analyze class, race, gender, community cultures, and larger relational cultural fields through sport (Dyck 2012; Grasmuck 2005: Fine 1987; Thangaraj 2015; Yep 2009).

In chapter 2 and 3, I go into more detail about the key cultural and social dimensions of variation that relationally exist throughout the field of youth soccer and focus on the four different soccer idiocultures that I spent substantive time immersed in. I analyze the particular idiocultures of youth soccer as a way to provide sociological insights into the relationship among families, culture, group identity construction, and meanings of community and youth development (both sporting and social). Idiocultures are groups that have their own lore, shared systems of knowledge, beliefs, and customs to which they can refer to and use as a basis of social interaction (Fine 1987). I use the concept of idiocultures because of its descriptive utility and because it provides an entry point to document the relational field of youth soccer along particular social themes. I argue that different soccer organizations draw boundaries and construct a particular group identity in relation to their perceptions of and experiences with how other youth soccer idiocultures operate.

In chapter 2, I focus on Elite Youth Soccer, a newly emerging social soccer space, that is defined by pseudo-professionalism and developing top-end soccer talent. At an elite developmental soccer club, Fusion Lake Academy, themes of high-end sporting

development, hyper-competition, and professionalism are prominent. The second idioculture that I identify is Lions FC, a club that exists within the organized travel club soccer space. For Lions FC, themes of technical development, tradition, community, and commitment are central. In relation to other soccer clubs, this particular club draws boundaries of belonging along lines of being a more socially healthy club that holds the right sporting and social values.

In chapter 3, I discuss is interscholastic soccer, and in particular one high school program, that I call Archer High School, which does not reflect the social demographics of the previous two idiocultures, specifically along dimensions of race, class, and immigrant status. Interscholastic soccer is more affordable due to schools subsidizing costs to play and thus has high rates of participation. This space of soccer also provides opportunities for youth from different social backgrounds from across the metro area to interact on the field; both within school teams and between school teams. In this environment of soccer, themes of community, positive youth sports development are prominent and situated within a school that is marginalized and at times stigmatized along the lines of race, class, and immigrant status.

In this chapter I also discuss Kick It, a non-profit soccer organization that exists within hybrid/alternative youth soccer. Kick It operates under the philosophy that for young people to excel at soccer and maintain a lifelong love of the game, they need to play early and often with little structure and most importantly, have fun. They construct their identity in opposition to dominant cultural practices of youth sport and youth soccer culture, both in terms of their style of play and coaching. Yet, this hybrid/alternative

soccer environment has similar themes and tensions with competition and intensive family involvement.

For each idioculture of youth soccer, I describe the roles and presence of parents, and discuss families and coaches' motivations for participation and couple it with ethnographic fieldnotes describing the ways these communities "do" soccer. In this section I build on scholarship about parenting culture, extracurricular activities, and its connections to class reproduction, cultural ideals of competition, and youth development (Lareau 2011, Levey-Friedman 2014). For the soccer communities that I was fortunate enough to spend time with, soccer culturally mattered in varied, similar, and relational ways. For players, families, and parents across the social field, discourses and understandings of youth development, sporting development, community, and family are prominent. Participants are very much aware of other idiocultures of soccer and construct their own sense of group identity in relation to these social dynamics and perceptions. From this I argue that youth soccer idiocultures provide a critical link in sociological understanding between local worlds and a larger social field of youth soccer and social order.

Gender and Youth Soccer

In chapter 4, I aim to make further contributions to sociological knowledge about how gender is performed, constructed, and contested in culture. Sport is a very fruitful and one of the most significant cultural practices with regards to the social construction of gender (Dunning 2008 [1986]; Theberge 1990; Messner 2009; Musto 2014). Soccer in the United States provides a great window into how social meanings of gender play out. At the youth level the game has extremely high rates of participation and has become an

accepted, normal, and popular sport for middle-class girls to play (Henry & Comeaux 1999; Lopez 1997). Historians of the sport have noted that the popularity of the women's national team, and the existence of more co-gendered play in soccer at younger ages and adulthood, does not match the gendered practices of the sport in other national contexts (Markowitz & Hellerman 2006). Thus, soccer holds a more gender egalitarian reputation that exists beyond of the institutional "center "of sport that often affirms hegemonic masculinity.

I investigate whether or not soccer lives up to this gendered reputation through focusing on hybrid/alternative soccer. I explore how youth soccer is a site where gender "plays out" and pay attention to how masculinity is reproduced in the performance of soccer, both within boys only spaces, and more co-gendered environments. Co-gendered spaces of youth soccer allow for an exploration into how individuals draw and affirm group boundaries between genders (Thorne 1993; Morgan and Martin 2006; Ridgeway 2009). These spaces of soccer provide a window into how sport is a gendered contested terrain, in which gender is constructed in complex and contradictory ways; and importantly, a locus of tension between change and continuity and gender relations (Messner 2009). I observe that gender practices within sport are invoked and structured through constant processes of performance, managing, policing, and disciplining (Thangaraj 2015). Similar, to what Thangaraj observes amongst South East Asian American men, I also observe how masculinity in youth soccer is always in process and becoming, and constantly performed to give it substance (Thangaraj 2015; Hall 2003; Butler 1993).

Related to how players and coaches perform gender within youth soccer environments, I analyze how coaches, parents, and players discuss differences and similarities between the ways boys and girls play the sport. These interviews highlight the ways in which youth sport can facilitate the production of a soft essentialism of gender (Messner 2009), especially for men. Meaning, that people (especially men) often tap into culturally hegemonic scripts of gender difference to talk through the culture of soccer, coaching, and how girls and boys interact within the sport. I also center the experiences of women in the field of youth soccer in this chapter. Here, I analyze how players and coaches understand gender in relation to the sport through their own experiences. Both in interviews and everyday interaction, women and girls often note the lack of respect and attention they receive as athletes, and the challenges of playing in co-ed environments and unstructured pick up soccer because boys are constantly at the center of sport.

Race and Youth Soccer

The final two chapters are centered on how race is deeply influential and consequential across the field of youth soccer. In these chapters my analysis will be in conversation with scholars from different fields who engage with critical race theory, and general sociological theories of race in the United States. Racism is engrained in the fabric and system of American society and I examine how it weaves into the intersection of sport, families and youth. Building off of the giant shoulders of W.E.B. Du Bois, who set the foundation for academic understanding of race as a social construction by rigorously demonstrating that the concept of race is a product of power, oppression, and resistance, rather than biological inheritance, I aim to contribute scholarship that

theorizes and empirically demonstrates the social construction of race (Du Bois 1899 & 1940; Olson 2005).

In a more contemporary sense, I draw from Omi and Winant's (2015) racial formation theory to interrogate the interplay between race, soccer, and everyday life. Racial formation theory approaches the creation, maintenance, and contestation of racial categories, racial boundaries, and racial meanings from a constructivist perspective. It is a "socio-historical process by which racial categories are created inhabited, transformed, and destroyed" (Omi & Winant 1994:55). The process of racial formation links social structure and cultural representation, and sport itself is a racial formation. This connection and process is made possible by "racial projects", which is simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial dynamics, and an effort to reorganize and redistribute resources along racial lines (Omi and Winant 1994: 56). Racial projects can take many different social forms and their statements on race can vary widely. I view soccer in the United States as a particular racial project that connects what race means in a particular discursive practice(s) and the ways in which every day social interactions and social structures are racially organized based upon that meaning.

I also draw inspiration from Karen Fields and Barbara Fields *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* in analyzing the way racecraft, defined as the "the mental terrain and pervasive belief in the ideology of race" (2014, p. 18), is navigated, traversed, imagined and made by human action. Ideology, including racial ideology, is best understood as "the descriptive vocabulary of day-to-day existence through which people make rough sense of the social reality that they live and create from day to day" (Fields & Fields 2014, p. 135). It must be constantly created and verified through social and daily

life. Through my ethnographic observations and interviewing, I demonstrate the persistence of racial ideology and build upon the idea that the existence of racecraft happens collectively, individually, historically, and in mundane routine (Fields & Fields 2014). Through the analytical prism of racecraft, I demonstrate the ways in which racism has been on the scene of social spaces that are often popularly constructed as race-neutral or less racially serious.

Youth soccer is a social space where racecraft operates and reflects the pervasiveness of racial ideology in American life. In chapter 5, I apply and critically interrogate Elijah Anderson's (2011) concept of the cosmopolitan canopy because many spaces of youth soccer have substantive racial and ethnic diversity and serve as gathering places for people from all over the metro area. Moreover, many players, parents, and coaches value the multicultural and multiracial soccer spaces that they interact in. The combination of cosmopolitan/diverse spaces of social of interaction in everyday life and the attitudes of participants help produce soccer's racialized culture and image, which on the surface is defined by idealized liberal discourses of diversity.[7]

In the next chapter, I critically analyze soccer's cosmopolitan reputation and I show the fragility, yet stability of such cosmopolitan social and sporting environments. I share my own observations and highlight experiences of players and parents of color who suffer from overt-racist aggressions that occur in diverse and cosmopolitan soccer environments. These overt racist aggressions rupture cosmopolitan canopies and happy

[7] Happy talk about diversity is often linked to other contemporary racial discourses such as colorblindness. These racial discourses often paint a false picture of meritocracy and minimize power, privilege, and the existence of systemic racism (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Berry 2015; Burke 2012; Bell & Hartmann 2007).

diversity discourse that is a key part of soccer's racialized culture. But crucially, these racist incidents are rarely grappled with by soccer organizations or lead to any sort of resolution or change. Moreover, I document the strong and lingering presence of biological racism and essentialized racial thinking in seemingly liberal and diverse social environments (Melamed 2011; Rosaldo 1994). Such thought is always hovering in the institution of sport. Here, I argue that soccer serves as a unique and influential social force in facilitating overt biologically racist thought that can be articulated simultaneously with ideals of inclusion, diversity, and cosmopolitanism. The fact that cosmopolitan canopies of soccer can exist and continue with such racial ruptures reflects the persistence of racecraft, and the power of liberal racial ideology and sport in containing/managing racism and its limitations of disrupting and dismantling racist social structures and racial ideology.

Now that I've given my personal motivations and a roadmap for where I am going and covering with this dissertation, it is time to convey in more detail how I immersed myself within the field of youth soccer and particular idiocultures of the sport. The next chapter will detail my methodological approach and how I identify and categorize different youth soccer cultures.

Chapter 1: Getting into and Constructing the Field of Youth Soccer

"Soccer is an inner-city sport in most of the world but seen as a suburban preserve in the US."

-Les Carpenter (2016), Journalist

"It continues to be seen as a white, suburban sport."

-Brianna Scurry, Black-American, former US Women's National Team Goalkeeper[8]

I don't think we have enough people in the federation who understand Hispanic or African-American communities to have conversations with them and make them feel like they're part of the American soccer community."[9]

-Hugo Perez, Salvadorian-American former US Men's National Team Player, and Youth National Team Coach

Soccer in the United States is popularly known and now more regularly critiqued by soccer pundits, former professional players, journalists, and academics for its segregated and exclusionary dimensions. On one end of the binary, soccer is intimately tied to suburbanization, upper-middle-class lifestyle, consumer-oriented individualism, and whiteness (Andrews 2006; Narcotta-Welp 2015).[10] In stark contrast to the suburban, white, and upper-middle class space of soccer, the other most documented soccer

[8] From Carpenter (2016). 'It's only working for the white kids': American soccer's diversity problem. The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/football/blog/2016/jun/01/us-soccer-diversity-problem-world-football

[9] From (McCauley 2018) "The 'old boys club': How U.S. Soccer ignores talented players from underserved communities" SB Nation. https://www.sbnation.com/soccer/2018/1/17/16893094/jonathan-gonzalez-us-soccer-national-team-hispanic-player-development-sueno-alianza

[10] Title IX is a federal civil rights law that was passed in 1972. It prohibits anyone in the US to be excluded from participation in, denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal funding (Durfur & Linford, 2010). Since the passage of Title IX, there has been a dramatic increase in girl's and women's participation in sport both at the high school and collegiate level (Durfur & Linford, 2010).

environment is defined by ethnicity, immigrant status, heteronormative masculinity, and urbanism (Markowitz & Hellerman 2006; Martinez 2008). There have been and continue to be active and rich ethnic and immigrant spaces of soccer across the country (Van Rheenen 2009; Kazuba 2015). The existence of these two distinct soccer worlds is crucial to the formation of a common popular understanding of US soccer's social and cultural dimensions and provides a powerful sporting and cultural narrative to explain the lack of cultural saliency and professional success of soccer in the United States (Martinez 2008).[11]

This paradigm of understanding is accurate in many ways and captures the broader economic, racial, and cultural context of soccer. When I first began to imagine and design this project, I shared this binary perception of U.S. soccer culture. This paradigm coupled with the more public discourse about making US soccer (specifically men's soccer) more professional, elite, and less upper middle class and white shaped my decision making and initial entry into the field. But as I learned after a few months, such a binary conception of US soccer culture flattens this social arena/field and does not capture the varied and interrelated landscape of soccer in the US and fails to account for social implications beyond elite level soccer performance and racial and ethnic representation at the elite levels of the sport.

This chapter is both a broad overview of the social field or landscape of youth soccer in the Twin Cities and a methodological narrative of my multi-site ethnographic immersion and interviewing process. First, I summarize the US youth soccer system and

[11] Concern or puzzlement with the lack of international success for the men's national team is common. The US women avoid such discussions because of international success, but women of color have articulated the lack of racial and ethnic representation on the women's national team.

provide some contextual background about the Twin Cities and its usefulness as a case to understand youth soccer culture. Second, I identify and summarize seven distinct, but interrelated spaces of youth soccer that when coalesced make up a social field. I utilize field theory (see Bourdieu 1985; Dyck 2012; Martin 2003) and an emergent-case study research process and analytic logic (Hartmann 2016), to make sense of these varied, mutually significant, and interdependent soccer spaces in terms of their respective social significance and patterns of motivations and actions. Third, I go into more detail about each of these seven soccer spaces; how I came to identify them, key elements of variation; specific details about sites that represent such spaces of soccer, and the form of fieldwork and data collection. After mapping the social field of youth soccer, I discuss the utility of multi-sited and relational ethnography and how my project is linked to other ethnographic studies of sporting culture. I conclude this chapter with a discussion about how my research process and construction of the field of youth soccer pushes beyond the binary framework generally applied to soccer culture in the United States.

The US Youth Soccer System

Organized youth soccer in America is a complex and somewhat byzantine system (Eckstein 2017). For boys and girls, there are a number of competing organizations that coordinate leagues for youth participation. Most organizations are affiliated with US soccer and there are over four million players registered in the US soccer system. Nationally, over three million kids ages, 5-19 are registered with US youth soccer, which has a range of competition levels within affiliated organizations. The most competitive/elite level is the USSDA (US Soccer Association Development Academies),

which include professional 25 major league soccer teams that are based in the United States. Within US youth soccer there are competitive leagues/organizations such as the National Premier League, Olympic Development Program, and Championship Series (Eckstein 2017). State and regional soccer organizations are organized competitive leagues that exist directly below national circuits. AYSO (American Youth Soccer Association), is an affiliated organization that is more focused on recreational participation and has 630,000 registered participants.[12]

While US Youth Soccer has organizations that provide recreational and highly competitive youth soccer options, US Club Soccer, another competing organization affiliated with the US soccer federation, is more focused on developing elite players and is not interested in recreational participation (Eckstein 2017). Under the banner of US Club Soccer, there are three organizations that organize competitive leagues for teams from across the country. One of these organizations is the Elite Clubs National League (ECNL), which is focused solely on developing elite women soccer players.[13]

Soccer in Minneapolis and St. Paul (The Twin Cities)

My ethnography of youth soccer in the US takes place within this overarching structure. I observed multiple teams which are registered with and operate under the banner of US Youth Soccer. This includes a team that plays in the academy system (USSDA) and teams that are registered with the Minnesota Youth Soccer Organization[14].

[12] Players can play for teams in multiple organizations if they choose. For example, a player can play for a club in their state organization but also participate in the Olympic Development Program.
[13] The other two leagues are the National Premier League, and Premier League (regionally organized leagues) (Eckstein 2017 & US Club Soccer 2018)
[14] There are currently over 60,000 players registered with the Minnesota Youth Soccer Organization (MYSA 2019).

But my research is not limited to soccer environments sanctioned by the US soccer federation and other dominant organizing bodies. There are hundreds of thousands of youth soccer players who are not officially registered with US soccer. Often these players play in independent or informal leagues, which are often self-organized amongst immigrant communities. Some of these players participate in interscholastic soccer, which is organized by state high school athletic leagues, which have their own rules and regulations. Immigrant soccer and inter-scholastic soccer do not fall under the umbrella of official US youth soccer organizations but are prominent in the overall soccer culture in the US.

Minneapolis and St. Paul serve as a useful case to make sense of US youth soccer culture because the sport is popular and different environments of youth soccer are represented within the metro area. Within the Twin Cities, there is a professional men's soccer team, youth teams that compete in national competitions, a vibrant state soccer organization, a popular inter-scholastic soccer system, City organized recreational leagues and multiple immigrant soccer communities. In terms of broader social dynamics that intertwine with US soccer culture, the Twin Cities is a major and growing US metropolitan area that is becoming increasingly racially and ethnically diverse due to refugee migration and a fast-growing Latinx population (Brower & Egbert 2015). At the same time, similar to other US cities, the Twin Cities has significant issues pertaining to racial segregation and racial/ethnic inequality (Orfield & Stancil 2015).

Youth Soccer as a Social Field and an Emergent Case Study

I conceptualize youth soccer as a social field because field theory provides an analytic framework well suited to explain dynamics of social endeavors, including that of youth sport (Dyck 2012). Field theorists aim to explain emerging regularities in the actions of participants in a social arena by taking account of their relative positioning within a recognized sector of common interest or social practice (Dyck 2012). A social field begins to align "when units interact in such a way that they develop a mutual influence" (Martin 2003, 26). Particular sports can be considered self-contained social fields because they possess their own themes and problems (Bourdieu 1984). Each social field possesses a coherence based on a working consensus as to the general rules and norms of a social space (Martin 2003). Coherence within a social field is always dynamic and changing because each field is "a site of more or less overt struggle over the definition of legitimate principles of the division of the field (Bourdieu 1985, 734). Within youth soccer, like other social fields, there are stakes about what kind of soccer is being played and taught, what kinds of people are playing the sport, and what norms will be central or even dominate in the future.

I consider youth soccer to be a crowded social field and participants and units (sites of the sport) move to occupy different locations (Martin 2003). Not all social action of participants within the field of youth soccer can be attributed to a 'field effect', but still must be demonstrated through observable effects and inquiries about the activities, interests, and perspectives of participants in the field (Dyck 2012; Martin 2003). Just as Dyck (2012) approaches community sports in Canada as a social field, I do the same for youth soccer in order to take account of the relative social positioning

and influences of diverse individuals, groups, and organizations that participate in a range of youth soccer activities. In the case of the Twin Cities, there are a range of youth, coaches, and families participating, a range of sporting organizations and personnel, and a range of roles that shape individuals' behavior within this field.

I did not begin this project with a research design that conceived of youth soccer as a social field, nor did I decide to operate from a field theory perspective before attending and observing matches. Rather, my project organically emerged over time, was relatively open-ended, and question driven, which matches Howard Becker's (1998) advice for social scientists approaching research. This project reflects many of the meta-methodological points and methodological narrative described by Hartmann (2016) with regards to his mixed-methods and long-term investigation into race, sport, crime, risk, and social intervention through midnight basketball programs. Similar to midnight basketball (Hartmann 2016), my project "grew out of an intensive, multifaceted, and long-term engagement with a particular empirical object or case" (215).

For my project, youth soccer is an emergent case study because the sites of inquiry and data collection, exact questions, set of social facts, general ideas and conclusions grew over an extended period of time. There is a methodological narrative that hovers over this project as during this multi-year period, I followed new leads and decided to enter different cultures of youth soccer (sites), I teased out themes and patterns of social interaction that I did not prepare for (community and gender), and I then re-worked my overall analysis based on these shifts, but still contributed to larger sociological questions pertaining to race, families, culture, and social reproduction. As Hartmann (2016) argues, an emergent case study is not a haphazard guiding analytic

logic. My research process is iterative and framed by literatures, scholarly thought, research techniques. Moreover, this form iterative analytic logic demands an understanding of the relationship between case and context, general and particular, and theory and practice, which has been written about by a variety of scholars who implement similar methods (Alford 1998; Burawoy 2009; Hartmann 2016; Tavory and Timmermans 2009).

Given the context of the Twin Cities, the foundation of field theory, and through an emergent case-study logic; I identify seven sites of soccer that make up the field of youth soccer in the Twin Cities.[15] These sites are interrelated, often informed by one another, and do not have fixed and rigid boundaries as players, parents, and coaches can and do move between these environments of youth soccer. Below, I chart the field of youth soccer and summarize the amount of fieldwork I conducted in each site. In this chart, I highlight key dimensions of variation, that cut across all sites of soccer and help conceptually organize this social field. These dimensions include, competition/intensity, organizational structure, and culture/group identity. I arrived at these distinctions organically, as over time they became clear distinctions through my own observations and because participants consistently brought up competition, sporting and youth development, and the culture and identity of their respective soccer communities in relation to other sites of the sport. Following the table, I summarize each site of soccer in more detail and provide a partial methodological and analytical narrative to explain why I

[15] In another US metropolitan context, I believe that there are similar environments/sites of the sport, but with possible variations due to local cultures, histories, and social structures. For instance, other cities have particular funding structures for youth sport, varying levels of popularity regarding soccer, and different racial, ethnic, and class dynamics. Soccer culture in Los Angeles will have its own particularities compared to soccer culture in Atlanta, Kansas City, Seattle, etc.…

moved to different sites and arrived at some of the social and cultural distinctions that mark different locations within the field of youth soccer.

Figure 1: The Field of Youth Soccer in the Twin Cities[16]

	Level of Competition /Intensity	**Organizational Structure & Costs**	**Culture/Group Identity**	**Amount of Fieldwork**
Elite Development Soccer	Highly competitive Very Intense Year-Round Participation 10-month season	United States Soccer Developmental Association High costs to participate unless subsidized by a professional men's teams.	Develop more and better professional soccer talent. Parents/players concerned with college soccer scholarships	4 months of observation with the U17/U18 Boys team at Fusion Academy.
Organized Travel Soccer	Competitive Range of Intensity 6-9 months of participation	Clubs are members of State Soccer Association Paid for by Families (2,000-3,500 a year)	Varies depending on the club. Some emphasize community, friendship	4 months of observation at Lions FC, a private travel club based in the Twin Cities. 1-3 teams per age group and gender between the ages of 9 and 18.
Inter-Scholastic Soccer	Competitive Range of Intensity Seasonal (3 months) participation	State Interscholastic Athletic Association Low costs. ($30-60) Registration with school athletics league.	Social development through soccer	6 months of observation over 3 high school seasons. Attended matches and practices featuring a variety of schools. Archer High School (boys), Newton High School (boys), and Littlefield High School (girls). Each school has racially, ethnically, and SES diverse

[16] All names used to describe teams and schools are pseudonyms.

				teams.
Hybrid/Alternative Soccer	A wide range of and competitiveness and intensity Recreational programs and opportunities for joining competitive leagues Range of commitment	Non-Profit Space provided by local government. Some grants and donations A range of costs to participate	Fun, Individual Skill and creativity, friendship, and agency of youth.	3.5 years of ethnographic observation at Kick It, non-profit organization that operates out of a community center.
Immigrant/ Ethnic Soccer	Range of competitiveness Seasonal Participation, but opportunities to play year-round	Independent, community organized and unaffiliated with US and state soccer organizations Low costs to participate	Community, Participation, Ethnic identity	Interviews with players, plus observations at a Hmong and Karen soccer tournaments and Latinx youth leagues.
Recreational / Participatory Soccer	Little Competition and low intensity Seasonal participation	Publicly funded. Low cost to participate. ($20)	Healthy and fun participation for young kids	6 months of observation over 3 years at recreational leagues in the Twin Cities.
Risk Prevention Soccer	Not competitive. Low intensity. Mostly after-school based. Some participation in local parks and recreation leagues.	Grants and fundraising. Little to no cost to participate	Provide opportunities and support for youth. Sport as a tool for positive outcomes in education, social behavior...	I did not spend a significant amount of time in these spaces of the game, but there are a couple of organizations in the Twin Cities whose purpose of soccer programming reflect ideas of "risk-prevention: and positive social development for marginalized youth.

Descriptions of Sites

Elite Youth Soccer: Fusion Lake Academy

Elite Youth Soccer receives much attention from soccer media, pundits, and fans because there is substantive interest in the professional and international potential for US soccer culture. I was drawn to this site of soccer because of the strong desire from powerful soccer officials, clubs, coaches, and the national federation to create a more elite and professional youth soccer environment and developmental system. I wanted to observe what this newer environment of youth soccer looked like in day to day practice, and if the class and race-based critiques and recommendations of pundits and/or national team coaches are present at the micro-level of the sport.

This relatively new site of soccer is defined by pseudo-professionalism and high-end player development. It has emerged over the past 10-15 years as professional US soccer teams and highly competitive youth clubs from across the country are running elite development academies for players 12-18 with the goal of developing more, and better, professional soccer talent. In 2007, in response to international competition, competition with other profitable and popular US sports, and the need for a wider and deeper pool talented young soccer players the United States Soccer Federation and Major League soccer (founded in 1996) created professional youth developmental academies modeled after many other countries. Within the MLS and USSDA academies, players cannot play for their high schools, and those who play for MLS teams enter an arrangement where the club holds their professional rights. These academies were originally just for boys'/men's soccer, but in 2017, the USSDA has created a national academy league for girls. The USSDA creating an official girls' academy is in partial

response to the Elite Club National League (member of US Club Soccer) which has been organizing elite soccer development in the women's game since 2009.[17] As of 2019, there are 197 USSDA clubs located across the country that have teams who compete at the U12, U13, U14, U15, U16, U16/17, and U18/19 age groups for both boys and girls.

I contacted multiple USSDA club coaches across the country in an attempt to recruit interview participants. One of the coaches that responded and agreed to be interviewed was Jeff, the coach of the U17/U18 boys at Fusion Lake Academy, a USSDA club in Minnesota. Fusion Lake Academy is an 11-year-old club with deep roots in the Minnesota soccer scene[18]. They strive to be one of the best development clubs in the state, region, and nation, and seek to develop players based on academies in South America and Europe. They advertise themselves as one of the top youth soccer clubs in the state and region and have over 600 players at various competitive levels, including teams from ages 14-19 that play in regional and national leagues under the banner of the USSDA or the ENCL, making it one of the largest clubs in the Midwest region.[19]

The team trains 4-5 days a week with 1-2 matches on weekends during the season. When the players are not in a cycle of games, they train 5 days a week in 90 to 120-minute sessions. During the season the club travels on weekends to other states in the Midwest region for matches against other Academy clubs. The training schedule occurs for 10 months of the year while the 30-match season is divided into two fall and spring

[17] According to its website, 76% of players in the women's final four of college soccer played on an ECNL affiliated club (US Club Soccer 2018).
[18] Fusion Lake was the result of two previous large clubs merging together. These clubs had been established premier teams since the mid 1980s.
[19] The ECNL is a national competitive league that started out as a program for elite girls' soccer development. Many participants in ECNL go onto collegiate, professional and international levels of soccer. ECNL has expanded to having boys' divisions too. In fall 2019, Fusion Lake Academy is moving their boys' team to the ECNL too.

schedules. As a member club of the USSDA, the club strives to "provide the best players in the U.S. with an everyday environment designed to produce the next generation of National Team players."[20] Players within the Academy system are provided with the best opportunity to achieve their potential as elite soccer players. The stated advantages of Fusion Lake include, more training, top instruction, meaningful games, connections to U.S. soccer resources, and exposure to collegiate, professional, and national scouts. They boast a bevy of soccer accomplishments at the individual and team level. At the team level, they have won dozens of state championships, multiple regional titles and regularly contended for national championships. In terms of individual player development, the club claims that over 800 players have gone on to play at the collegiate level, 18 have reached the pro-level, and over 20 have played on youth national teams, and over two dozen players have won accolades for state player of the year.

Fusion Lake operates as a 501(c)(3) and costs an individual player/family at the USSDA or ENCL level $3,000-3,500 per year, but this does not include uniform, tournament registration fees, or travel expenses. Around 10% of players at the club receive a form of financial aid, thus this is very much a pay to play club, and families make significant financial and time investment to participate. I was not able to secure official demographic facts about the entire club but based off informal conversations with the coaches it is clear that the majority of players come from at least middle to upper-middle class backgrounds since their parents can afford team fees. And most of the players are reside throughout the metro area and commute to the various fields that Fusion Lake trains at.

[20] This is stated on the team website.

There are three main coaches for the USSDA teams. Each participant involved in this project (player, coach, parent) is identified with a pseudonym. Luke, a middle-aged white man is the technical director for the Academy and manager of the U14. Dave, also a middle-aged white man is an assistant coach for the that age group. And Jeff, an ex-professional goalkeeper in his late 30s is the head coach of the U17/U18 team and also serves as a goalkeeper coach for the entire club. In terms of responsibility, Luke takes on the majority of logistical duties in terms of setting up practice times, travel, organization, and finance management, in addition to coaching duties. Jeff and Dave's duties are more centered on just the soccer performance. Jeff is also the head coach of a university team in order to make a living coaching.

Each team has a roster of 19-20 players and for the teams I spent the most time observing their general racial/ethnic demographic picture is as follows. The U17/U18 team consisted of 13 white players, one Asian American, one Argentinean, two 1st generation East African Immigrants, 1-Egyptian American, and one Mexican-American. On the U15/U16 team there were two Latino players, 1 Asian American and four 1st generation African immigrants, and 11 white Americans.

After I interviewed Coach Jeff about his coaching experiences, American youth soccer culture, and the culture of Fusion Lake Academy, he invited me to attend practices and matches for the fall and winter portion of the season. For the next four months I attended on average 1-3 matches, inter-squad scrimmages, and matches. During training sessions, I would often sit on the sidelines as to not interfere with training, but also close enough to hear and observe what the players and coaches were saying. When there was a break in play, I would often join the team circles and conversations. And when the

players were doing warm-ups or doing an extended training exercise that required less direct coaching, Coach Jeff would often call me over and initiate informal conversation about the team.

At practices and matches I took jottings on my cell phone and when I returned home, I immediately wrote out my fieldnotes. I used my cell phone because writing in a physical small notepad made it seem like I was a college scout or evaluator from the US Soccer Federation. Since, I spent most time with the oldest boys' team, parents were not present at training as players often drove themselves to practice. Most of my interactions with parents occurred during games or when U15/U16 boys team shared the field and trained at the same time. At matches, I sat in the stands next to parents and talked with them about the club and their experiences in the sport.[21]

The logistics of building rapport with players and securing formal interviews at Fusion Lake Academy was difficult for a couple of reasons. One, there was little room during training and matches to have conversations with the players or build some type of relationship. Moreover, the team travelled out of the state two times a month for games and/or showcase tournaments, and I did not have the resources to go on such trips. Such trips have lots of down time, which are excellent times to build trust and rapport.

In addition to not having the funds to travel with the team, after four months Coach Jeff left the club at the end of the season, and the technical director at the time was not interested in having a sociologist observe other teams at the club. So, for this site of soccer, the voice of the players was harder to document. I instead relied on my own

[21] These conversations were very fruitful and sitting in the stands allowed me to observe symbols of general middle to upper middle-class security that existed within the club.[21]For example, many of the players drove nice cars to practice and some attended private schools. Parents often wore high-end expensive winter clothing (Patagonia) to games.

observations and informal conversations with coaches, parents, and USSDA evaluators.[22] Despite not having the opportunity to do a longer ethnography of Fusion Lake, four months of participant observation and informal conversations, and one formal interview with a coach provided me a good sense of this space.[23]

Losing access to Fusion Lake Academy was a blessing in disguise as it helped me develop a more holistic, robust and multi-sited and relational research design. After presenting preliminary findings on elite youth soccer, I was encouraged by my advisors to look beyond the newly emergent elite spaces of youth soccer, which had attracted my initial attention because of such explicit discourse about professional development, intense competition, and the open desire for American soccer culture to be more Brown, Black, and working-class. I followed this advice and sought out ethnographic and interviewing opportunities in other youth soccer communities.

[22] At 1-2 practices, an official from US soccer would evaluate training and grade them on how the training session was run. Fusion Lake is evaluated every year on a handful of measures, which forms their overall ranking as a development academy. These categories of evaluation include: 1) Player Development: This is evaluated based on how many players the Academy graduates into college soccer programs, professional teams, and the USMNT. Their technical soccer skill is also incorporated. 2) Training Environment: Based on the quality of training sessions and coach performance. 3) Administrative: How effective the club fulfills its responsibilities in terms of scheduling, marketing, communication and attendance. 4) Facilities: The quality and availability of the club's training and match facilities. 5) Funding: How much does it cost for players to participate in the academy. The goal is to make it as affordable as possible and ideally free. 6) RESPECT: The level of professionalism in the Academy. What is the discipline record of the club, it's players, the parent behavior on the sideline?

[23] To supplement my observations of Fusion Lake I was able to formally interview the coach of another official USSDA academy. This interview offered more insight into elite youth soccer and American soccer culture at higher levels of the sport. I attended two of their practices to get a sense of their training environment and culture. This club is higher ranked within the USSDA and recruit players from around the world and country to participate. It is based out of a resource rich private boarding school located in a small Minnesota town. Many of their players are on scholarships to attend the school and play for the academy team.

Organized Travel Soccer: Lions FC

Though I had less luck securing interviewing opportunities with coaches in elite youth soccer, coaches from different sites of soccer were more interested in participating and sharing their knowledge and experiences. One of these coaches, Jay, a middle-aged black-Nigerian man, with decades of experience coaching and technical director/president of Lions FC an organized travel team, agreed to be interviewed and also granted me permission to observe training sessions, matches, and to travel with the team to an end of season tournament in a neighboring state. Lions FC exists within the space of organized travel soccer and I decided to spend time in this site because it represents the dominant or mainstream image of youth soccer culture and it offered a first relational point for constructing the social field of youth soccer. Moreover, after a few interviews and participant observation, variations between organized travel soccer and elite youth soccer in terms of culture and group identity, and competitive intensity began to stand out. Participants at Lions FC made it clear that they want to compete and be committed to the sport, but not at the expense of a social community or social development for youth.

Organized travel soccer can be characterized by spacious suburban neighborhoods and parks, middle to upper-middle-class lifestyles, traveling tournaments, highly structured practice, and private pay-to-play systems. It is the more visible and culturally known space of the game for many Americans. Since the 1970s, with the creation of the American Youth Soccer Association (AYSO) and the introduction of title IX youth soccer programs all over the country in mostly middle class and well to do/spacious suburbs were created with a focus on participation, fun, and minimal

competition (Wangerin 2006, Pesky 1993). Such programming has been very popular and over 3.5 million kids are registered with U.S. soccer.[24] Within this space of soccer, there are variations in approaches, styles, motivations to participate for the vast number of clubs that participate. It should also be noted that the minimal competition element of organized youth soccer has shifted over the years with substantial growth of traveling teams and organized regional and national competitions.

In Minnesota, organized travel teams are registered with the Minnesota Youth Soccer Association (founded in 1969) and compete against one another in MYSA sanctioned/organized leagues and tournaments.[25] There are 110 competitive, organized travel clubs that are organized into six different regions.[26] Lions FC is one of 25 clubs in the "river" region and regularly compete against these clubs throughout the season. MYSA breaks up leagues into 5 divisions: Premier, Premier 2, Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3.[27] For the age groups between U15-U19, placement into particular divisions is determined through performance on the field as clubs are either are promoted to a higher division, stay in the same one, or are relegated to a lower division. Lions FC has teams that compete in Level 2, Level 1, and both Premier divisions.

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[24] Though organized club and travel soccer is popular in participation and generally gender inclusive, it still has exclusive elements to it. David Andrews (2006) astutely argues that despite mass participation numbers and rhetoric of inclusion, soccer's newly formed identity as a young, white, middle class, affair actually excludes it from many different groups. In turn it serves as a symbolic site for reaffirming exclusive suburban middle-class lifestyle and white suburban institutions, which in turn diminishes and devalues elements of urban lifestyles, institutions, and social spaces of color and the sporting practices that take place within those spaces (Andrews et. al 2003).

[25] According to MYSA (2019), there are over 60,000 players registered in the state.

[26] Many of organized travel teams label themselves as recreational too. But the vast majority become competitive travel teams at the 12-13 age group.

[27] Premier divisions only exist for U15-U19.

Lions FC is a competitive club with recreational teams (U9-U11) that play seasonally, and competitive teams (U12-U19) that play nine months of the year, breaking only during the fall for high school soccer. There are 22 individual teams (14 boys' teams and 8 girls' teams) spread out between all age groups. They participate in spring and summer league play, which generally consists of a 1-2 weekly games and 2-3 training sessions per week. Throughout the late spring and summer there are also local weekend tournaments that individual clubs participate in. During the winter, Lions FC teams train 2-3 times a week and the club arranges occasional scrimmages, but it is not required as players at the club can do other sports or activities.

The club has two full-time coaches, Jay and another man named Kyle, who oversee specific teams and the club as a whole. There are five to six other part time coaches (often former players in the program) who coach individual teams throughout the season. Parents are very involved in the club, whether that be serving as volunteer team managers, coordinating fundraiser events, or serving on the board. In terms of costs, players/families at Lions FC, who play on the competitive teams, pay roughly $2,000-3,000 per year (not including travel expenses and tournament registration). Most players come reside in a comfortably middle class and majority white neighborhoods within the city limits or adjacent suburbs, and thus reflect dominant conceptions of organized travel soccer in the United States. The premier teams hold relatively more racial and ethnic diversity than the teams that play at level 1 and 2, and overall the club is predominantly white.[28]

[28] During his interview, Coach Jay told me that he wants his club to have more people of color. He acknowledged that it is difficult for him to achieve this beyond individually recruiting players that he meets or inquire about the club.

At Lions FC, I observed multiple training sessions and matches of U13 level 1 boys' team[29]. With this team I watched league matches, tournaments, and helped drive players to a tournament when parents had other commitments. I also attended games and tryouts for the U15, U16, and U17 girls' team. Similar to my ethnographic techniques at Fusion Lake, I generally took jottings on my phone and started informal conversations with parents on the sideline. Moreover, I travelled with the team to an out of state tournament, where I observed matches for multiple teams and attended their end of season banquet. Attending this tournament, coupled with one family and Coach Jay introducing me to families at the club, fostered a decent level of rapport with parents and I was able to formally interview four parents at the club. It proved to be difficult to get formal interviews with players at Lions FC or build significant rapport since I was not involved in coaching or formally affiliated with the club. Ultimately, observing Lions FC for 4-6 months and interviewing a few key parents allowed me to gain a detailed sense of organized travel soccer and construct the social field more comprehensively.

Inter-Scholastic Soccer: Four City Public High Schools

From August to late October, boys and girls in high school play for their school-based soccer teams. Youth who play Interscholastic soccer can play in other sites of soccer except for elite development academies that are year-round commitments.[30] In Minnesota, inter-scholastic soccer is organized by the state high school athletics league

[29] I knew one family that played for this club, which made immersion smoother and less obtrusive.

[30] Interscholastic soccer has players who spend most of their soccer time in organized travel soccer, immigrant soccer spaces, hybrid/alternative soccer, and occasionally recreational/participatory soccer.

and has 435-member schools that participate in a variety of divisions based on geographic location and school size. Due to school athletic budgets, and easier access to facilities, inter-scholastic soccer is more affordable compared to Organized Travel Soccer and Elite Youth Soccer and has high rates of participation.[31] Through such organization, cost subsidization, and the number of schools participating, interscholastic soccer also provides opportunities for youth from different parts of the metro area and diverse social backgrounds to interact on the field; both within school teams and between school teams.

Before spending time in inter-scholastic soccer, the participants and communities I observed were predominately white and middle to upper-middle-class. Thus, I spent 6 months (or 3 seasons over 3 calendar years) observing inter-scholastic soccer because it was a way for me to hear from coaches and players who did not just operate in the organized travel soccer or elite youth soccer. It also provided a bridge to players who learn the game and spend time in immigrant soccer communities and I often selected matches to attend based on the demographic make-up of the schools. I mostly attended matches that featured at least one public city school with substantive student of color representation.

As I continued to recruit coaches to be interviewed and possibly serve as an entry point to ethnographic access, five different high school coaches agreed to participate. Four of the coaches work at public city or first-ring suburb schools that have a substantive number of people of color, immigrant, and working-class students. I interviewed Zach, a white man in his 30s who was the coach of the Lowland High School girls' varsity team. The girls' team generally finishes in the middle or bottom half of their

[31] There are discrepancies in funding and resources between different high school teams and such disparities often reflect larger inequalities found in the education system (Raghavendran 2017).

division. Lowland's is located in a first-ring suburb south of the Twin Cities that has gone under considerable racial and ethnic transformation in recent decades. In terms of demographics for the JV and Varsity team, there are two Black players, half of the team is Latina, and the other half is white. The school population is nearly ¾ people of color (40% Latinx, 20% Black, 6% Asian-American) and about 60% of the school are enrolled in free or reduced lunch. I attended a few Lowland matches, training sessions, and their end of season banquet over one season (two months) and interviewed two players and three parents.

Coach Eddie, a Black man in his mid-30s in charge of Tesla high school's boys' soccer program, participated in the project. Tesla is a smaller public school (950 students) located in the Twin Cities with a student population that is 85% students of color (54% Black, 20% Latino) and 82% that qualify for free or reduced lunch. The boys' varsity team is predominately players of color and first-generation immigrants of color (Latino, Black, and Asian-American). Similar to Lowland, Tesla generally finishes in the middle of the division in terms of wins and losses, but the program improved each year under Coach Eddie's stewardship. Over one season I observed five matches that Tesla played in.

Coach Paul, a white man in his mid-30s in charge of the boys' program at Archer High School agreed to be interviewed and allowed me to observe practices and ask players that were over 18 if they wanted to be interviewed. One of the players, the captain of the team, agreed to participate. Archer High School is located in the Twin Cities and like most public schools is majority students of color (37% Asian, 31% Black, 10% Latino) and has a large immigrant population (Hmong, Karen, Somali, Ethiopian). The

boys' soccer team reflects these demographics and is predominately comprised of Asian (Karen), Latino, and Black (Somali and Ethiopian) players. I spent two seasons (four months) attending a handful of Archer training sessions and matches. In contrast to Lowland and Tesla, the Archer program has had a lot of on the field success in recent years, including multiple state tournament appearances and section titles. Their reputation as a top inter-scholastic soccer program is much newer compared to other traditional powers in the Twin Cities and state more broadly.

The last high school I spent significant time observing and pulling interview participants from was Lakes High School. I knew the varsity and junior varsity coach through immersion into hybrid/alternative soccer (discussed in more detail below). Lakes high school, which is located in center of the Twin Cities, has a student body that is majority students of color (34% Black, 20% Latinx, 12% Native and Asian), but also 1/3 white. The boys' varsity team is nearly evenly split between white players—who play in organized travel soccer—and Latino and Black players—some of whom play organized travel soccer, but others just play in their respective immigrant communities. Lakes is considered a competitive and consistently successful soccer program. I interviewed four seniors from the team and attended varsity and JV matches over two separate calendar seasons (four months).

Inter-scholastic soccer is an important and distinctive point within the social field of youth soccer because it is a gathering point for a diverse range of participants and also a place where group identity and interpretations of and motivations to play soccer varied and was tied directly to the school's culture and social location. It has a distinctive and more inclusive organizational structure in comparison to organized travel soccer and elite

youth soccer. Though competition matters and is prevalent throughout high school soccer teams, its level of importance and intensity varies tremendously across different schools and. Moreover, discourses of social development through sport is common and notions of group identity and community are even more present for many interscholastic teams.

Immigrant Soccer

Spending time and talking with players and coaches in interscholastic soccer crucially provided a bridge to immigrant soccer. These sites of soccer exist in various neighborhoods across the Twin Cities. Immigrant sites of soccer are distinct from organized travel soccer and elite youth soccer because of their demographic composition, self-organization, and because they are often separate from official US youth soccer organizations. In part due to my limited abilities in languages other than English and general time constraints, and established scholarship on immigrant soccer, I did not immerse myself in this site of youth soccer for an extended period of time. Despite my limited immersion into immigrant youth soccer, this space of the game appears in this project in variety of ways.

There is contemporary and historical research on this cultural soccer space (Martinez 2008; Van Rheenen 2009), which has mostly focused on notions of belonging, collective ethnic identity, and American identity and nationality. Based on this research and connections made in inter-scholastic, attending Latinx youth leagues, and attendance at local Asian American youth tournaments and cultural events, I was able to identify some of the varied characteristics of immigrant youth soccer and position this space within the field of youth soccer more broadly. The obvious variations centered on the

demographics of participants, affordability, and the physical locality of where games took place. Additionally, immigrant soccer also highlighted actors understanding of the field of youth and the presence of relationality within this field. Formal interviews and informal conversations about different cultural styles of soccer and observations of when immigrant soccer culture meshed with inter-scholastic soccer and collided with organized travel soccer demonstrated the importance and influence of immigrant soccer within this social field.

Hybrid/Alternative Soccer: Kick It

As the practice of soccer and other youth activities have and are becoming so organized, competitive, exclusive, structured, and now professional; there emerge hybrid/alternative soccer spaces, which represent push back and frustration with various practices of the sport that exist across the field of youth soccer and extracurricular activities as a whole. These spaces of the sport are explicitly constructed in relation to cultural and social dimensions that youth soccer culture. One example of hybrid/alternative soccer is Kick it, a non-profit organization that operates out of an under-supported community center in an urban neighborhood. I learned about Kick It through a formal interview with one parent and a google search of different youth soccer organizations in the area. I met with Coach Kelly, a white man in his late 50s --creative director of Kick IT—and he was excited to talk through the goals of the organization and granted me permission to observe and become a part of the Kick It community.

Kick it operates under the philosophy that for young people to excel at soccer and maintain a lifelong love of the game, they need to play early and often with little structure

and most importantly, have fun. The organization is driven by the notion that soccer should be inclusive, fun, playful, creative, and cooperative before competitive. Kick It provides 2,000 hours of free play per year and they served over 2,500 kids since they started ten years ago, after winning a bid to operate out of the public rec center. Free play is when the kids self-organize their own game under the general supervision of a staff member. It happens at least six days a week for a couple hours a day during the school year and 3-6 hours during summer camps.

The center is a small facility and from the outside you would not think that this was a space specifically and exclusively used for soccer. When you enter through the front door there are two main offices and the walls are decorated with various soccer posters, trophies, schedules, and Kick It events. To the left of that office there is a small and somewhat dimly lit room that has been converted into a skills room. Kids can play small 2v2 games, dribble, stretch or just hang out in this room. Across the hallway is a large community room with a kitchen where parents and kids can hang out, eat, read books, or watch television. There is a flat screen on the wall that is playing soccer games all the time. Otherwise, the room is pretty open and there a handful of posters of World Cups, or pictures of kids playing the game with inspirational quotes about soccer, fun, learning, and play. Next to the all-purpose room is the gym. This is where all the indoor futsal programs happen. It is a basketball court that has been converted to futsal, and by that, I mean they've put goals in the gym and two of the basketball hoops. Outside of the community center building there are two well-maintained tennis courts, and a large grass field for soccer and baseball/softball. Like many community center fields, the grass and

diamond are not in good shape after the winter and looks like nobody has taken care of it in months.[32]

I label this soccer site as alternative and hybrid because it is very much new and there are not too many other examples of explicitly organized spaces of free or unstructured sport/play. Identification of this site emerged organically as I had no sense of this type of youth culture when I began this project. Hybrid/alternative soccer offered another and clear way to observe and make sense of varied and overlapping cultural interpretations, motivations, and practices of the sport. Themes of group identity, differences in organizational structure, and norms of competition were ever present and constructed in relation to other locations within the field of youth soccer.

Kick It is a hybrid space of youth soccer because in addition to explicitly focusing on fun, recreation, and enjoyment, Kick It offers a variety of soccer/youth programming that is intertwined with other feature characteristics of soccer sites. For example, Kick It is interested in developing very talented soccer players through their model of fun and unstructured soccer instruction. They offer seasonal skill programs, which cost a couple of hundred dollars to participate. In the summer they run very popular and affordable summer camps, inclusive to all skill levels and driven by unstructured soccer and play, with the supervision of an adult. But similar to organized travel soccer, Kick It offers year-round programming, which they call "meat and

[32] Kick It recently added a small sized turf field. This was an entire ordeal and I will write about this in the future as themes of community, neighborhood and city politics, non-profits, and neoliberalism permeated the entire process.

potatoes".[33] There are over 100 families that participate in the "meat and potatoes" program and many pay annual costs similar to organized travel teams.

Through Kick It, other sites of soccer were constantly being touched, referenced, interacted with. Kick It players and coaches were linked to elite youth soccer in a variety of ways: players securing trials abroad, MLS academies recruiting players, or players making youth national futsal teams. They are a part of organized travel soccer because they do organize teams for MYSA league play and compete in tournaments. Some of the coaches coach at local high school programs and many of the players play in interscholastic soccer. In terms of immigrant soccer, Kick It has intentionally participated in Latinx youth leagues and Somali and Oromo soccer events, has families from immigrant backgrounds, and also appreciates/reveres immigrant and international soccer culture. And finally, Kick It is very much tied to recreational/participatory soccer because of its emphasis on unstructured/free play and they participate in low stakes, participatory centered parks and recreation leagues. They selectively participate in other organized travel leagues, elite soccer competitions, and more recreational parks and recreation leagues.

In terms of social demographics, according to Kick It's records, 40% of the kids in the program are from the local neighborhood and 75% of the kids are from the Twin Cities. The center is fairly cosmopolitan in terms of race and ethnicity and at most free-play sessions, camps, or programs about half of the players are children of color. There

[33] Kids in this program participate in free play, but also show up to 3-4 days a week for 1.5 hours of organized soccer. During these organized 'meat and potatoes' programming, coaches take a bit more of a direct role, but the foundations of fun, unstructured play, and creativity are still very much central. There is not much drilling or concern over team-based development. Players that participate in meat and potatoes often form teams for particular tournaments or MYSA league play when they reach the age of 13.

are multiple multiracial families (whether through adoption or interracial marriage) and families where one of the parents is a recent immigrant and highly educated. In terms of social class, the Kick It families that participate year-round are generally middle class, and most kids attend local public schools.

The staff at Kick It is small and coaches do rotate in and out of the center for different career opportunities. But generally, there are three full-time staff members: Kelly, the program director; Xavier, the administrative manager and coach; and Ramon, a full-time coach.[34] Over the four years I spent at Kick It three other coaches worked at the center either part-time or full-time. Coach Eddie, (who simultaneously coached at Tesla High school), Coach Michelle—a white woman in her mid 20s, and Coach Emeka, a Nigerian-American in his late 20s. Each staff member at Kick It has high level playing experience (college and/or professional) and multiple years of coaching experience.

Compared to the rest of the youth soccer field, I was the most immersed in Kick It. This was due to a combination of research motivations and the logistics of ethnographic research.[35] Kick It held a special draw because of its hybrid and alternative characteristics, but also because I built great rapport with coaches, players, and families. I volunteered and worked for Kick It in a variety of capacities in exchange for ethnographic access. At first, I hung out at the center during free play, seasonal skill training, or "meat and potatoes" sessions. Then I began to help Kick It with grant-writing for field renovations, fundraising, and community relations. For one year I was hired

[34] Xavier, a white American with Belarussian parents was in his early 30s during my time spent at Kick It. Ramon, a Latino man, was in his mid 20s when I started observing Kick It.
[35] Kick IT being based out of a single physical location and operating 6 days of the week made it much easier for me to become a part of the social space. There was a single gathering place for families, and I did not have to track down fields or stand somewhat awkwardly on the sidelines during practice.

part-time in this capacity. As I became a part of the Kick It community, I travelled to out of town tournaments on multiple occasions (I drove the van for 6 hours with multiple kids in it), coached the same group of boys from ages 13-16 in MYSA league play, helped out during summer camps, monitored free play, and attended national soccer conferences on behalf of the organization. Socially, I played evening pick up soccer with many of the fathers at Kick It and was a listening ear for parents, coaches, and players as we all negotiated the world of youth soccer and life in general. Not surprisingly, my deep immersion and connection with Kick It led to a decent number of formal interviews with participants in this site of soccer. I interviewed 13 parents (10 dads and 3 mothers), two coaches, and four players from Kick It.[36]

Recreational and Participatory Soccer

As mentioned, Kick It is linked to aspects of recreational and participatory soccer because of its philosophy, programming, and participation in local parks and recreation leagues. I identify recreational and participatory soccer based on the fact that every fall and spring the Twin Cities parks department and neighboring suburbs organize shorter and more affordable soccer leagues for young people. Recreational soccer is the entry point into the sport for the vast majority of young kids and community centers form and run teams for kids to participate in over an 8-week season during the fall, and the occasionally the spring. Participation is less intense, seasonal and open to a wider range of skill levels than organized travel soccer and elite youth soccer. Within the Twin Cities, because of the organizational structure, affordability, and limited travel, players come

[36] See appendix for a table that details the demographic aspects of interview participants. Including, what site of soccer they participate in.

from a range of racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds. Furthermore, themes of social development are much more central over sporting development, winning soccer competitions, or maintaining a particular status within youth soccer organizations.

In this space of the sport, coaches are often parent volunteers or community center employees, rather than adults with official soccer coaching licenses. Participatory spaces of the game generally have younger kids, but there are opportunities for teenagers to participate in these soccer environments. I accessed this site through participant observation and coaching U10 and U12 Kick It teams that signed up for this league. Moreover, for two years I worked as a referee for the boys' and girls' youth futsal leagues (ages 10-14) organized by the St. Paul parks and recreation department.

Risk Prevention/Intervention Soccer

Risk prevention soccer spaces fit in with other youth sports programming that aims to support marginalized youth (see Hartmann 2016). Such soccer programming exists all over the country at various levels of organization. National programs such as America Scores, Soccer Without Borders are programs which use soccer to help refugees, homeless youth, and youth who reside in high-crime neighborhoods are examples of youth soccer environments that fall within the risk prevention and intervention soccer space. For this project, I did not spend a significant amount of time in these spaces of the game, but there are a couple of organizations in the Twin Cities whose purpose of soccer programming reflect ideas of "risk-prevention: and positive social development for marginalized youth, whether it be race, class, immigration status, or refugee migration. Youth who participate in these organizations also participate in other sites of youth

soccer; in particular recreational youth soccer, interscholastic soccer, and immigrant youth soccer.

Multi-Sited and Relational Ethnography

My ethnographic process reflects the foundational principles of participant observation and thick description. My immersion into youth soccer reflects how Hargreaves approached studying the characteristics of school cultures in the U.K (1967). Hargreaves worked as a teacher, observed classrooms, and interacted informally with teachers and pupils inside and outside of school. I implemented a similar ethnographic approach as I spent substantial time informally interacting in different soccer environments and formally working for soccer organizations.

Due to the relationality youth soccer cultures and the social categories and systems that infuse and surround them, I have multiple ethnographic sites. A multi-site approach develops a dynamic and interconnected comparative analysis where observations and initial arguments make up an emergent object of study, whose contours, sites, and relationships are not known beforehand (Marcus 1995). So even though I have a theoretical foundation of sociology and personal knowledge of youth soccer before entering the field, a multi-site approach encouraged more reflexivity about theory building and data analysis. Related to multi-site ethnography, I draw on Matthew Desmond's (2014) conception of relational ethnography. Desmond (2014) advises ethnographers to approach the research question and data from a perspective of collision, which helps in exploring meaning making dynamics and how beliefs and values are cultivated. I heed this advice, by focusing on actors who occupy different positions and

spaces/boundaries within youth soccer that are in constant collision or negotiation with one another. This is why I immerse myself in different spaces of soccer, observe relations between coaches and families; how notions of appropriate forms of the sport and group identities are constructed in these different environments. Relational ethnography coupled with an analytical logic developed through an emergent case study process made it possible to seek out different social contexts of the sport and to construct a social field of youth soccer along dimensions of organizational structure and group identity which is tied to varied yet constantly present themes of competition, community, and youth development.

My multi-sited and relational ethnographic approach to interrogating sporting fields is not the first of its kind. This project draws inspiration from a variety of scholarship on sports. Dyck's (2012) two-decade ethnographic immersion of Canadian community youth sport is a model for approaching youth sport as a social field (Bourdieu 1984; Martin 2003). Like Dyck (2012), I take into account the respective positioning of and influences exerted by diverse persons, groups, and institutions that constitute the field of youth soccer. There are range of roles, participants, norms, problems, and themes that define the field of youth soccer.

Sheri Gramsuck's (2005) ethnography and interviewing project of neighborhood baseball in Philadelphia is a model for understanding how the institutional arrangements and social characteristics of sport create an arena for the negotiation of social and cultural differences across a bevy of social categories and identities. Similarly, Gary Alan Fine's (1987) immersion and observations of different little league baseball teams and their

relationship to masculinity, painted a picture for how one can conduct different short-term ethnographies of youth sporting cultures without losing depth and thick-description.

In terms of models for thick-description and ethnographic immersion, ethnographies of American basketball culture have guided my own methodological approach as well. Stanley Thangaraj (2015), deep documentation, active participation, and analysis of South Asian American pick-up basketball and its implications regarding race, sexuality, and gender clearly demonstrates the usefulness of ethnography and organically enmeshing oneself in sporting/social environments. Brooks (2009) and May (2008) each served as assistant coaches on youth basketball teams to build rapport and document dynamics of race, masculinity and adolescence. I implemented similar tactics by actively participating as a coach who travelled with teams, volunteer, and occasional player with kids and adults in pick-up settings of play.

Youth Soccer as more than a binary field of social and cultural production

The methodological path laid out by other scholars and my own trajectory of entering youth soccer culture has allowed me to identify and develop a more multi-dimensional understanding of this social field. The "two worlds of US soccer" binary paradigm is in many ways accurate and captures the broader economic, racial, and cultural context of soccer. But it also flattens this social field and does not capture the varied and interrelated landscape of soccer in the US. Moreover, this dominant binary framing often fails to account for social implications beyond elite level soccer performance and racial and ethnic representation at the professional level. Soccer in the United States is a unique sport, socially, because it is historically marginalized in relation

to dominant American sporting culture and at the same time is emerging as a popular sport because of mass participation, popular consumption, competition, and increasing professional status.

Based on four years of ethnographic observations and 42 semi-structured interviews with parents, players, and coaches in the Twin Cities I document the shifts in youth soccer culture. Through an emergent-case study research process and analytic logic, I provide an overview of the sprawling, popular, interconnected, and varied socio-cultural system of youth soccer in the United States. There are in fact seven distinct, yet interrelated spaces of youth soccer: Elite Youth Soccer, Organized Travel Soccer, Ethnic/Immigrant Youth Soccer, Scholastic Soccer, Alternative Youth Soccer, Recreational and Participatory Youth Soccer, and Risk Prevention Youth Soccer. This picture of youth soccer is a more nuanced and detailed picture and indicates that the field of youth soccer is better understood, not as a binary space, but as a multi-dimensional and permeable social field ripe with sociological implications.

Within these different sites of soccer there are range of approaches, motivations, norms and practices. In the next two chapters I demonstrate that there is a wide range of cultural interpretations and values that different groups and communities (who come from different social positions) bring to the sport. I show that the everyday practices, discourses, and experiences of participants in these interconnected soccer communities are rich with social and cultural meaning. Each space of soccer is distinct in its approach and purpose for practicing the sport, but they are all interconnected by larger and at times similar notions of youth development (both sporting and social), community, and group identity. Moreover, through ethnographic snapshots of different and relational youth

soccer environments, I show how the sport is raced, classed, and gendered in different positions within the social field.

Chapter 2: Elite Youth Soccer and Organized Travel Soccer

Introduction

In the previous chapter ("Getting into the Field"), I provided an overview of the sprawling, popular, interconnected, and varied socio-cultural system of youth soccer in the United States through the case of the Twin Cities. I identified seven distinct, yet interrelated spaces of youth soccer: Elite Youth Soccer, Organized Travel Soccer, Ethnic/Immigrant Youth Soccer, Scholastic Soccer, Alternative Youth Soccer, Recreational and Participatory Youth Soccer, and Risk Prevention Youth Soccer. In this chapter I go into the everyday/micro level of four of these sites and describe the communities that form this varied and interrelated social field. The everyday practices, discourses, and experiences of participants in these interconnected soccer communities are rich with social and cultural meaning. In the next two chapters of this section I argue that each space of soccer is distinct in its approach and purpose for practicing the sport, but they are all interconnected by larger, varied, but at times similar notions of youth development (both sporting and social), community, parenting and childhood, and group identity.

I share representational ethnographic moments from four specific groups of youth soccer to cover prevalent social themes of sporting development/performance, group identity construction, community, and social development, all of which appear throughout the social field of youth soccer. The first theme that I cover is professionalism and elite high-end competitive performance. By focusing on elite youth soccer, I discuss that seriousness of the game, intense competition, and relationship to professional soccer development around the country and world are very central to Fusion Lake Academy's

group identity and soccer culture. Within this space, tensions sometimes arise between the motivations and expectations of elite coaches and compared to players and parents with regard to commitment and desire to achieve professional soccer success. The second central theme that is prominent in different spaces of the game is community and positive social development through soccer participation. I share observations from Organized Travel Soccer to show how the rhetoric of proper social development, long time friendships, family and community are crucial to one club's (Lions FC) group identity and practices of the sport. The motivations and emphasis on the social aspects of the club are constructed in relation to perceptions and criticisms of elite youth soccer culture.

In the next chapter, I cover Interscholastic Soccer to demonstrate a variation that occurs with regards to notions of community and social development through sport. At Archer high school, such discourses and motivations are intertwined with race, ethnicity, immigrant status, and social class. The Archer High School team consists of many players who learn the game in spaces of immigrant soccer, and through interscholastic soccer get the opportunity to play in an officially sanctioned and highly organized competition. Their group identity of family, positive social development, and competitive team play is constructed in relation to larger systemic and discursive marginalization that impacts their team, classmates, and broader local community. There is motivation and a form of responsibility at Archer soccer to be a symbol that disrupts negative racial and classed stereotypes and to be source of pride for people that do not spend time kicking a soccer ball. To conclude the section, I shift to Hybrid/Alternative soccer to focus on how group identity within youth soccer can be linked directly to aesthetic styles of play and notions of sporting development. Here, I detail Kick It's approach to the sport, which is

centered around fun, creativity, and hands-off coaching. They envision and understand their approach to coaching and playing soccer as distinct and in opposition to hyper-competitive soccer environments and youth extracurricular activity culture at large, are understood as too structured and adult-directed, not fun, and poor for actual skill development and continued participation in the sport.

Happenings in, on, and around the Field(s) of Youth Soccer

Now I am going to provide ethnographic snapshots from a few sites of youth soccer: Elite Youth Soccer, Organized/Travel Youth Soccer, Interscholastic Soccer, and Hybrid/Alternative Youth Soccer. These snapshots can be understood as representational moments of these sites and show the social and cultural dynamics and particularities of different soccer communities. I supplement these observations with selected interview excerpts from parents, coaches, and players that inhabit these varied spaces of the game.

Elite Youth Soccer: Serious, Intense, and Aiming to be Professional

Fusion Academy views itself as a top club in the state in terms of developing high level soccer players. They attract players from all over the Twin Cities metro area and as a member club of the highly selective and national USSDA program, Fusion Academy is evaluated by the USSF on their ability to deliver an elite soccer training environment. The first snapshot that I discuss demonstrates that professionalism; high end soccer skill, and intensity are crucial cultural elements to the group identity and idioculture of Fusion Lake and Elite Youth soccer more broadly.

Field Note: Grinding away in October

On a windy and bitterly cold day with rain careening sideways from the clouds, 39 high school aged boys and three coaches are conducting a soccer practice at a nondescript suburban high school multi-purpose stadium. Three coaches, all white men in their late 30s, are bundled in winter coats and beanie hats and barking instructions, giving encouragement, and evaluating player performance from the sidelines. Players move quickly from drill to drill, play with intensity and focus during practice games, and mainly communicate with each other in soccer lexicon. Yells for the ball, "Give it!", encouragement for good defensive tackles, "Well Done!" and shouts of frustration, "Fuck me!" fill the 90-minute training session. Despite the innocuous setting, these 39 high school aged soccer players are considered the top players in the state.

Even as someone who has watched and played countless hours of soccer, watching these young players, with little effort or strain, kick a ball 40 yards across the field to a teammate's chest was still very impressive and frankly, continued to catch me off guard. Every time these group of kids played, the game was fast paced and intense. Each player had an excellent touch, good technique, and the game was filled with frequent and loud communication between players. Players were not afraid to hold each other accountable through direct communication and whenever coaches detected a dip in intensity, sharpness, or focus, a vocal admonishment would follow.

Field Note: U18s and Sloppy Soccer

As the boys shift from a 5v3[37] *drill to a 5v5 small sided scrimmage, the play becomes sloppy. Loose passes, wild shots, a lack of movement and flow define the play. The players are getting frustrated with each other. After conceding 2 goals in quick concession, Tristan, a tall red-headed goalkeeper, slams his gloves together and shouts at the group, "Come on boys, focus!" One minute later, Matthew, a defender, admonishes his teammate after they commit a handball in the box, resulting in a penalty for the other team. "Dude, what are you doing?! Come on!" After a few more minutes of less-than-stellar soccer, the group takes a water break. As they walk off Coach Jeff shouts, "Well that was the shittiest soccer I've ever seen!"*

[37] 5 attackers vs 3 defenders in a small field about 25 X 25 yards. After a ball goes out of play 2 players join the 3 defenders and 2 players drop off from the attacking 5. This drill emphasizes team defending, quick decision making, counter-attacks, and finishing.

As the group gathers near the sideline, Coach Jeff [38] re-emphasizes that the 5v5 scrimmage is supposed to be fun, quick, and decisive. He tells the players that it is good that they are holding each other accountable, but that they have to mentally bring it themselves before blasting other teammates. Jeff then goes through a handful of players and tells them how they are not in tune in terms of effort or decision-making, "Goalkeepers, keep the ball out of the damn net." He then turns to Mido, a central midfielder, and says "Mido, make quick passes." Daniel, a wide midfielder was next: "Daniel, I don't know what you've been doing on the wing, stop playing lazy balls." After criticizing individuals for their play, Coach Jeff then referenced the match that they won over the weekend and how winning is linked to significant effort and mental focus developed from training.

Coach Jeff's coaching practices are fairly normal for most coaches at Fusion Academy and reflect the approach of the club towards soccer and player development: serious, focused, and professional. The seriousness of play was constant throughout all of my time spent at Fusion Academy. The following note is from a scrimmage between the 17-18-year-old boys' team and the 15-16-year-old boys' team.

Field note: Intra-Club Scrimmage

Like on Monday, the intensity is extremely high the first 20 minutes or so of the scrimmage. Tackles everywhere, players flying to the ball. Coach Luke (coach of 15-16-year old team) is yelling consistently. "Stop being so slow—move the ball quicker!"
After a give-away, which leads to the older boys' team goal—exactly what Coach Jeff wanted from his drills on pressuring the ball—Coach Luke lectures the player who gave it away. "Instead playing simple and quick, you just gave the ball away to the fastest and most dangerous player on the field."

Dave, the other coach, had previously told the young defender what to do. After he didn't follow the instructions, which led to conceding a goal. Coach Luke said "When Dave says something make sure you follow that instruction. Simple as that."

As the scrimmage progresses Coach Jeff yells at the oldest boys "No breaks, no breaks, everyone is thinking" Jeff clearly wants a mental and team discipline instilled in the team. Later in the scrimmage after some substitutions Coach Jeff becomes more vocal again in order to get the team to finish a game and stay focused defensively. "1-0. 5 minutes left. What do we do? Finish the game. Let's

[38] Jeff is in his late 30s and briefly played goalkeeper as a professional in the US. Jeff coaches at the college level too.

stay dialed in.". *He and the team's goalkeeper yell consistently to the rest of the team to continue to pressure their opponent. "Get UP! UP! UP!"*

Very competitive and intense training, high-level technical soccer ability and physicality, and very involved, serious, and vocal coaching are instrumental to the everyday practices of Fusion Academy and elite youth soccer. The soccer careers or trajectories of players at Fusion Lake academy indicate elite soccer/player development is achieved regularly. Fusion Lake is proud of and advertises its history of training and producing players that play at the professional, collegiate, and national/international level of soccer. During training, I spoke with coach Jeff and he causally rattled off a list of all of the college scholarships that the boys had earned for the next year. Drake, Michigan, St. Thomas, Highpoint, and the University of Washington (all Division I, II or III programs) were listed as if it was a given and routine accomplishment. All but five of the players on the 94/95 team had the opportunity to play soccer at collegiate institution.

Dads at Fusion Lake

Fusion Lake's high rates of players securing college soccer scholarships is impressive and matches the motivations of many parents at the club. For instance, at an early morning league match I had an informal conversation with Ralph, a father of Lance, a 17-year-old keeper, who praised Fusion for its role in getting his son exposure to college programs. Ralph said the following when I asked him why they joined Fusion Lake:

> "We joined the club because Lance can be seen more. We have been contacted by a few schools already. The club and the Academy are great for that. Also, the competition and training are the top in the state."

Ralph, who is white, praised the club for helping his son get onto a national scout/ranking list and securing a guaranteed a roster spot at a prestigious division 1 university on the east coast. As we continued to talk Ralph emphasized that they were still hoping for that roster spot to actually turn into financial aid/scholarship. Financial support for college through soccer was a central goal and purpose for being a part of Fusion Lake and it such a possibility made their 1.5-hour car time 5 days a week for practice worth it. Other parents at Fusion Lake shared similar motivations for participating in Elite Youth Soccer and many are very involved and knowledgeable about their children's soccer lives and elite youth soccer culture.

At a different match, Amon, an Egyptian-American father, who played club soccer at a University without a formal NCAA team, shared with me how much his son, Nabil, loved the game from when he was little and that they'd been involved with Fusion for years before they became an official academy member of USSDA. Amon's substantive involvement with his son's soccer development was evident in a few ways. At one level, he joked and critiqued how Nabil's teammates often ate heavy meals before games "They see subway ads and think that type of meal is good." Amon, talked about monitoring what his son ate and how diet impacts his soccer development, reflecting a professional like seriousness and approach to the sport. Later in our informal chat, Amon discussed his role in identifying other elite youth soccer clubs in case his family had to move to another state because of work. The move was just a possibility, but Amon had already been in contact with multiple elite youth clubs in in the area and Nabil had even spent a week on trial with a team there.

Ralph's motivations for his son's participation and satisfaction with Fusion Lake Academy, and Amon's strategic and materially substantive involvement in supporting his son as they navigate elite youth soccer indicates that parenting practices can match the stated mission of Fusion Lake and mesh with norms of high-level soccer performance, development, and committed and intense participation. Yet, while parents seemed satisfied with their experiences in Elite Youth Soccer and committed to their children's elite soccer success, tensions arose between the motivations of club coaches and the motivations of players and parents.

Limitations to becoming a top elite academy

Based on Fusion Lake's elite national status, rates of players making it to collegiate and on occasion professional soccer, and the satisfaction of families, it would seem that the Fusion Lake meets the evaluative standard of player development. However, coaches at Fusion Lake are not satisfied and display reflexivity in their criticisms of their club. Coach Jeff, whether during a formal interview or everyday talk around the field, regularly articulated the limitations of the club and challenges of being a top environment of elite youth soccer. During one practice, after he listed the schools his players had secured athletic scholarships from, Coach Jeff said that these programs were not the "best or top" soccer programs in the country and that none of his players would really have a chance to play at a college that funneled players to professional leagues, let alone the national team. Coach Jeff's lack of satisfaction with the soccer trajectory of his players was also shared by formal USSDA evaluators who at the time ranked the club as adequate (2.5 out of 5 stars) in player development.

Coach Jeff's desire for his players to compete at more prestigious programs and the average ranking from the USSF/USSDA indicates how competitive elite youth soccer and the USSF/USSDA system is. Coach Jeff and the USSDA's evaluation of what is satisfactory as player development reveals a significant tension between coaches and families within elite youth soccer pertaining to the purpose of elite level soccer participation and future achievement in the sport. As mentioned earlier, parents at Fusion Lake are satisfied with their children making it to the collegiate level of soccer, and Coach Jeff and other coaches at Fusion are very aware of this dynamic and motivation for participation.

> Alex: So, can you tell me what you kinda consider development to be?
>
> Coach Jeff: Ya know what I consider development. I'll tell you what I consider development. I'll tell you what a lot of the players and parents in the academy think of development... um, a lot of players and parents in our development academy, they think development is getting a college scholarship. So, take my kid to the winter showcase, get him in front of 300 college coaches, and get him even if it's 20 percent off tuition, get him something. They think that's development.

Using elite youth soccer as a path for a college scholarship is viewed as antagonistic to Fusion Lake coaches who want to develop players to reach the highest competitive and professional levels of soccer. Coach Jeff is aware that most parents do not care what type of collegiate soccer program their kids make it to, it just matters that there is a school. The end goals of coaches and U.S. soccer officials and parents can be in completely different places. Coaches and officials see the end goal and purpose of the Academy as a tool to better the overall talent pool of American soccer players in order to compete internationally and to grow the professional game.[39] Whereas parents view the

[39] Coach Jeff told me in our interview that he wants to help improve American soccer culture at the professional and international level.

purpose of the Academy as facilitating tool for their child to gain access to higher education and better their future.

In other moments, coaches at Fusion Lake also grapple with the challenges of creating their desired professional training environment for players. For Fusion Lake, administrative duties/logistics, and a lack of professional affiliation to help subsidize costs funding are a constant issue and partly responsible for their middling national ranking amongst USSDA academies. In terms of logistics, Fusion lake does not have a central location and consistently have to juggle field locations across its metropolitan area. The amount of travel for the week around the city is quite astounding. Some days they practiced at a suburban high school south of the city, other days at a local urban college, other days at a public field on the Western fringes of the city. None of these locations are near each other and frequently change from week to week. The constant movement does lead to some practice sessions that are sparsely attended and don't reflect the professional training environment set out by the MTA, USSF, or USSDA. This manifested itself very noticeably at two training sessions that I attended when players couldn't make the session because the location and time got changed last minute.

Field Note: Saturday Training Session

I walked in about 30 minutes late to this session because I didn't know if this training session was actually going to happen until about 2:30. The session was much different than Wednesday in terms of the amount of coaches and mixture of aged players. Coach Jeff was the only coach there and actually had one parent helping him out with 35-40 players. There was another tournament in St. Louis for the players that play at the level below USSDA level. So, the other three coaches were there instead of at practice--- Coach Jeff was pretty reserved throughout the session and didn't say too much besides organizing scrimmages and recording scores. At the end of practice Coach Jeff called this type of practice a limitation of the club and expressed frustration with having to coach 35 players in one session and mentioned that other academies have multiple coaches for each age group.

The training environment of Fusion Lake is not as always consistent and can become disorganized fairly easily despite the administrative efforts of the club. The administrative capabilities of Fusion Lake are constantly tested due to the realities of them not having a funding source that comes from a professional affiliation with a MLS club. On two other occasions practice was cancelled because Coach Luke would flip the field to another local team in order to make a few extra dollars for the club. In addition to juggling field locations, and giving up field time for funds, coaches cannot make a living off just coaching Fusion Academy teams; they often have other obligations as well and cannot make the practices when they change location and time on such short notice. Furthermore, since Coach Luke is the technical director of the entire club, when the non-academy teams that play in organized travel soccer have to travel or require his services, he may miss training sessions. This drastically changes the practice environment in terms of seriousness and intensity.

The lack of professional or corporate funding support means that Fusion Lake is reliant on families to pay for the operation of the club. Coaches at Fusion view their dependency on funding from families as a major limitation to their ability to become a top development club. Being dependent on funding from parents creates a couple of issues from their perspective. Since the parents fund the club, the coaches feel that they lose their power to parents and players during the season. Coach Jeff makes this point clear to me during a training session two days before an away match where only 9 players show up because the rest of the team is on spring break vacation with their families.

> Coach Jeff: "This is one of the limitations of our club and not being associated with a professional club. I can't hold them accountable or tell them to not to go on vacation because their parents pay the club. You think a kid in the Seattle

> Sounders (MLS club) Academy could leave for a week in the middle of the season?"[40]

Since Fusion Lake is funded by parents, coaches cannot, in their minds, create a true professional and competitive environment, that reflects the top academies across the country and world. Coach Jeff feels that the kids can coast, because they are at the top regional club and do not have to face the possibility of being cut because their parents have secured their voice in the club through their wallets. If it didn't cost any money to play elite youth soccer, Fusion could run the club without having to listen to the concerns of parents. They could truly run their own operation based off the criteria set by the USSF/USSDA. For instance, in an ideal subsidized free-to-play elite system, Coach Jeff would be able to cut players he doesn't think are contributing.[41] However, these kids who have been with the club with the years and have paid full price (4,000-8,000 per year) cannot be cut, since their families keep the club afloat. Through their financial capital, parents are able exert agency and secure their kid's position. Such agency is viewed as an obstacle to Fusion Lake thriving as a truly elite youth soccer club that can keep up with their peers across the nation.

Within Fusion Academy and Elite Youth Soccer more broadly, there is little discourse amongst coaches about social development, community, or group identity. On occasion, parents did mention that they built close relationships with other parents, or that their sons had friends on the team. But this form of talk and motivation for participation was not central to the practices and culture of Fusion Academy. In other sites of youth soccer, notions of community, group identity, and youth development are more central

[40] Informal conversation during training.
[41] Coach Jeff informed in practice that the couple of kids who were not going to play collegiate soccer should not be on the team.

and visible. These themes guide the following section and will be discussed in more depth.

Organized Travel Soccer: A skilled, small, and communal soccer club

Concerns about professional soccer development, status within US soccer, securing college scholarships and professional trials are not front and center at Lions FC, a club that represents and operates within Organized Travel Soccer. Lions FC approaches the sport and constructs its identity in contrast to norms and motivations of professionalism and elite soccer development. Instead, they draw group identity boundaries around ideals of social development, stability, and community. They construct their group identity through soccer-specific decisions (coaching style, selection of players, and attempting to not cut kids and maintain roster continuity for multiple seasons) and through social interactions off of the field. I focus on off-the-field social gatherings within Lions FC and interviews with parents and the coaching director of the club to show how motivations for soccer participation and group identity are articulated and constructed in relation to perceptions of other youth soccer groups, including Elite Youth Soccer and other clubs that exist within Organized Travel Soccer.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Lions FC is 20-plus years old and plays in the Minnesota Youth Soccer Association at a variety of levels: Premier, Level 1, and Level 2.[42] At the end of each season the club travels to a different state within the region for a tournament.[43] Many people within Lions FC (parents, players, and coaches)

[42] There is a level 3, which is the lowest level of play within MYSA, but Lions FC does not place teams in that division.

[43] Lions FC is a year-round competitive soccer club. Teams train all year with breaks happening for scholastic soccer in the fall. In the spring and summer seasons, teams play weekly games and

emphasized to me that this tournament, with the end of the year banquet that accompanies it, is a defining aspect of the club. It is seen as unique because the entire club (270 players, boys, and girls) travels together for a full weekend during July. This is viewed as unique because travel soccer participation normally happens amongst individual teams, not entire clubs.[44]

Field Note: A Banquet for Youth Soccer

Entering the banquet hall, which was located in a hotel in the downtown corridor of this midsize Midwest town, I was taken aback by the size of the event. I knew it was a big event after talking with Jay (the technical director) and Kelly (a mom at the club)[45], but seeing a large hotel banquet room full of parents, kids, and coaches from one soccer club was impressive. Outside the banquet hall there were tables where moms and players were selling gear (t-shirts, socks, sleeve holders, sweaters) with Lions FC on it. This was part of the fundraising effort and one way the club raises money.

The room had over a hundred tables that could seat at least 8-10 people per table. The room was a classic banquet hall, with large chandelier lights. There was a cash bar at the far end of the banquet room and two tables for food at the opposite end, which was a good 100-150 yards away. There were two screens on each side of a podium/stage. The screens were airing the first half of the China vs. USWNT world cup match, which many of the kids were watching intently. Tables were reserved for specific teams, so one table would consist of an entire 14-year old boys' team, while another was reserved for a 17-year old girls' team. At the back end of the banquet hall, parents were also assigned tables to sit out depending on what teams their kids played on.

The scope and size of the event reflected the club's composition of majority professional and middle to upper-middle-class families and represented the commitment families and coaches put in towards youth soccer as a year-round activity. The group

train 2-3 times a week. There are also local weekend tournaments that individual clubs participate in. During the winter, teams train 2-3 times a week and the club arranges occasional scrimmages. The winter is a time where players at the club can do other sports or activities.

[44] I was invited to this tournament by the coach and a family that I befriended.

[45] Jay is a Nigerian American man who has coached in the Twin Cities for decades. Kelly is a white single mother with one 12-year-old son who plays for a U12 boys Division 2 team.

identity of Lions FC and its differences compared to other clubs was put on display as the banquet continued.

Field Note: Banquet and Master of Ceremony

After I mingled with a few parents, the event began when the TVs turned off (to the disappointment of the of kids) and the MC for the night went to the podium and began talking. The MC was an older white man in his late 50s or early 60s and addressed the crowd in a composed tone. He sprinkled in corny-dad jokes throughout and it was clear that he had spoken at this event before. During the first two minutes of him speaking, a parent leaned over and told me that he is a board member whose kids used to play for Lions FC until they graduated from high school. After the initial welcome he went into some basic guidelines for the kids for the tournament. He emphasized that code of conduct that the kids should follow throughout the tournament—good sportsmanship, fair play, being well-behaved in between games at the tournament, and supporting other Lions FC teams during games. As he continued to speak, the MC repeatedly made the point about how Lions FC develops kids beyond just their soccer ability. After justifying and advocating for Jay's coaching methods and techniques, he restated what made Lions FC special and important and distinct from other clubs in the region. "Our club is special because we are not just about building the best soccer players. You can go to Fusion Academy or Mill City [FC] for that. We are not here to get a line on our soccer resumes."

Fusion Lake Academy and Mill City FC, another local and large organized travel team, are rival youth soccer clubs with large numbers of participants. According to the MC of the banquet, they are perceived to be more about making the best teams, winning competitions, and in turn, they care a lot less about the overall social environment. Those clubs are perceived to not actually care about kids and families because they are too preoccupied with their status as a winning and prestigious club within the state. They are perceived to be all about the short-term gain of individual players, teams, and coaches, and thus have no sense of community or continuity. The coaching director and founder of the club made it clear the ways in which Lions FC stood apart from other organized travel

clubs in terms of team-roster building and relationships between coaches, players, and families.

> Coach Jay: The team comes last. The player comes first, then the image of the club, then the team. So, although that means that maybe I'm not as team focused or [inaudible], but my — I think my fiduciary duty is to every kid. When you bring your kid, you don't — you want the team to do well, but you're mostly always concerned about your kid, so my concern is always the kids. So, for instance, in most clubs, if you have a parent that's just a royal pain, that causes problems, they cut the kid. I don't do that. If I have a good relationship with the kid, the kid stays, no matter what. If the — if I have a poor relationship with a kid, because a kid has a very bad temper or behaves poorly, I can still keep the kid if the parent influences me, right? If the kid is bad and the parents are a pain, then the kid is gone. So, I have this policy where if you've been in the club for two years, you don't get cut anymore. You have a home. Yeah, I don't cut you.

Coach Jay understands contemporaries within organized travel soccer clubs to make decisions about their rosters based primarily on soccer performance and competitive outcomes. In contrast, the coaching staff at Lions FC does not make roster decisions just based on soccer potential and team performance. Later in the interview, coach Jay reiterated the club's no-cut policy, "if you come, the first day, if you have a very good commitment, good judgment, a good attitude, it's always hard even if you're not very good, for me to let go." Coach Jay and Lions FC's emphasis on sticking with players and not-cutting players has developed over time as they exist in an increasingly competitive organized travel soccer landscape. Due to a variety of factors, Coach Jay acknowledges that being the top club in the state in terms of wins and losses is difficult, and that he has shifted his definition of success as a club.[46]

[46] Organized youth soccer has become more competitive as the game has grown more popular and received more resources. When Lions FC started in the early 90s, they were considered one of the top two teams in the state. But other clubs have merged together, grown larger, pushed harder to recruit, and the overall talent in the region is higher than in the past. Thus, Lions FC teams are not consistently winning state championships or always in the highest divisions of organized travel soccer.

> Coach Jay: I have learned to define my success differently versus saying that I want to be the top club in the state that wins all the trophies. I'm saying I want to be the best club that produces some of the best players and produces the best players in terms of technique, skill, but also in terms of personality, the person, you know.

Coach Dave and Lions FC's purpose and goals are constructed in relation to other clubs within organized travel soccer and the larger youth soccer landscape. Their style of play and approach to coaching is a crucial element of how they create meaning and define themselves as a group. The coaches at Lions FC want their teams their commitment to playing a sophisticated, technical, and collective style of soccer. They strive to play like Barcelona, who are known for individual technique, clever collective movements, passing, and high levels of ball retention and possession. Due to this style of play and coaching, Lions FC games feature a lot of ball movement and collective patience. The ways in which coaches bring develop this collective and possession style of play coupled with long term individual and team skill development is appreciated by parents and viewed by as a key positive feature of the club.

Larry, a father with a 10-year old daughter and a 12-year-old son that plays up with a U14 Lions team, decided to try out and stick with club because of its coaching philosophy and coaching practices.

> "We wanted somebody who really had the technical focus on making the individual players better, and somebody that had that longer-range team focus… And so, Jay allowed us to attend some winter training sessions and it became evident after our first month or two there that it was the type of environment that would be conducive to learning soccer."

Similar to Larry, Len, a father whose son (Nick) was 12 years old at the time of the interview, considered coaching, skill development, and consistency/stability of the team/club to be the most important factors in their choice to be a part of Lions FC. These features of Lions FC are what make Len and Nick commit to the club, which includes

consistent 30-60 minute plus one-way commutes to practices and matches depending on location within the Twin Cities. For Len, who started to learn about soccer culture because of his son's participation and love the of the game shared the following example of Lions FC coaching.

> Alex: Have there been other moments where you're like 'oh that's really good coaching'? Or 'that's what I want'?
>
> Len: Yeah, it's all over the place. When you see the technical stuff, they're doing. I don't know if you've seen Lions FC practice and stuff? It's organized… they've got things that they want them to do. I know Nick can't stand it when Jay comes in there and interrupts a practice. He's like 'he's in there every ten minutes.' I'm like 'you gotta listen to him, he's making points. You don't see the things he's seeing'. So, there's moments like that where I'm like… I watched Jay run a practice once actually, now I think about it. Nick has never played midfield very well and never comfortable at it. And he's running a drill that basically showed them the concept of showing onto the ball, that he just didn't understand. These dumb little drills he was doing. He was putting Nick in the right spot and then the drill brought out of him what he needed to learn. So, I could explain to him 'did you see what you were doing?' He was just running through the motions, but I go 'you know why you're doing that, right?' So, I think he kind of saw that. Dumb little things like that. It's the subtle things you see.

Carl, a father with two daughters at Lions FC, liked the ways in which his children improved at the game because of the club's coaching and overall philosophy of development.

> Alex: How could you actually tell that Peyton was getting those skills?
>
> Carl: In one week, the development was unbelievable.
>
> Alex: Really.
>
> Carl: It was unbelievable. Because she had a strong leg, and she was fast, and she was tough. That we knew wasn't going to change. But she didn't necessarily have a good first touch. It would just bounce off a board. And then she had a week because it was try-outs and kind of morphs into practice. And you just drop them off. And you show up a week later and you just kind of pick them up. And we saw a little scrimmage or something and we thought 'oh my gosh, that's not even the same girl'. So, I didn't have to be a professional soccer player to see that. It was just really obvious that there was an acumen, or an intellectual development about

> what she was supposed to do with the ball. Who it was supposed to go to? How the team played together?

Each of these fathers understood coaching, skill development, style of play, and continuity at Lions FC to be distinct from their experiences at other organized travel clubs. At other clubs, they expressed frustration with the lack of attention given their kids whether it be due to the club being too large and unstable, being too interested in building a competitive team, or being unable to improve players both individually and collectively through coaching. Len said the following while describing why he likes Lions FC in relation to another organized travel team.

> Len: The other thing too with Lions FC is the kids get to stay in their team. Once you're there, you just keep going. At Lakes FC you could be in a C1 team and next year Premier. And these kids, these girls or guys, that made the premier team, go… they'll get chopped off for some supposed superstar who wants to get on a premier team from his different club. So, next thing you know, these kids that have been here (inaudible: 10.11 – 10.12) players but still contributed, they'll get dropped. And the other thing too, that was happening… Every year, at the end of the year, what are we gonna do? Are gonna play at the club? Are we gonna go somewhere else? Who's gonna be the coach? It drove me nuts. Here it's like ok, I don't know who is gonna coach but I know it's going to be somebody who's been through Lions FC that has a lot of skill. And it's going to be Jay and Corey doing all the training. These big clubs, you don't know who's gonna show up. You don't know what their background is. You don't know what they're about. The big clubs are more about winning than they are about the technical skill with these kids.

The idea of other clubs being too big and too interested in constructing winning teams at the expense of developing good players and teams is common understanding and discourse within Lions FC. Parents within the club view other parents as being like-minded when it comes to such understandings around soccer and development.

> Carl: as an example, and I hate to build two teams against each other… but Mill City, I think can foster from parents 'just win'. And Lions FC is like 'let's build for the future'. And I think parents reflect that. Because there are some who had never have come to Lions FC but they're going 'that team's not that good' and

> we're like 'we don't care about good, we're caring about skill development'. So, I think it's a different sort of mindset.

Lions FC's group identity is more than just on the field practices in terms of coaching style, roster construction, and long-term individual and collective soccer skill development. Lions FC's relative smaller size, and emphasis on continuity is linked to perceptions of the club more communal and social off the field. Returning to the banquet, the MC affirmed Lions FC's culture and practices of the sport mattering beyond boundaries the soccer field, and just as importantly, distinct from elite academies and other competitive and organized travel teams, "Mill City doesn't have a banquet like this." Through this ceremony, Lions FC makes it clear that they are not about making soccer stars, but rather about what's "really" important, which the MC articulated as follows: "Lions FC helps guide boys and girls through their lives, that is how we are measured as a club." In this banquet, Lions FC reflects the cultural notion that organized sports serve a larger social function for youth and families; that sports can and should instill positive personal, moral, and social development. Developing what is really important can occur through the way coaches relate to players[47] and what they talk about during training sessions and in-between games.

> Coach Jay: I go through processes sometimes where I sit my kids down, I call it WOW Time, W-o-w, Words of Wisdom. And usually I will catch a kid saying something that I think is unfair to someone else or I think is improper or whatever it is, or behavior, and I usually take all the kids, just going to sit them down and just give them a lecture, talk to them about life, to make them understand that there's more to soccer than winning or losing. There's the — I now think soccer is just a

[47] During this interview Coach Jay also talked for a couple of minutes about his relationship with his players throughout the years. He considers everyone to be his children and that he knows every kid's name at the club. Coach Jay feels that he has a more intimate relationship with players and families as a whole and that this is distinct at Lions FC. Summarize Interview excerpt where Coach Jay says they know everyone's names. They have a more intimate relationship. Distinct from other clubs.

> platform for life. You learn things like comradery, perseverance, being resilient, learning how to win with humility, learning how to lose and not lose face, not lose face, just pick your head up, and there are things you —if you win all the time, you don't grow. You can't grow. You have to have failures to grow, because sometimes you win too much, you get complacent, you think everything is right, but when you lose often, it causes you to look for solutions. That just makes you grow, so I have adopted that sort of mantra, but it's out of necessity, I would say.

Coach Jay views a key aspect of his coaching to be tied to helping players develop socially and psychologically in a variety of ways that will be beneficial to their futures outside of soccer. Whether that be personal tools of resiliency, humility, and contributing to a collective. He acknowledges that this approach to coaching has shifted as the landscape of organized youth soccer has become more competitive and less stable in terms of players staying with one club for multiple years. Social development, while understood to be a key feature of Lions FC idioculture has emerged in relation to dynamics embedded within youth soccer culture and in turn helps the club attract and retain families.

Regardless of Lions FC reactively moving towards emphasizing soccer as a tool for social development, parents also re-iterate moments of their children's positive social and personal growth through being a part of the club. Larry shared a detailed explanation about how his son's time at Lions FC facilitated a growth in his confidence, ability to make friends, and in turn played a crucial role in making a smooth transition to a new school.

> Larry: Yeah. I think one of the biggest adjustments I have seen is in my son. He is generally a fairly introverted nature and outside of soccer. I think he was definitely more reserved in nature and sometimes found himself a little bit uncomfortable when he got into social situations in school or gatherings of a bunch of kids for some other sporting event or something. Or, he was going to a camp or sessions during the summer for daycare or stuff like that. That he was a little bit more worried about 'I don't know anybody' and 'how am I going to meet

somebody?' And 'what if they don't like me?' And kind of concerned with how other kids would respond to him. I think given his success on the soccer field, playing for Lions FC where he's adapted quickly and the kids have accepted him, I think that's really helped grow his confidence substantially. And I think nowhere is it more evident than his current school situation.

Larry went on to explain for three years he and his wife drove their son to an elementary school they had been zoned out of because he was "petrified of leaving his friends" and being the new kid. But when their son entered middle school he responded in a different and unexpected way.

> Larry: This year, his elementary school from his previous school was zoned for a different junior high school as well. And we decided that this was a good time to transition him to the junior high for the middle school that we're zoned for. And he really, other than a few neighborhood kids, doesn't know anybody that go to his current school. And he couldn't have been more confident the first day. Even knowing that he didn't really know anybody. And he'd never ridden the bus before. And have different teacher throughout the day, and a locker and everything else. I couldn't tell you how impressed my wife and I were with how his maturity and how his self-confidence has grown. And I think that really has a lot to do with his experiences with soccer.

Time spent at the annual Lions FC out-of-town tournament provided many examples where the culture of Lions FC is very much tied to notions of continuity, family/community, social relationships, positive social development through soccer.

> ***Field note: "We're a Family"***
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> *A U11 Lions FC boys' team was playing, and I was watching the game and standing next to Whitney, a white mother who was serving as a team manager for her son's U14 team.*
> *After some small talk and explaining why I was at the tournament she motioned over to the 10 of the boys from the U14 team sitting close to each other on the grass in order to get under a sun umbrella and avoid the hot-Midwest sun. The boys were laughing loudly and cheering for the 10-11-year-old Lions team. "Let's go Chava!" "Lions FC! Clap-clap. Clap-clap-clap-clap. Before Whitney moved onto another field to help with a different team, she said to me "We're a family. This is what it's all about."*

In this moment, the community of Lions FC's relative smallness compared to other organized travel clubs is on display. Instead of one team of 12-year olds participating in a tournament, Lions FC has a dozen different teams participating in one tournament, which creates the conditions for players and parents to support teams that they are not directly involved in. Since the club is small and emphasizes continuity, players in different age groups know each other's names and cheer one another on. This type of interaction is how parents at Lions FC understand the club as a family and to be important in terms of social relationships and future outcomes. The conclusion to the annual banquet demonstrates, reinforces and ties together the key and particular cultural dimensions of Lions FC. To wrap up the ceremonies the 18-year-old boys' and girls' teams were honored and recognized as it was their last tournament and games as Lions FC players.

Field Note: Graduating from Lions FC

From my vantage point, the U18 boys and U18 girls' teams were predominantly white, with the exception of one Latino boy and one Asian girl. Both teams stood at the podium and the MC began talking about how the kids on stage had been playing together for with the club since they were 10 years old and that many of them were close friends that hung out together outside of soccer. The continuity and togetherness of the girls were hailed as a strength of Lions FC, and behind the team, there were pictures of them camping at a lake to show how well they all got along. Their long term tight-knit social group was described as "rare and awesome" for youth soccer, but the norm for Lions FC. As the speech continued, the MC asked the parents and younger players to imagine themselves or their kids on the stage in 8 years. After painting that warm image of the future, the MC hailed the girls as great representatives of the Lions FC and then listed off all of the colleges that the girls are attending in the fall. He listed off a number of ivy-league, small liberal arts colleges, and regional state universities.

The racial and class demographics of both teams reflects scholarly descriptions of the suburban, middle class, and white dimensions of youth soccer in the country (Andrews 2006). The educational futures of young women speak to the socioeconomic

and educational class status of this particular team, and most of the teams at Lions FC, and again made explicit the connections between participation at Lions FC and future positive social outcomes into adulthood. As the program shifted to the U18 boys' team, players on the team shared with the entire club what Lions FC meant to them.

Field Note: Being a Part of Something

The boys began to talk about what Lions FC meant and friendship. After following the format of poking fun at their coaches, the young man started to talk about Lions FC that reinforced the image and identity of the club as true community or family. The player did this by comparing his time with Lions FC to the one year he spent playing for Mill City. He told the full banquet hall that at Mill City he felt like a "cog in the wheel" whereas when he joined Lions FC, he "actually felt like he was a part of something." His best friends were made through Lions FC and were standing up on stage next to him as he said to the crowd that Lions FC is a "family."

As soon as the young man finished his telling his story, the teams were given a large round of applause from the crowd as they shuffled back to their tables. The MC then ended the banquet with another handful of statements establishing the special nature of the club and its importance in kids' lives:

"Those boys and girls are what Lions FC is all about. This is why you are here, why your kids are here. This is why you spend the money and the time on the club. This is why you spend so much time traveling to Wisconsin for a weekend instead of enjoying the Twin Cities. That moment is what makes it all worth it. Seeing your kids grown, with friends, in a community, talking about what they learned from soccer. The fact that the kids on that podium stayed together with the same group of kids for multiple years is special and valuable. This doesn't happen very often with other clubs."

In front of parents, coaches, and players as young as 9 years old, this player articulated his positive experiences with Lions FC, specifically family, positive interpersonal relationships, and being a part of a true team. Throughout the evening, tournament and during hundreds of practices and games, the group identity of Lions FC as communal, small, and familial was reinforced in multiple ways and by multiple people. Players and parents constructed and reinforced the group identity and culture of

Lions FC in relation to perceptions of negative youth sporting practices and norms associated with clubs that exist in Elite Youth Soccer and other competitive organized travel soccer teams.

While Lions FC is very clear in its critique of other organized travel clubs and Elite Youth Soccer, the practices and cultural work that appears within Lions FC is shaped by upper-middle-class privilege and this site of soccer does reflect central features of suburban and middle-class soccer culture in the US. The club is expensive ($2,500-$3,500 a year) to participate in and consists of mostly of white, educated, and upper-middle-class families. Despite these exclusive parameters, the club purports itself to be inclusive to a diverse range of kids and invested in long term social development through the practice of soccer. There is an acknowledgment of families' social and material investment in Organized Travel Soccer, but only to unilaterally declare the investment worthwhile because of the many positive social outcomes for youth who stick with Lions FC for multiple years.

It must be reiterated that Lions FC is just one representation of Organized Travel Soccer. Just within Minnesota, there are hundreds of organized clubs that all likely have their own particular soccer idiocultures. In this case, the social importance of community and social development through soccer is evident, and the ways in which such boundaries are made is linked to how participants understand other social groups/idiocultures within the social field of soccer. In other sites of youth soccer, themes of community, social development, and family are also prominent discourses and motivations for participation. But these norms are constructed in social contexts which vary in terms of soccer organization, race, class, ethnicity, and immigrant status.

CHAPTER 3: Interscholastic Soccer and Hybrid/Alternative Soccer

Interscholastic Soccer: Competing, Family and Representing a Broader Marginalized Community

As mentioned in the description of youth soccer sites in the previous chapter, Interscholastic Soccer is distinct from Elite Youth Soccer and Organized Travel Soccer because of its organizational structure, length of the season, and subsidized costs, which reduce costs to participate. In contrast to Elite Youth Soccer and Organized Travel Soccer, this site of soccer has participants from a range of class, racial, ethnic backgrounds due to lower costs, and representation from a range of schools. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Archer High school is racially and ethnically diverse school (majority students of color), with much of its student body on free or reduced lunch. The boys' soccer team is predominately kids of color from Hmong, Karen, Somali, and Latino families. Archer, a school that has recently emerged as a consistent strong soccer program in the city and state, cares about competitive soccer performance.

Near the end of the season Archer had a training session before a tough playoff match against a suburban high school team that they had lost to earlier in the season. The team was working on corner kicks and practicing driving a hard, flat ball (no spin, line drive) for the players to attack or defend. The pass would come in and if Coach Paul did not like the way the play worked out, he would begin talking to his players or begin to physically demonstrate what they should be doing.

Field Note: Focus Archer, Focus

During one repetition, Omar, a short and strong senior player who identified himself as Latino, hit a driven cross into the penalty area from the corner area, which was then cleared away from the goal. Then one of the players, Tao—a slight and skillful player, who was assigned to the defensive unit—was not in the

right position on the end of the box to clear the ball away from danger. In this team set up, whenever a loose ball came near to the corner of the penalty area, it was his job to collect the loose ball and dribble towards the other end of the field or make himself available for his teammates after defending. When he did not do this correctly, Coach Paul loudly communicated, "If you want playing time, you gotta show it. Where are you supposed to be?" Tao did not answer Paul's question. On the following corner kick, some of the defenders and attackers didn't get near the ball and Paul again paused the play and began asking a handful of players where they should be on the field. The kids sort of mumbled answers and Coach Paul wasn't particularly pleased and announced to the whole team, "We need to have intensity. This is about helping the team. We gotta be on the same page!" Paul then shifted to more confidence inspiring coach-speak in an attempt to get the players to imagine themselves in an intense competitive setting. "Focus Archer, this is your game tomorrow. You're up 1-0; it's the last 5 minutes, don't concede."

This form of coaching and attention to detail makes sense given that the season was increasing in competition as it came to a close. Coach Paul's intensity and coaching style in that moment are similar to approaches found in Elite Youth Soccer spaces and Organized Travel Soccer. The practice reflected the consequences of one more loss for this group of kids. One more loss meant that the high school season was over, and for a handful of seniors, their last ever formally organized competitive match with their friends. Thus, this practice was not about fun, enjoyment, or even individual improvement, but the team's mentality, organization, and specific strategies to win. But in addition to the presence and emphasis on competition, concentration, intensity, and team coordination, there are other group identity characteristics specific to Archer.

Field Note: What did I eat for Lunch?

For most of this practice, I sat on a sideline bench about 20 yards away from the team. On three occasions throughout play, Coach Paul stopped play and brought the players near him for a team talk. Each time the team circled up, Paul said, "Bring it in, bring it in. Tight, family, guys, family tight." When they circle up the players are all within one foot of each other and often have their arms around one another. It is a tight circle. During a variety of these circle-ups, the authority difference between players and coach softens. Coach Paul would make jokes

about his breath. "Can you guys tell what I ate for lunch today" and a few of the guys jokingly answered. "Wings and blue cheese?", Paul replied, "Nah, man, my breath smells like hot Cheetos," which got a few laughs out of the guys.

In these moments the social closeness of the team is evident and is an interaction that reflects the mission statement of the Archer High School soccer program: "Through the journey, the players became teammates and brothers forever, sealing a common bond of passion for soccer and love of one's school and team." The importance of family and togetherness appears in the two main mantras of the program, which are branded on team gear and repeated throughout practice and games by Archer players. Coaches and players wear warm up long sleeve shirts with the phrase 'TOGETHER GET IT DONE" printed in large lettering across the front. During practices and matches, players and coaches constantly said the phrase "next one".

"Next one" means that players and coaches should always be ready for the next play and not dwell on a particular mistake or an unlucky soccer moment, such as a missed shot, misplaced pass, or referee's call that goes against you. Many of the players would say "Next one!" as a way to support their teammates on the field. This mantra was spoken dozens of times during training sessions and within the idioculture of Archer soccer "next one" means do not dwell on things, but instead, be in the moment, because that is what is necessary in order to succeed and make progress. If you don't move on to the next one, you're stuck and so are your teammates.[48]

[48] For Archer high school, meanings of family, togetherness, and mantras such as "Next one!" are tied to its social position in relation to the broader field of youth soccer. When I watched the Archer boys team play against other schools from more materially rich and white neighborhoods, it became evident how mantras such as "Next one!" were particular to their social position (majority youth of color, immigrant, working class) as a school, community, and individuals.[48] For example, one of Archer's annual opponents, a majority middle-class and white high school, had parents who wore shirts to games that read "we just can't stop scoring goals"

Similar to players and parents at Lions FC (organized travel soccer), positive social development, notions of family and community were repeated by coaches and players at Archer as distinct and positive features of its soccer culture. I asked Coach Paul what he hoped his players got out of playing soccer and he said the following.

> Coach Paul: I hope they get, first of all, just a positive experience in their life. I hope they get some identity. I think especially as a teenager, like who am I, what am I, like what am I a part of? I think that's a big thing, you know, some friendships and some memories and the opportunity to kind of challenge themselves and become a better person and a better teammate. And they get opportunity to be a little bit in the spotlight and represent their school and community against other schools and communities

All of the things mentioned here: friendship, working on a team, and self-confidence/positive self-identity, matches common positive youth sports development rhetoric and idealized visions surrounding the purpose of participation in high school sports. Later in the interview Coach Paul described the boys at Archer as from around the world and passionate for soccer and life in general and understood one of his tasks as a soccer coach is to build a team and family first mentality.[49]

> Coach Paul: A good soccer coach can balance just the many demanding things a coach has to do as far as learning what his players' strengths are and then helping his players grow and melding them into a team. And I just think it's about getting that mentality of we're putting the team first, and we're a family.
>
> Alex: So, you've talked about the family part, but is that something you establish, like a second group and we're a family?
>
> Coach Paul: So, I think everybody works harder when you share a mutual love and appreciation for each other, so that's just a family. You know, everybody — every culture understands family, right? So, we're a soccer family, and you sacrifice for your family, and even if you're mad at your family, you get out there and play, you fight for your family.

[49] When I interviewed the girls' coach for Archer, he also echoed similar sentiments about pride and creating a family environment through the soccer team.

The notion of Archer as a family/community is not just an abstract ideal or platitude spoken on the field for Coach Paul and the team more broadly. Players who graduate from the high school and soccer program come back and volunteer as coaches/mentors, donate time and money, often attend matches throughout the season, and maintain in contact with Coach Paul as they matriculate in work and/or college.[50] While Coach Paul frames family and community as an important way for his teams to play well together and display a good attitude on the field, he emphasized that being competitive on the field is only good if the players make good decisions off the field if everyone feels connected as a group.[51]

> Coach Paul: I just don't want to measure everything by wins and losses and going to state championships. I think it's just unfair. Because kids can give their heart and not — and then it's just a tough way to measure success in life, so I want to feel like — you know, again, vaguely — we came together as a team, but just a sense of family and buy-in to a common — just a common — we're going to play the best we can and compete the best we can.

Again, ideals of high school sports being about broader life lessons, social belonging, and not just about winning a game are made clear. Community and close-knit relationships through the Archer program are held and articulated by players as well. Jeremy, an 18-year-old Asian-American senior and four-year varsity player, has played in each site of youth soccer recognized that Archer's soccer culture is distinct. It is distinct because he has closer relationships with teammates that he sees five days a week at school and because the team is comprised of recent immigrants who are learning English,

[50] A good example of Archer soccer's community and family ties is that many of the current and former players volunteer with local participatory/recreational soccer teams. Often, they serve as assistant or head coaches for under 12-year-old teams during the winter and spring.
[51] Good decisions meant doing the 'right thing' when authority figures or Coach Paul wasn't watching. This could include not cutting line in the cafeteria, helping out a teacher or classmate, and generally displaying unselfish behavior.

which is something the team works through and grows from. Jeremy talked effusively about playing for his school and situated his feelings about playing interscholastic soccer within a larger social context.

> Alex: Do you have more fun or take more enjoyment out of high school versus club?
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> Jeremy: I think it's a little bit of both. It's a little more competitive and more fun. It's fun because I get to play with the guys I sit next to at lunch or in the classroom. But it's more competitive because I feel like I'm fighting and like I'm playing for my school. Which is a bigger thing for me, I guess.
>
> Alex: Why does that matter to you, playing for your school?
>
> Jeremy: Well, I feel like, especially today, in today's society, people judge everything that happens and especially in schools or anywhere in the world. So you hear on social media or in the news last year for Archer, we were like horrible, fights everywhere, and it was bad, Um., so when you play for your school, you are represented as that in the media, so if you play good, they're like 'oh you're not that bad.' And we try to play with first class here. 'Oh, they're not bad people. They're actually like good at Archer.'

Being able to take the field with classmates/peers that he has close social relationships with is a particular soccer experience for Jeremy and makes interscholastic soccer more enjoyable than club soccer. While other communities within youth soccer discuss the importance of representing their group/community well through proper and good social behavior on and off the field, Jeremy articulates that playing for and representing the Archer community matters to him because it is very much tied to racialized, classed, and national stereotypes and marginalization.

That academic school year, Archer received substantive local media attention for students fighting and violence on school grounds. For Jeremy, playing soccer for Archer is an opportunity to break negative perceptions of his school and neighborhood community and there is an acknowledgment that he and his teammates personal and

collective character can be judged based on how well they play and carry themselves on the field. Coach Paul and Jeremy are aware of the negative outside perception of the mostly immigrant of color student body.

> Jeremy: Yeah, a couple of things people stereotype about Archer um overall, just the students. That we're violent. That we're just careless and aggressive. I think because we're a competitive program, people will either see us as good or as uhh… I don't wanna say the bad guys, but the antagonist I guess, if they don't like us. And that's why we always try to stay first class because like I've participated in a lot of ethnic tournaments. And things can get out of hand (laughs). And we have a lot of those players from those tournaments who come to the school and play on the team. So, first things first we like wanna stay first class, so people don't stereotype us as much.
>
> Coach Paul: You know, sometimes people describe an urban team or an immigrant team as emotionally out of control, as selfish, right, as pouty whiners. We've been the stereotype, but we've also broken the stereotype, and we've played with class and sportsmanship. We've played unselfishly. So that's what we're looking for.

The soccer team at Archer is one avenue for players to push back against negative stereotypes against working class people of color, and immigrants of color. Jeremy understands immigrant soccer culture within the Twin Cities can have a reputation for intensity and physical confrontations that spill over outside of the game.[52] And given that Archer has many players who learn the game and develop their skills outside of organized travel soccer, and come from a school that is labeled 'dangerous', any incident or slip up in behavior can be easily used to confirm negative stereotypes and reproduce the racial and classed discourse that surrounds the school. Proving these stereotypes wrong is a key element of Archer's group identity and linked to how social development through sport is practiced and understood. This is a distinct difference of how notions of family/community, social development is constructed and understood in comparison to

[52] In my own observations I think the notion of working class and immigrant soccer (Black, Latino, Asian) being overly physical and always in tension with potential violence to be greatly overstated.

other sites and idiocultures of youth soccer where race, class, and nationality are taken for granted and not overtly present. One of the central techniques to push back against the racist, anti-immigrant, and classed stereotypes that surround Archer is to play with 'first class'. Playing with class is a straightforward concept for players and coaches at Archer.

> Jeremy: First class… oooo, first class means just, not rude, don't say anything back to them, doing little things like, just helping somebody up. Be nice to them. Be the way uh, treat someone the way you want to be treated basically.

This is a common ideal and goal for participation in sports and social development. Being good sportsperson i.e. displaying a positive attitude, working hard, and treating opponents with respect are foundational elements for sports to be a vehicle for positive social development. Players at Archer also recognize that their "first class" motto and emphasis on sportsmanship is not something found throughout interscholastic soccer, specifically teams that are majority white and upper-middle class and often play in organized travel soccer.

> Jeremy: I think there are some teams out there, but uh, we've just come across quite a few teams that aren't like that or do not emphasize that way. Which is… it's a competitive sport, people do things all the time. But I think especially, after being an official alumni of the program. Being first class something that prepares you for life and an overall better person.

Jeremy, after four years in the Archer program, views many peer soccer programs as not concerned with being good sportspeople on the field. Others at Archer share his sentiment[53] and this is telling, given how prevalent the idealized rhetoric of positive social development through sport is across different idiocultures of youth soccer. For Jeremy, Archer distinguishes itself because of its emphasis on good social behavior and

[53] When discussing other interscholastic programs, Coach Paul critiqued a few programs that didn't seem to have similar values and culture: kids had "terrible attitudes on the field" and coaches are screaming at refs and players, and "it just doesn't seem right".

he even links Archer's soccer identity and culture to his own individual personal development.

While Archer's strategy and motto of being 'first class' is important to the program and helps combat the negative racial, classed, and ethnic stereotyping that they must deal with; there are incidents on the field and in the stands where the embedded social tensions that exist between spaces of soccer manifest themselves. The following field note is from when Archer played against Groveland High School, a public school located in a majority white and middle-class neighborhood and a soccer team that reflects that demographic composition.

Field Note: Shame on You and Let's Act with Class

As the 2nd half proceeded, the game got a bit more chippy, sloppy, and physical because Archer got two more goals, which frustrated and surprised Groveland. Some kids were throwing some hard shoulder charges, making cynical and tactical fouls, which earned a yellow card for a Groveland Park defender. As I stood on the sidelines with the Archer supporters, the parents and the high schoolers were more vocal about the referees' questionable decisions. And to be fair, they were calling a very odd game. They stopped play frequently, scolded an Archer Park player (east African) for an apparent dive, (even though it didn't really look like one), and repeatedly lectured Archer players even though they were not playing more physically than Groveland. The refs were from a mix of social backgrounds. One was a portly and short Latino man, one was a white dude, who is a TERRIBLE ref, (he's refereed some of my adult recreational games) and the assistant referee (AR) was a person of color. After a missed and questionable foul call, some of the Archer sidelines were loud and criticized the refs. To me, this was nothing out of the ordinary and wasn't anywhere close to crossing the line with regards to fan behavior at youth sporting events. One of the more amusing comments came from one dad whenever the referee did not handle the physicality of the game in a correct manner. Whenever an opponent made a foul, he would yell "At least give him a 'SHAME ON YOU!'

After the fans let out their frustration towards the ref, the assistant referee (AR) did something I've never seen in a soccer match; and I've been to a countless number of soccer matches and sporting events. During the game, the AR walked over to the 3 boys of color that were standing on the bottom row of the bleachers and began scolding and berating them for their behavior. It was super odd, given that the boys weren't doing anything other than cheering. The AR picked out the

middle teenager, walked right up to him, started pointing his finger at the kid's face, and began yelling at him to behave. He even screamed that "he knows his dad" and he'll talk to him. It was oddly intense, and the youth seemed more bemused than anything. I was standing about 15 feet away and the intensity of the incident made little sense. The middle boy argued with him with teenage sarcasm, and after the ref finally returned to the game the three boys laughed about it. From higher up, in the stands, the boys' peers yelled at the referee to get back to watching the game and were rightfully incredulous with the referee's behavior. "What are you doing?! Get back to watching the game! They aren't doing anything!"

After a few minutes my positionality as a person of color, the racial/ethnic/class composition of the game, and the social collision through scholastic youth soccer became more evident as the game increased in tension. Later in the match one of the mothers, a Hmong woman, was focused on how the referee actually was not giving equal amounts of talking-tos or lectures to one physical Groveland player (white defender) who had earned a card for cynical foul and who earlier in the game berated the referee after a penalty call went against Groveland. The woman said out loud to the ref "you should talk to that player like you do to ours! He's talking back to you way more than our boys!" She had a good point. Multiple Archer players had to listen to the refs talk to them after much more minor infractions.

After about 20 minutes into the half, the referee crew stopped the game and gathered with the two coaches at the opposite at the end of the field to discuss something. Two minutes after the meeting, the Archer assistant coach walked around the field and addressed the Archer supporters. The assistant coach yelled up into the bleachers that Archer cheers 'with class' and that we only cheer positively. He referenced the "Archer way." No one in the crowd really reacted or talked back to the assistant coach, but more listened in silence. No one agreed with him or thought much of it. In fact, the crowd was quiet for a bit and disengaged from the game for the next few minutes.

The crowd was pretty dismissive of the lecture/plea from the white assistant coach and I agreed with the rest of the folks in the stands who did not feel like anyone on or off the field was out of line or misbehaving. And upon comparison to the hours of youth soccer matches I've observed, plus interviews with players and parents at Archer, the stoppage of play and lecture to the crowd reinforced how the negative stereotypes that surrounds the Archer soccer community informs their social interactions. In this case, the Archer fans

and players have to live up to a different standard of sporting and fan behavior and they were sanctioned and monitored in a way that I did not see happen to other majority white and middle-class interscholastic or organized travel teams. The monitoring and lecturing of Archer fans reproduced problematic and false associations between poor social behavior and race/class/ethnicity. Furthermore, it created an increased and unnecessary racial and class tension to the sporting event and signaled that Archer's emphasis and tactic of being 'first class'—a key element of their group identity-- can only do so much to disrupt the social inequalities and negative racial/class/ethnic stereotypes that the team is forced to negotiate.

Despite Archer having to deal with tensions that arise due to their racial, classed, and immigrant social position, the positive feelings about Archer's soccer culture from players like Jeremy, and its group ethos of family, community, and healthy competition has been effective in many ways. As the program has been successful off and, on the field, it is clear that the team can frequently live up to its idealized goals of community and positive social representation in the face of broader structural and cultural marginalization.

> Coach Paul: I think, particularly because you've got like this 20 to 25 percent of the population, they rally and identify behind soccer, okay? So, I think it's real positive, and I think it's healthy for the school, because there are times when the team is showcased as a source of pride for the school, to say, "Oh, these are important people of our community," right? They're a big deal, and you just hear it in weird places, you know, from kids that you wouldn't expect to hear it from sometimes. Like they take pride in a student who's not — they don't care about soccer, or like they didn't grow up playing it, they don't watch it, but our soccer team is the — so I love my team, and this is cool that we've got guys who do this.

The unique characteristics of interscholastic soccer can provide a sporting and organizational foundation for an idioculture such as Archer soccer to exist and then thrive because of the actions and efforts of people within the program. Since interscholastic

soccer creates and subsidizes a competitive structure between schools, and by proxy neighborhoods, players and coaches understand that they are representing a broader and larger social community when they train, coach, play, and compete. For Archer, their soccer community is intimately tied to their classmates, families, and neighbors who share similar social identities that are often systemically and culturally marginalized. This larger collective representation and the motivation/responsibility to be a source of pride for people not involved in the team demonstrates that prominent discourses that permeate different youth cultures of community, family, and personal/social development through sport are constructed with substantive variation at Archer.

Alternative/Hybrid Youth Soccer: Make it fun and get out of the way

Kick It, a representation of alternative/hybrid soccer, is the last idioculture of youth soccer that I will discuss in this chapter. Similar to other soccer communities, they construct their group identity in relation to perceptions of other clubs and American soccer culture more broadly. The key elements of Kick It's group identity are coaching style and philosophy and practices of play, and individual player development that is centered on fun and individual creativity. These dynamics are linked to the motivations of participants at Kick It and inform how notions of community are articulated.

At Fusion Lake Academy, Lions FC, and Archer High School the practice of coaching often looks similar and matches common social perceptions about what a sports coach socially does. They are often very vocal, overtly demanding, directive, and hands on when leading players through individual drills, fitness, or team tactics. Training sessions are often very deliberately organized and structured. And when matches happen,

these coaches are constantly yelling instructions, debating calls with officials, motivating their players to exert more physical effort and mental focus, and offering praise or criticism to players during the run of play. In all of these soccer sites, explicit coach-directed instruction is the norm and coaches are easily noticeable and identifiable. Coaching at Kick It is much different in daily practice.

Field Note: Coaching on the Sideline, U12 Boys

One of the white coaches at Barling (a different organized travel club) was dressed like one of the players almost; red shirt and black athletic shorts. And the assistant coach was wearing a Barling team soccer jacket. They were constantly instructing the kids while the match was going on. The coach in red was quiet for maybe 15 seconds at most during the first half. In the first five minutes of the match, the coach said the following phrases multiple times "Work!" Tackle Hard"! "Come on Johnny!" "Come on Baz." "Look wide!" "Get wide!" "2 touches guys!" "The field is too bouncy for 1 touch." Additionally, the coach was consistently trying to direct where the 11-year-old kids should be spatially on the field.

In contrast to the coaching style, Ramon, a 25-year-old Latino male, with collegiate soccer experience, was hands off and gave little to no feedback. Wearing track pants and a yellow Kick It t-shirt Ramon just watches with his hands either by his sides and in his pockets or with his arms crossed. Other times he turns away from the game and chats with the substitutes who are sitting on the grass. If he has any soccer suggestions for the players, he waits until they come out of the game for a break and just talks with them 1 on 1 for a few seconds. I counted two times where Ramon talked loud enough for players on the field to hear over the course of a 60-minute match. And each time it was just a quick word of encouragement for the group. "Don't worry! It will come (referring to converting a shot into a goal)."

Coach Ramon's hands-off and quiet coaching demeanor during the match is common at Kick It. Kick It coaches are instructed by the director of the organization, Coach Lee, to give as little direct feedback to players when they are playing and training. As mentioned in the previous chapter, their coaching style is informed by their philosophy that fun is the most crucial element for players to continue playing, develop and master soccer. There is a deep belief in the power of unstructured soccer where

players learn through their own mistakes and develop their own ideas about the game. Coaches at Kick It are constantly trying to provide limited feedback in the aim for players to learn through fun, agentic, and unstructured acquisition, rather than structured and deliberate practice. Fun and less-directive coaching are commonly on display at Kick It in a variety of ways.

Fieldnote: Goalie Wars and Relaxed and Cross-Age Unstructured Play

There were 13 boys in the gym during unstructured play. On the left side of the gym 8 of the boys ages 9-14 were playing goalie wars. A game where two players take turns taking shots with a soft volleyball on a goal about 6 feet high and 10 feet wide. The soft volleyball allows for kids to shoot barefoot and hit the ball really hard without fear of injury or a ton of force. If you get scored on, you rotate out and the next person takes your place. Ethan, Samuel, Reo, Hunter, and Diego were playing. Anton was sitting and watching as well. The kids continued to shoot and be a bit goofy. Laughing after misses, dancing after goals and posing after acrobatic saves. They were keeping track and rotating within the rules of the game. It wasn't intense, but some of the boys' frustration came about in small moments. For instance, Samuel, lost and took the ball and punted it straight up in the air. Other than that, it was fairly unremarkable. Ethan would talk out loud about how he "needed to put his shoe on" before he shot as he was playing barefoot and not scoring as much as he'd like or expect.

On the other side of the field there was a nice game of 2v2 that spanned age ranges and skill levels was taking place. In this case it was 14-year olds Paul and Lionel playing 2v2 with 8-year olds' Connor and Preston as their teammates. The younger boys got plenty of touches, and the older boys got to try moves out and constantly boosted the confidence of their younger teammates. It was a nice reflection of unstructured "play" Paul and Lionel were acting like 14-year-old teenagers in that they were roughhousing during the game too. On multiple occasions one of them would "playfully" foul the other and while this happened the younger kids kept playing. The relaxed vibe of their play was also evident because Paul, one of the most skilled players at Kick It played in crocs. And when Paul and Lionel stopped playing after a few goals, the younger boys kept going and continued their now 1v1 game.

In this regular moment of unstructured play a few different aspects of Kick It's idioculture is on display. In goalie wars, a very popular and common unstructured game, agency and self-direction of the players is central. Players create, organize, and run the

game and coaches are nowhere in sight. In terms of player development, the soft ball and low stakes allows for kids to acquire and develop different types of shooting techniques (toe pokes, outside of the foot, laces, curves, knuckleballs) through fun repetition and their own internal feedback. In the 2v2 game, cross-age group play happens informally and frequently. Unlike other organized clubs where individual teams are segregated by age groups, Kick It attempts to avoid team-based training and encourages kids in elementary school to participate with players in middle and early high school. Similar to unstructured play/soccer, Kick It coaches understand this type of cross-age play to not happen and take pride that their soccer culture encourages an inexperienced 7-year-old player to play with a highly experienced and skilled 14-year-old.

Even during programs, where coaches are more present and unstructured play moves the background, Kick It coaches aim to provide a playground and recess like soccer environment, something that many at Kick It feel is gone in many spaces of youth soccer, specifically elite youth soccer and organized travel soccer.[54]

Fieldnote: Fun, Controlled Chaos, and an Innovative Practice

The exercise was a hectic, beautiful, and energetic space of soccer activity. There were 8 separate courts where 4-5 kids playing a version of a game on each one. The courts didn't have official boundaries and kids often roamed into each other because it's hard to keep a ball within such a tight space. I had never seen this exercise before, but Coach Lee said he had designed and run it before, but this time he added a bit more. He quickly explained what each court was (there were about two that I wasn't sure what was going on).

[54] Coaches at Kick It acknowledge that immigrant soccer communities in the Twin Cities have similar elements of unstructured, less coach-directed environments of play. They believe that immigrant communities (including players at Archer and other city high schools with larger populations of color) are skillful and creative players because they do not play in organized travel soccer, but rather their own self-organized and more unstructured soccer environments. As mentioned in the previous chapter, they revere soccer culture in Latin America and portions of Europe where players learn and master the game in pick-up environments.

Spatially the gym floor was divided into a 4x4 grid. Field 1 was a passing drill with 4 large orange cones being used as goals. On this field the players had to hit a pass on the ground between the posts. But also, they could not hit the player in other goal, who was sitting down. Coach Kelly told me that this was to encourage passing. On the next court was a regular 2v2 game with a futsal ball. On the one next to it there was a 2v2 played with a tennis ball. The far-right corner was another 2v2 game with goals that only went as high as your ankles. On the near left side, there was a toss and volley court that was played with a soft volleyball. On the next court there was team handball, where the kids tossed each other the ball with their hands, and they could only score off a header. The next court was 2v2, but the only way to score was to kick the ball through a standing tire instead of a goal. The corner court was a head tennis/juggling game. If you won the game, you moved onto the next court.

The kids could not get enough of these games. No one was bored or disengaged. Players were buzzing around, Robin crashed into a poll? trying a diving header and leapt up immediately with big grin on her face. The gym was full of energy, noise, and activity. Kids running into each other, nets, balls careening into other courts. But no one really minded or noticed the sort of controlled chaos that existed. Coach Lee and Coach Alexander, clearly happy with the environment, were both taking videos and laughing and smiling while doing so.

This variation of play is what the staff at Kick It loves because it gets kids to play the game in a variety of settings and scenarios. Each court emphasized a different skill set; there is agility, heading, touch, shooting, passing, teamwork. But crucially, the coaches did not say anything directly to the kids about the skills or the purpose of the courts. The coaches said play and they did not instruct anyone, rather, they set up a vibrant and creative environment for kids to figure the soccer stuff out on their own. At other sites of soccer, I did not see such a collective energy and display of fun during a routine practice. Even in moments of regular and adult-directed training, Kick It's group identity of limited and selective coaching feedback, fun, and acquisition learning stand out.

In addition to everyday social and soccer practices, the philosophy of play, player development, and coaching at Kick It is verbally communicated directly and very clearly

to parents and players. Twice a year, the Kick It staff hosts a parents and players meeting for families that participate year-round at the center.

Fieldnote: Kick It Meeting

I got to the community center about 4 minutes after 6:00 and the room was packed with kids sitting in chairs in rows of 5 with parents dotted along the walls or waiting by the door. When I walked in Coach Ike said what's up and said there was more room to sit inside. I shuffled through the back of the room and to the side near the kitchen where Eduardo (10-year-old player) was sitting on the table. Coach Lee was just starting his presentation to the kids in the room. There were about 35-40 kids at the meeting, with younger kids sitting on the floor and high school aged kids standing along the back wall. Most of the kids were listening closely, but the kids in the front were giggling, energetic, and goofing off throughout.

Coach Lee had a PowerPoint going and with multiple charts demonstrating the importance of unstructured play as being crucial for players to become masters of soccer. One slide consisted of a simple graph with the X axis being age of player and the y axis being number of hours. One arrow labeled "unstructured play" started at the top of the y axis as age of player goes up. The other arrow, labeled "deliberate practice" started at 0 on the y axis and slowly increased as the age of player gets to around 15-16 years old. Another slide had pictures of Magic Johnson, Pele, and Larry Bird and text that says they all became incredible players because of the many hours that they spent in unstructured sporting environments and had a growth mindset. Coach Lee repeatedly emphasized that deliberate play or structured and organized practice is not going to help kids continue to improve or become masters of the game. Fun, constant play, laughing, smiling, being nice to others, and being a good person were the key to constantly growing as a player.

After about 30 minutes, Coach Ike and the players left the room to self-organize unstructured play in the gym, while Coach Lee, Ramon, and Alexander continued to talk with the parents. In addition to logistics of communication, key dates, and costs, Coach Lee gave a few recommendations for parents when interacting with their children about soccer. 1) Take the pressure of the kids, it's their world and their game. 2) Be positive and only give feedback for good effort, no feedback about performance or the result of a game. 3)Watch other kids play and not just your own. After these recommendations Coach Lee reinforced the Kick It model of soccer development, "We're creating mountains of play so they can slide down and right up the hard "deliberate practice hill."

The hybrid aspects of Kick It are on display during this meeting because Coach Lee's words reflect motivations to develop elite and skilled players through a particular

model of play, training, and coaching that centers fun, participation and encouragement of positive social development through sport. Fun, unstructured play not only makes better soccer players, but it also helps kids become better people and in Coach Lee's words "prepared for work in life". Moreover, the relational ways in which Kick It develops its philosophy and group identity is linked to perceptions of other youth soccer environments and perceptions of hyper-competition and contemporary intensive parenting culture. Coach Lee attempts to directly push back against notions of overly involved parents (which are viewed as present at many other organized clubs) that pressure their children and ultimately take enjoyment, potential, creativity, and skill away from the game. Many parents and players choose to be a part of Kick It because of its culture, whether that be the motivations and orientations of parents, coaching style, or the fun playing environment.

Bob, a white parent with two step-children (Black/biracial) at Kick It, explained their choice to participate in Kick It in relation to prior experiences and perceptions of other organized travel clubs and the more relaxed vibe that surrounds Kick It.

> Bob: At a couple of the games, when the kids were really young, and we first were in soccer, it formed out opinion on what we wanted out of soccer too. And there were different ways to do it. So, that was another thing that I think really appealed to us about Kick It was that the coaches were quiet. They were on the side-line, they weren't screaming. All the parents were hanging out. They're friendly but they're not screaming at their kids, and then there's the polar opposite of that, which was the club team at the time which was just way over the top and the kids were really disrespectful.

Later in the interview, Bob talked a bit more about why the parents at Kick It stood out in comparison to other organized travel soccer clubs.

> Alex: You mentioned a little bit about the parenting vibe or culture of Kick It. How would you describe the culture? Is it laid back?

> Bob: Yeah, I would say so. I guess the other thing is that I felt like the parents that went there were intentional about going there. There's a lot of parents at rec centers that their kids play soccer because that's just the closest place for soccer. And there's nothing wrong with that, I don't think. But I felt like at Kick It, the parents were intentional about sending their kids because they bought into the idea… So, that felt nice. There were some parents at that time, who were driving from (distant suburb) in rush hour multiple days a week to bring their kids because they found it was that special of a place. We didn't have to drive that far, obviously, but it was nice to know that other parents shared the same values, I guess. When we got there we just hung out.
>
> Alex: How would you describe those values?
>
> Bob: I guess a lot of it was about free-play. About making it kid-centered. About making sure adult egos are taken out of it. The other thing was just about having fun. I think our kids had a lot of buy-in just on simple… I don't know if it's a gimmick, but inflatable things are a big deal. The fact that you don't have to stop playing and chase a ball on the side-line. The kids come home just absolutely pooped. They take a shower and they lie down on their bedroom floor. It's awesome. I think some of those things… just let them go. You don't have to have them all structured, and they figure things out.

Kick It's more relaxed and calmer vibe in terms of coaching and parent behavior stands out in comparison to other soccer communities. Bob appreciates that there are other like-minded parents who intentionally seek out Kick It's soccer environment. And the emphasis on unstructured play and fun goofy things like inflatable soccer fields matter not necessarily because of soccer development, but rather because the play environment at Kick It is so engaging that his kids healthily exert physical energy, which is good for their general well-being.[55] Bob is not the only parent who made observations and criticisms of parents and coaches at other clubs.

In the early stages of my fieldwork I attended and volunteered at Kick It's annual fundraiser/futsal tournament and I had multiple informal conversations with parents that I

[55] In our interview Bob also discussed how much he and his wife (both school teachers) were concerned about their own kids and kids in general being too structured and not having enough free time whether in school or outside of it.

was meeting for the first time. Cal, an Ethiopian-American parent with one son at Kick It told me the following.

> ***Fieldnote: Hanging out at the Registration Table***
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> *Cal and I spent about an hour helping team's check-in, complete player registration, and directing them to where their match was taking place in the gym. As we got talking, Cal told me that He wanted to be involved in Kick It because he did not like the hyper organized and serious environment of the programs. Kick It offered lots of play and it reminded him of how he played growing up. For him soccer isn't about cost, status etc… It's not about buying all the fancy gear and traveling as a group. Cal has plenty of criticism for people who take the game too seriously for these kids. Not happy about coaches who yell or organize too much. It's all about fun, before a certain type of structure or coaching. He talked about a coach at a local club and exclaimed "You don't need cones for 4-year-olds!" and said he who isn't good a coach because "he yells and makes kids cry."*

When I interviewed Cal about a year later, he repeated this sentiment and similar to Bob, also articulated his enjoyment of the relatively more relaxed parenting culture that surrounds Kick It. Specifically, that has made friends with other parents and that families happily hang out together outside of just attending their children's soccer trainings or games. For Cal and many parents, the social connections that their kids make coupled with the relationship among parents is part of what makes Kick It an excellent community.

In addition to community and positive social relationships with between families, for many parents, Kick It lives up to its goals of cultivating a fun soccer environment and coaching in a way that is socially appropriate. Approval of Kick It's coaching is not just based off criticisms of other bad coaching that exists in other soccer and sporting spaces. Such approval is also tied to the specific individual soccer outcomes. For instance, at that same tournament, I volunteered at the t-shirt table with Amy, a white mother with a 10-year-old and 8-year-old daughter at Kick It.

Fieldnote: T-shirt table

When I asked Amy how long they've been at Kick It she mentions her son Wes, and his love of Kick It. She or her husband drops him off every weekday after school and every day from 4-8 pm and he participates in all the summer camps. She asked me about my impressions of Kick It and mentioned that its and cool and unique to see the Kick It teams that were just made for this tournament have such a range of skill levels. Amy responded, Lee is a great coach and that he can make any non-athlete a solid soccer player.

Coaching and actually helping their children improve at soccer is still crucial to happiness with Kick It for many parents, which isn't dissimilar from organized travel soccer or elite youth soccer. Yet, parents, especially dads, value the ways players individually develop as soccer players. Focus on individual development is crucial and parents appreciate that Kick It generally does not focus the majority of its attention on building a team to compete in various leagues and competitions at young age groups. Sterling and Robert, fathers who each have two children that play at Kick It and have participated in organized travel soccer share similar criticism of organized travel soccer and praise of Kick It.

> Sterling: They put a lot of emphasis on developing groups, teams and developing. They sort of skip over the whole skill-development stage and go straight to 'we're going to put together a team and then we're going to try to get them to play as a group' instead of teaching kids how you control the ball. What I find, watching it for a while now… your average club player who doesn't do anything outside of club soccer will almost never develop unless they spend a lot of time on their own. Will never develop the same comfort with the ball. Will never develop the individual skills.

> Robert: My oldest was… she did train with a [organized travel] team. She pretty much did the standard club stuff. It drove me insane. Because those kids… It's just another system that clubs where it's all passing-based. As soon as you get the ball your goal is to pass it to someone else. There's very little skill development individually. Basically, they would stick my daughter who is tall and fast, up front. And boot the ball and ask her to run to get it. Which is how I played in high school in the eighties. Have we not evolved past booting it and running? That physical American crap game, which drives me crazy.

For Robert and Sterling, individual player development which is grounded in dribbling ability, technique, creativity and comfort with the ball, is lost and not taught to young players within many settings of organized travel soccer. Similar to the coaches at Kick It, these parents through knowledge of the sport and direct experience, reject a perceived dominant style of play at youth levels, which centers physical aggression, strength, directness, and winning irrelevant matches. Most of the parents at Kick It have experienced organized travel soccer and had a story that stood out as what's wrong the sporting environment, whether it be coaching, lack of player development, travel requirements, or style of play. While parents often had detailed critiques of the flaws of other soccer communities, they also articulated what individual player and skill development looked like to them.

> Robert: The biggest thing that I see that comes out of it is just the patience with the ball. You can't teach patience. It's hard to coach patience. And our kids… just that alone from free-play and having a million hours that they just learn the patience on the ball. And something like that I've always struggled with. That calmness of just working in the game, and I have the ball and I don't need to rush. I can just take it and do what I do. That is amazing to watch.

Players at Kick It also understand and enjoy the ways in which they are allowed to be creative, have fun, and individually develop through the game. Many do not articulate individual skill in terms of being calm on the ball, but rather their ability to dribble past people and do challenging yet creative skills. Yet, like parents and coaches they understand other environments of soccer as less fun, less creative, and less individually skillful. Luigi, a 16-year-old at the center told me the following:

> Alex: Do you guys play differently?
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> Luigi: Kick It is incredibly different. Just cause, just based on the fundamentals of free play and it's more dribbling, more skillful play. Where [specific organized

club], the club system in general, it's more textbook. "Pass here, here, here, then this guy shoots."

Alex: Yeah.

Luigi: It's not as creative. Kick It is really creative.

Alex: Did you kind of even know that when you were younger, and do you kind of realize that now?

Luigi: I realize it now, that playing here younger made me much more creative and so I can think of different, different solutions, rather than, "Pass this ball to this dude who's open back," or "Turn, beat a guy, then play a ball, a through-ball into goal.

When Kick It plays in matches against organized travel teams their comfort and calmness on the ball, and distinct style of play is often evident. In certain moments, the philosophy of fun, individual creativity, and less-direct coaching implemented by the staff and approval from parents is hard to miss.

Fieldnote: Kick It Style on Display

Onyama, a 13-year-old goalkeeper embodied Kick It's loose and creative style of play as well. For one, she played with her feet consistently, which is a rarity for young goalkeepers. Her teammates passed her the ball all the time, she did little clever dribbles and also played multiple difficulty splitting passes to teammates. The girls as a whole are displaying a very sophisticated level of play their division (4th). Additionally, Onyama adopted an old school, futsal, and now modern approach of playing keeper. In futsal, the keeper often pushes up to the halfway line or beyond to keep the opponents in their own end and to also rip shots from distance. In outdoor 11v11 this never happens, but professional goalkeepers move up about 10 yards away from the half-line to stop a counter attack. But Onyama took this modern approach to another level during the match.

She reminded me of the legendary Columbian keeper Higuata, who dribbled the ball like he was a creative attacking player. As the girls kept the ball their opponent's half of the field Emmy pushed all the way to the halfway line. She basically played as another defender and more than once she would win the ball and dribble towards the goal.

This type of loose positional play and freedom for players on the field is not the norm for most teams in organized youth soccer. The other team's playing style was very stifled and organized. The girls weren't particularly technical or skilled,

but they ran hard and only got near the Kick It end of the field through a turnover or a long direct kick up the field. Whenever Onyama touched the ball in front of her net with her feet and began dribbling the opposing coaches would constantly implore the girls to run hard and try to win the ball. "Pressure her! Pressure her!" Often the forwards responded to the direction and tried to pressure, but Onyama or another Kick It player would comfortably dribble around them or make a simple pass. As a proper strategy, the girls could have sat back and elected to press later down the field. The male, organized travel club coaches didn't recognize this and instead kept suggesting for their girls to pressure. Or basically, run harder.

Kick It's cultural characteristics of fun, skilled, and creative soccer development coupled with more laid back parents and hands-off coaches is evident through the experiences and understandings of its participants and in everyday observation. The ways in which soccer is understood, coached, and practiced is distinct at Kick It, but similar to sites like Lions FC and Archer high school, broader notions of community are also articulated and valued. The following statement from Robert about the community at Kick It summarizes the particular features of Kick It's group identity, it's relational dynamic and critique of mainstream youth soccer culture, while simultaneously being firmly rooted in an ideal of community that permeates multiple idiocultures of soccer.

> Robert: It's awesome. It's the best community ever. It's people that all have that mindset, that they know that club soccer is totally screwed up. That skills… It's interesting to see how much a mix it is of cultures. There's Columbians. There's Ethiopians.[56] All who have lived in America, so they have the dual perspective. But they've grown up either playing soccer, in the countries they were born in or whatever. It's an interesting mix. But they're overriding understanding is the skills of the player and the power of just playing the game on a daily basis. Freedom to just be… And that's one of the reasons I joined at first. When we went to one of the soccer… one of the Kick It games, and the parents cheered

[56] As mentioned in the previous chapter, Kick It has many families with one or two parents who are college educated immigrants. The center celebrates its cosmopolitan diversity and many parents seek out or find it appealing that there is this particular form of international and racial diversity at Kick It. The implications of such discourses and appreciation discussed more in chapter 5.

more for the moves on the field for any of the goals. The kid does a Maradona[57] and the crowd erupts. I've never seen that anywhere else. I've never. And it's a great group of people.

Discussion

In this section I have mapped the vibrant and complex social field of youth soccer, that similar to the work of Noel Dyck (2012), demonstrates that the social system and cultural practices of youth sport is ripe with substantive cultural meaning regarding notions of sporting development, childhood and youth development, and parenting culture. Anchored in long-term ethnographic fieldwork and in-depth interviews, in the last two chapters, I have offered a deeper dive into the varying and similar motivations, understandings, and daily cultural practices of soccer at four distinct and relational sites of youth soccer. The way each of these groups 'do' youth soccer is deeply important and tied to how they form a group identity, and very much reflective of what Gary Alan Fine (1987, 2012) identifies as idioculutures. Fine (1987, 2012) argues that every small group has its own lore and idioculture, which "consists of a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group, to which members can refer and use as a basis of further interaction, including drawing boundaries of group membership. Each of the soccer communities discussed in this chapter clearly have produced and constantly produce their own respective idiocultures" (125).

For Fusion Lake Academy, which represents elite youth soccer, it draws its group boundaries around norms of high-end performance, year-round professional like commitment, professional or collegiate soccer aspirations/outcomes, and competing on a

[57] Maradona is a famous move where the player does turns with the ball away from opponent through a fluid 360-degree pirouette on top of the ball. It is named after Diego Maradona, who did it in the 1986 World cup quarter final.

national level. Intensity of coaching, preparation, effort, and competition is a normative expectation within Fusion Lake. Coaches are very much motivated by developing players to better the overall professional potential of American soccer and to maintain a prestigious status within US soccer. Parents and players within Fusion Lake can have slightly different motivations because professional soccer is not desired by predominantly middle to upper-middle class families within the club. Instead, obtaining partial or full collegiate scholarships are central and the coaching and level of exposure to such opportunities are understood as important and a crucial part of the club's culture. Families take soccer seriously at Fusion Lake, but to meet a broader personal and future end, not for soccer's sake.

The link between participation in highly specialized, elite youth extracurricular activities and motivations to secure admission and scholarships for higher education has been documented as increasingly common amongst American families (Eckstein 2017; Levey-Freidman 2013). Levey-Freidman (2013) focuses on specialization and the development of competitive kid capital for elementary school children, and my observations of elite youth soccer's everyday intense, competitive, and specialized sporting environment reflects the norms of hyper competitiveness in youth sports at older age groups. This, coupled with families' causal talk of getting into college programs through elite youth soccer, signals the ways in which competitive capital and competitive childhoods continue throughout different stages of childhood and adolescence.

Yet, the coaches at Fusion Lake are not primarily concerned or are necessarily happy with only helping their players secure a partial or full scholarship to a university to play soccer. Rather, tension exists within Fusion Lake and Elite Youth soccer because

coaches want to make the club truly professional and match the standards of other professional soccer academies in the United States and the world. Structurally and organizationally, this means not being dependent on the funds of upper-and middle-class families, which in the eyes of coaches diminishes the talent pool and reduces their authority in establishing a consistently elite training environment.

Key actors (coaches/administrators/professional leagues) aiming to make youth sports more professional has not been documented or engaged with by scholars of youth sport in the United States. Instead, professionalization has mostly been understood more in terms of intensity, commitment, costs, and pipelines to collegiate sports (Eckstein 2017; Engh 2002; Levey-Friedman 2013). These observations are correct, but coaches in elite youth soccer want to create a truly professional like environment on and off the field in direct relation to professional soccer clubs around the world. This in part due to the recency of soccer of becoming professionally profitable and that the sport exists in a global and extremely competitive context where it is common for youth players to be understood as on a professional rather than collegiate tract. Elite youth soccer is very much shaped by and related to the goals of the United States Soccer Federation and Major League Soccer, which are grounded in professional and financial success on and off the field and have invested heavily in producing more young professional soccer players. Ultimately, I see this tension between goals of professionalization and the realities of competitive yet pay-to-play elite soccer as a new, yet particular mutation and dynamic of hyper competitive, extracurricular youth activities.

In Fine's (1987) multi-sited ethnographic study of five distinct little-league baseball teams, each team's idioculture is linked to their demographic backgrounds,

particular moral and religious beliefs, or specific ways players and coaches use language to socially bond on the field. Such patterns are key in the formation of idiocultures in youth soccer, but since my multi-sited ethnography is bounded within the Twin Cities, it is clear that idiocultures are constructed in direct and overt relation to one another. While Fusion Lake and elite youth soccer is very much immersed in a relationship between pay-to-play high end competition and possible college admission, Lions FC is an idioculture with families and coaches from similarly privileged socio-economic positions, but where different values, goals, and motivations are articulated in direct response to perceived norms elite youth soccer and other organized travel clubs.

Coaches, parents, and players clearly discuss the goals and purpose of participating in Lions FC because of its distinct cultural qualities that are not present in elite youth soccer and other large organized travel clubs. Lions FC understands itself to be small, communal, and to primarily care about the personal and social development of players (children). Though they compete eight months of the year at competitive levels of organized youth soccer, coaches and parents emphasize that the club intentionally works to never succumb to the faults of other hyper-competitive and large clubs. Specifically, this means not regularly changing players and rosters, developing a technical and collective style of play, encouraging long-term social relationships, and understanding/celebrating soccer as a tool for broader and positive social and personal development.

Lions FC's positions itself in contrast to hyper-competitive soccer environments, but it still reproduces elements of competitive kid capital development and intensive, strategic parenting culture (Levey-Friedman 2013; Lareau 2011). Many of the players at

Lions FC are specialists because of their consistent commitment to soccer throughout the year, and parents put concerted and substantive thought, research, time and material resources in order for their children to be a part of Lions FC. Moreover, the club's celebration of players developing important life skills and friendships as they matriculate to college because of academics not soccer is tied to what Coakley (2011) describes as youth sport 'evangelists.' One key claim of this socially popular perspective is that youth sport has a "guardian angel effect" that will guide young people in success-oriented directions throughout their lives (Coakley 2011). From this dominant discourse, sport can achieve such an effect because it "inspires educational achievement, facilitates the formation of social networks, and fosters aspirations that transcend sport" (Coalter 2007; Coakley 2011, p. 308).[58] At Lions FC, positive youth sports development narratives are frequently reproduced and crucial to its group identity. Academic achievement and symbols of normative middle to upper-middle class life course are casually linked to the culture of the soccer program and the values of families at Lions FC while simultaneously obscuring the social advantages and resources that exist for a predominantly secure middle to upper-middle class social group.

Whereas Lions FC is an idioculture of soccer where community and positive youth sports development are articulated in a way where class and racial privilege is taken for granted; Archer High School is a soccer community where dynamics of racial, ethnic, immigrant, and class identity are front and center and inform its group identity. The demographic composition of the boys' team (majority players of color and many

[58] Coakley (2011) argues that there is no empirical evidence that supports the neoliberal belief in the positive power of youth sports with regards to personal development. There is not enough research on the conditions that allow for positive youth sports development to thrive.

recent immigrants) very much reflects the broader school and is tied to larger systems of residential segregation, education, and social inequality. The structure of interscholastic soccer allows for various immigrants of color, who are often working class and predominately play in self-organized sites of soccer, to participate in a formally sanctioned sporting competition at minimal economic cost. And this soccer social structure allows for Archer to represent itself and interact with other schools and communities that occupy different social positions.

Unlike organized travel soccer and elite youth soccer, the people that play and support Archer soccer are much more tied to their neighborhood and the public-school system. Moreover, players and parents at Archer do not strategically select to attend Archer because of its ability to develop soccer players. But similar to other sites of soccer, discourses of community, family, and positive youth sports development are present, and crucial to the culture of Archer soccer. Part of the mission of Archer soccer reflects how interscholastic sport is understood by many education and sports practitioners/scholars as an important tool for participants because of its connections to strong academic performance, physical health, and positive social relationships (Bolter & Weiss, 2012; Côté, 2002; DuBois, 1986; Oughton & Tacon 2007). Additionally, because many of the players come from marginalized racial, ethnic, and class identities and attend a school that on occasion gets public notoriety for physical violence, there is an undercurrent of soccer at Archer operating as tool of 'risk prevention'—a common narrative that youth sport programs have organized around over beginning in the 1980s (Bessone 1991; Coakley 2002; Hartmann 2016; Pitter & Andrews 1997).

But what stands out as a key feature of Archer's idioculture is that its message and social practices of family and community on and off the field deeply tied to representing and belonging to a broader social community that is situated in relation to larger systems of inequality and marginalizing discourses and stereotypes. More racially and class privileged idiocultures of soccer produce and construct community within a fairly insular social group where attention and judgement from people outside of the soccer group is rare. This is not the case for Archer, as participants are keenly aware of how their identities, social groups and school are perceived and stigmatized in relation to other schools and within the Twin Cities metro area more broadly. Since Archer soccer represents a community that is more than just 18 players, responsibility is a distinct dynamic that imbues this idioculture of the sport. There is pressure on the players at Archer to be successful on the field and be a source of pride for their community. Soccer, rather than an avenue for just positive personal development or sporting development, is actually a way for marginalized youth to directly push back and disrupt negative of themselves and peers through a combination of competitive success on the field displays of positive social behavior.

At Kick It, a representation of alternative/hybrid soccer, the presence racial, class, and ethnic stigma, power, collective identity and representation are not explicitly present or overtly crucial to its group identity. But as mentioned in chapter 1, there is a level of cosmopolitan racial and ethnic diversity at Kick It and a prominent admiration of the style of play, individual skills, and unstructured play environment that is associated with different national and ethnic groups in the Twin Cities and the world. Yet, it's idioculture is very much relationally constructed to the three sites of soccer discussed in the last two

chapters. Kick It wants to develop top players like elite youth soccer, but they want to achieve such development through methods of fun, creativity, and unstructured play. Similar to Lions FC and Archer they place an emphasis on community, positive social relationships and including players of multiple skill levels. But unlike those sites of youth soccer, Kick It strives to not primarily focus on team performance, but rather the individual player.

The actual way soccer is coached and played, and a rejection of overly organized and adult-directed soccer is very important to Kick It coaches, parents, and players and is crucial to its group identity. All other sites of soccer are understood to be flawed in their approach to teaching and experiencing the game. Kick It coaches believe their peers at other clubs are too preoccupied with team building, winning individual matches at young ages, and actually contribute to burnout and hinder player freedom, enjoyment, and skill development. Players at Kick It understand other soccer environments to be too rigid, lacking freedom, and fun. And their unique approach to playing is evident during free play, trainings, and matches. Kick It's culture of explicitly centering fun offers interesting linkages to other scholars who theorize the sociological importance of fun (Benzecry and Collins 2014; Fine and Corte 2017; Goffman 1961; Starbuck and Webster 1991). Within Kick It, fun is linked to social cohesion (Baarts 2009), integral to social interactions (Goffman 1961), and a collective project (Fine and Corte 2017).

Parents at Kick It share similar criticism of other soccer communities' focus on competition, overly involved parents, poor coaching, and unsophisticated style of play. They are also frustrated with and rejection of hyper-competitive youth activities, intensive parenting, and over-structured childhood. And, they act on this frustration by

seeking out such fun and unstructured soccer environments for their children. But while these mostly middle-class families reject elements of intensive parenting (Faircloth 2014), highly scheduled and structured activities (Lareau 2011), and competitive socialization (Levey-Friedman), many of the parents at Kick It still mobilize particular dominant parenting strategies to get their children involved in this unique soccer environment. They are intentional, strategic, and involved and they conduct research, drive from different parts of the city to participate in this alternative sporting environment. Even in partial rejection of dominant parenting culture and youth sports/extracurricular activity culture, parents at Kick It implement a morphed variation of concerted cultivation and intensive parenting in order to navigate the field of youth soccer to their own satisfaction.

Conclusion

In this section (chapters 1, 2, and 3), I have mapped the field of youth soccer and offered a deep dive into four idiocultures that inhabit it. I demonstrated that youth soccer is more nuanced and complex than its common and popular binary conception. There is substantive relationality between different sites of youth soccer. Such relationality is tied to how larger systems of economic stratification, broader social categories and identities structure this social field, but also in the ways people interpret and practice the sport in everyday life. Similar to Dyck (2012), I have demonstrated the differing roles, motivations, and experiences of participants in youth soccer that exist within a highly organized, structured, yet varied social field that is youth sport. By focusing in depth on particular idiocultures of youth soccer I highlight that small groups can often make particular social and cultural meaning that is in direct and overt relation to other

idiocultures that operate in close proximity. Sport, and particular youth soccer because of its popularity, shows the utility of a multi-sited ethnographic approach in bridging field level analysis to detailed, everyday observations of small group cultures.

In the next section I focus more on how key social categories and discourses of gender and race and of inequality are deeply embedded and impactful throughout these idiocultures and the socio-cultural field of youth soccer more broadly.

Chapter 4: Boys, Girls, and the Masculine Center of Youth Soccer

A Personal Blindspot

When I first came up with the idea for this project, I was not very mindful about the relationship between gender and youth soccer culture in the United States. I was and continue to be a fan and supporter of women's soccer (following women's world cups and professional women's leagues, playing together and watching/supporting my sister perform on the field), and was aware of the ways in which soccer marginalizes girls and women throughout the world. But admiration for women's soccer and women's sport in general did not guarantee that I automatically developed research questions that centered gender. This blind spot indicated my own privilege and lack of reflexivity about the ways in which I take masculinity for granted in the sport.

This blind spot initially carried into my research, as I did not question and give attention to why there was much more popular discourse and resources being invested into improving US men's soccer at all levels of the game. I did not grapple with the ways in which gender and race intersect when pundits, journalists, and coaches lament the lack of Black and Latino boys at elite levels of the sport. Nor did I ask myself why such calls for more racial inclusion and reduction of class and racial barriers rarely appeared in discourse surrounding women's soccer in the US. Fortunately, it just took a few months in the field for me to realize that there was no way to complete holistic sociological analysis without asking questions that center gender. Observing how boys and girls play and understand soccer, how male coaches discuss strategies of coaching girls in comparison to boys, and how mothers and fathers interacted within different spaces of the sport made it impossible to miss how gender is a fundamental aspect of this social field.

Popular and Critical Social Narratives about Gender and Soccer in the United States

The relationship between gender and soccer in the United States has been labeled as exceptional and distinct in comparison to other national and continental contexts of the sport (Adams 2011; Markovitz and Hellerman 2003). In the global sporting hierarchy, soccer holds a dominant position that is heavily imbued with hegemonic masculinity and a physical culture that centers men and the subordination of women (Adams 2011; Harris 2009; Clayton 2005). In contrast to soccer's global reputation, United States soccer has been characterized, both as a sport where hegemonic masculinity and the marginalization/subordination of women are not as central to the sport's culture (Adams 2011).

This in part can be explained through the social positioning of soccer in relation to nation, politics, and the broader US sporting landscape. Historically, in the American imagination, soccer has been deemed as a second-tier sport in comparison to the 'big 3' of football, baseball, and basketball (Bairner 2001; Markovitz and Hellerman 2003). Soccer gained second tier status due to its foreign heritage and isolationist and nativist narratives that positioned soccer as outside of an American identity as explicitly different than aristocratic Europe (Markovitz 1998; Narcotta-Welp 2016; Sugden 1994). The 'big 3' sports were very much understood as native sports that were deeply tied to notions of physical prowess, rugged individualism, and in turn the production of American masculinity.[59] Whereas soccer has been viewed as having little national tradition of

[59] While the big 3 sports were celebrated and identified as quintessentially national sports. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s soccer was associated with communism because of its entrenched popularity amongst ethnic immigrants. This coupled with the Red Scare in the US further stigmatized the game as other, unmanly, and inappropriate for "real" Americans. Though this form of rhetoric surrounding soccer has substantively diminished, it still pops up from time to

masculine prowess and the sport has been considered at odds with hypermasculine American sporting culture, especially when compared to the sporting norms and physical requirements tied to a dominant sport such as American football (Sugden 1994; Narcotta-Welp 2016).

The combination of soccer being understood as outside of American sport and the lack of men's soccer success on an international stage created the conditions for a sport that fails to reproduce American sporting masculinity and the nation as a whole (Puar 2007). While soccer in the rest of the world advances conservative and dominant definitions of manhood, in the US soccer is associated with a particular alternative articulation of masculinity and an inverted gender dynamic. David Andrews (1999) and Paul Guilianotti (1999) note that as soccer became socially imagined and connected to suburbia and upper-middle class lifestyle and more distant from immigrant communities, the sport started to connote sophistication and worldliness often associated with an emerging white, middle to upper-middle class cultural disposition. In this context and Pierre Bourdieu's framework, soccer became an "elective luxury" and took on new meaning for wealthy suburban families in search of distinction (i.e. taste of urbanity beyond the US, and soccer's relevance in elitist colleges and Universities), and as a consequence produced a seemingly more sophisticated articulation of sporting masculinity (Narcotta-Welp 2016).

Soccer's unusual and historically marginalized position in the US male-dominated sports landscape created an opportunity for women to carve out a space to succeed in the game and de-center gender hierarchy within soccer, and even define the sport in the US

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time. For example, in 2014 conservative pundit Ann Coulter (regularly criticizes soccer for its "foreign roots, liberal affinity, and emasculated approach to sport (Narcotta-Welp 2016).

as a women's game (Narcotta-Welp 2016). Today, US soccer has developed an intellectual and popular reputation and image as a more gender equitable sporting arena because of a few social realities. First, at the youth and recreational level, 48% of registered players with US Youth Soccer, or 1.4 million are girls (2014). Other historians of the sport have noted that soccer participation rates for boys and girls at different age groups are now nearly even because of the exponential rise in the number of American girls playing soccer in recreational leagues, high schools, and organized/competitive travel teams (Collins 2006; Markovitz & Hellerman 2003). This rapid rise in girls' participation, which occurred primarily between 1980-2000, provided a solid foundation for women's' soccer to be prominent at the collegiate, professional, and international level. Such levels of participation coupled with interpretation and enforcement of Title IX at the collegiate level is tied to the growth of women's soccer as an intercollegiate sport. Today, there are 1,038 NCAA women's soccer and 27,811 women playing the sport at this level (Irick 2018).[60]

At the national and international level, the United States Women's National Team (USWNT) is extremely popular and has been an international powerhouse for three decades. World Cup championships, Olympic medals, corporate sponsorship, and substantive media coverage are considered normal, and players are on the team are considered sporting superstars and icons. The USWNT, while not as popular as dominant men's sports (basketball, football, baseball) surpasses the US Men's National Team (USMNT) in terms of television viewership, attendance, popularity, and on-the-field

[60] Soccer is the third highest sport in terms of teams and players for women's sport. It just trails track and field in terms of number of participants. Volleyball and basketball are the other sports who have slightly more official teams across the NCAA.

success.[61] The USWNT has been popularly celebrated as an achievement for women in sports and symbolic for gender equality. Yet, as mentioned earlier with regards to soccer becoming an "elective luxury" and form of distinction for privileged families; the USWNT's success and image is very much tied up with privatized organized travel soccer culture, middle-class suburban life and a celebration of white, heterosexual femininity (Cole and Giardina 2013; Narcotta-Welp 2015). So despite the USWNT, and soccer in the US, being popularly understood revered as a progressive, inclusive, and a model for women's sport; there is an undercurrent of journalistic and academic awareness and critique of the USWNT and girls soccer in being defined by whiteness, a pay to play structure, and upper-middle class suburban womanhood (McGovern 2017; Narcotta-Welp 2016; Van Epps 2016; Yang 2015).

Questions and Road Map for the Chapter

My process of working through my privileged gender positionality within the gendered context that surrounds soccer in the United States, combined with my multi-year immersion into different spaces of youth soccer culture has provided a base for analyzing the sport as a gendered social arena. In this chapter, my findings are structured around the following questions: 1) How is masculinity constructed, reproduced, and contested in youth soccer 2) What is the role of gender in relationship to unstructured/pick-up soccer environments? 3) How do women and girls articulate their experiences in the sport? 4) How does gender inform discourses of coaching and player

[61] Such popularity does not mean that gender equity exists within the sport at the highest levels. Currently, the USWNT has filed a law-suit against the US soccer federation for gender-based discrimination. Issues center around compensation, revenue-sharing, and equal treatment regarding facilities and training (Hays 2019).

development? In terms of data, I mostly rely on my ethnographic observations at Kick It because gender was quite regularly discussed and salient due to the frequency of co-gendered soccer. Additionally, my time spent as a coach for a U12-15 boys' team at Kick It provided ample opportunity to see dynamics of masculinity through peer socialization. The rest of the data comes from my interviews with coaches at Kick It, boys who play at Kick It, and girls who play interscholastic soccer.

To answer the first question, I discuss how boys, ages 11-17, at Kick It (alternative/hybrid soccer), perform masculinity as they socialize with one another on the field and play soccer in a particular aesthetic style that emphasizes individual creativity, flair, and dribbling ability. Then I focus on co-gender environments of soccer that are prevalent at Kick It and discuss the ways in which, despite good intentions and hopes for equitable play, girls can be pushed to the periphery of the game. I supplement these observations by analyzing informal conversations with girls at Kick It, interviews with girls who play in interscholastic soccer and a coach (who is a woman) involved in various sites of youth soccer, who are very much in tune with how gender impacts their experiences in co-ed, unstructured, and organized environments of the sport. To answer the final question, I highlight the ways in which male coaches at Kick It articulate how they approach coaching girls and boys is messily linked to hegemonic ideas of inherent gender difference. To conclude the chapter, I situate my findings within a broader scholarship about sport's historical foundations as a male preserve that centers hegemonic masculinity.

Youth and Performances of Masculinity at Kick IT

When boys at Kick It, who participated in the meat and potatoes program, moved from playing at the recreational center in unstructured and low intensity environments to more formal and competitive games against other organized travel teams, certain persistent social actions and dynamics became evident. In nearly every match I stood on the sideline and acted as coach for a boys' team between the ages of 12-16 there was constant chatter before, during, and even after the game about the skills and physical abilities of their opponent. Moreover, official competitions and games provided more opportunity for players to talk about their respective soccer performance and display a certain disposition of intensity and competitiveness.

Field note: Missing easy chances to score

This match was 20-30 minutes away in the suburbs at a high-end athletic facility that has fields for miles (grass, baseball fields, a basketball facility). This is a sign of the booming private youth sports industry. When we got to the complex Christian's dad, Eduardo, pointed out "man this field is nice, look at this grass". Edwin (13 years old) even said, "this is way nicer than our field."

Before the game, six of the boys--Antoine, Christian, Ethan, Edwin, Kevon, and Gyasi, a tight group of friends, whom have more overt personalities, were bragging about how many goals they each were going to score. Confidence and laughs were prominent, and the game was a very easy one for Kick It, as the boys were much more skilled and even more athletic than a lot of the kids on the opposing team. At the end of the game, the score was lopsided in favor of Kick It and could have even been worse.

But even though the game was not close, about half of the boys on the team were consistently getting frustrated when one of their teammates missed a chance to score a goal or turned the ball over. For instance, when the game was 4-0 there was a sequence when Gyasi shot the ball way over the goal with little pressure from the defense and one minute later Brandon (another player on the team had a 1v1 with the keeper but just dribbled the ball into the goalie, Kevon said out loud "Man, you have to score that!" And Casey, who was on the sideline, muttered to the other three players and me, who were standing on the sideline, "How are we missing?!"

Later in the match, Kevon had a chance to make the game 6-0 by converting a penalty kick. He decided to go for full power and blasted the ball over the cross-bar. It wasn't even close. Edwin yelled out in a combination of disbelief, frustration, and amusement, "How did you miss that!"

It is common for boys at Kick It to act like this when their teammates fail to achieve a successful outcome on the field, whether that be scoring a goal, completing a pass, or controlling the ball. Many of the boys on this team often present themselves as players who consistently make the right play on the field and never mess up a skill move or chance to score in a game. Pre-game, during the game, and after the game, the boys are assertive in their understanding of themselves as individually skillful and dominant at the game with almost an air of soccer invincibility. Amusingly, the boys' consistent self-presentation of soccer superiority is regularly disrupted by the sport itself. This happened in the same match discussed above.

Field note: Missing Goals Continued

Ethan, who for most of the game was criticizing his teammates for not scoring what he thought were easy goals had an opportunity to score from 5 yards away with his left foot on pretty much an empty net. It was an incredibly easy chance, but as the ball rolled across his body he swung with his left foot, he mis-hit the ball and popped it up high and wide. I laughed out loud at the miss because of how much talking and big-upping Ethan and the other boys were doing the whole match. When Ethan came off the field, I said to him "you can't talk about people missing chances again" and he replied humbly "yeah, you're right". After the game I also brought up our team's inflated ego when it came to scoring goals and making mistakes on the field. "So how many easy chances did we all miss tonight" There were a lot of sheepish laughs and comments "a lot!" I then said, "so we're all gonna miss chances even seemingly easy ones, so there is nothing good or accurate when we get frustrated with each other when missing a chance to score." There were nods in agreement, but whether or not the message stuck was still to be determined.

Over time, I saw this as a particular masculine social performance amongst boys because I rarely saw girls at Kick It talk about their opponents' abilities, joke and criticize their teammates for a missed goal in a competitive game, or constantly talk themselves up

as dominant and nearly perfect soccer players. Whereas, teenage boys repeated a consistent script when they played in organized matches. Masculine social performance was demonstrated by the boys at Kick It in non-competitive soccer settings too. Though instead of competitive frustration, playful joking and demonstration of skill were central.

Field Note: Unstructured Play

I stopped by the center for about one hour before a meat and potatoes session began as a lively pick-up futsal game was unfolding in the gym. There were 12 kids (11 boys and 1 girl) rotating in out of the game after a team scored. The game had a range of ages participating (11-15). I sat down to watch and as soon as I entered the room, Paul, Lionel, and Marcus immediately started egging me on to participate in the game. "Alex, are you gonna play? Come on… play!" I responded "nah, the game looks full", but that just encouraged the boys to trash talk. Marcus joked, "Oh, you don't want to play because you know I'll meg you!" As the pick-up play continued Lionel sat down next to me and said, "Alex, you better get in the next game. Or are you scared of me making you fall down?"

It was common for boys at Kick It to try and one-up and/or tease coaches about their soccer abilities. Other times, I did join in unstructured pick-up play at Kick It and boys would consistently seek me out and try to dribble by me in a creative or skillful fashion. If they succeeded it would be a big deal because of the age difference and the general playful/sporting embarrassment that occurs when a defender gets "schooled' by an attacker. And whenever a move failed to work, boys such as Marcus and Lionel would often then resort to playful physicality (shoves in the back, grabbing of arms, bear-hugs). Such play-fighting happened with other young adult male coaches at the center too, which reflected the big brother-little brother vibe amongst boys and male coaches at the center.[62]

[62] Girls at Kick It had somewhat similar dynamics with coach Michelle and a few would socially tease some of the adult male coaches. But this was on display with much less frequency and not as tied directly to a particular soccer action. I did not observe girls at Kick It actively seeking out ways to nut-meg or embarrass Coach Michelle during soccer action.

Exerting a form of sporting dominance and soccer bravado was very common amongst boys at Kick It. At Kick It, beating your opponent with a skill move is a source of pride, status, and public appraisal. It is cool to be skillful and to show off those foot skills. For the person who was beat by a clever touch, spin, feint, or nutmeg, it is an embarrassing sports moment. The boys at Kick consistently verbally and physically respond when one of their peers performs a clever and skillful move against an opponent. The following fieldnote from a match highlights the way masculinity and the performance of it is on display.

Field note: The Boys go OOOOOOHHH

The 10-13-year-old boys and girls are playing a self-organized "tournament". There are two teams of five waiting on the sideline watching and waiting their turn to enter and two other teams are playing. During the run of play Gysai, dribbles past three kids and scores a goal, including one nutmeg of a kid. It is an impressive piece of skill. As soon as Gysai gets around the first defender, Amir, a 12-year-old boy who is sitting on the bleachers, lets out a loud "OOOOHHHH" and starts playfully hitting his teammate next to him on the bench. After Gyasi puts the ball into the net to complete his mazy run with the ball, Amir and all of his teammates yell out a collective "oooooh" and Amir follows up loudly "that was dirty, Gyasi!"

This type of interaction and vocal approval of a move and in turn embarrassment of an opponent is frequent at Kick It. It is something sought out and celebrated by boys at the center and even encouraged by coaches. Such moments are sources of laughter, enjoyment, fun, and a product of the many hours of play/practice put in by youth at the center. Performances of bravado and celebration of individual skillful and creative sporting dominance over an opponent is common in many sporting environments where boys and men are central. The ways in which many boys interact, showboat and brag during unstructured soccer at Kick It looks very similar to youth and adult basketball culture, and other pick up soccer environments around the world. However, when boys

and girls play in the same unstructured pick-up environment, boys and girls at Kick It do not respond or act in similar ways after moments of soccer skill or showmanship.

Co-Gendered Soccer at Kick It: Tensions of Unstructured, Pick-Up Play

Fieldnote: Matt and Natalie

There were about 20 kids at the center today and there were two 4v4 coed games going on in the gym. Matt, a 13-year-old boy was on a team against Natalie, a 12-year-old girl. Both of them are very skilled and experienced players. Matt had the ball at far end of the court near his own goal and Natalie, approached to play defense. Matt did his favorite move, which he told me about a few weeks prior during a trip to a national tryout in Kansas City. In the soccer world, this move is known as "la croqueta"—to quickly shift the ball from his right to left foot, while still moving forward in one fluid motion. He did la croqueta and put the ball through Natalie's legs for a meg. Matt said "ooooh" and laughed as he continued to dribble down the gym court.

Natalie was not pleased with being megged and she turned and chased him with determination. Maybe two minutes later, Matt got the ball near the wall and tried a fairly outlandish skill move where he spins and flicks the ball while turning. He pulled off the skill and again megged Natalie as she approached him to defend. As Matt was eagerly showcasing his many skills, his teammate Paul reacted with a sly grin and soft laugh. None of the four girls playing in the game responded in similar fashion. They did not acknowledge Matt's move.

After the second skillful move, Matt again laughed, let out an "ooohh" and sort of taunted Natalie. It wasn't excessive, but it was a clear taunt. Natalie did not appreciate the taunt, chased Matt down and gave him a hard 2-handed shove in the back. The push didn't lead to Matt falling over, and he laughed and kept playing.

After the game ended Matt did try to apologize by shaking hands with Natalie. Natalie was having none of it and walked with a purpose and near defiance to the other side of the court to start playing in another game.

Matt successfully performed the idealized individually creative, skillful type of play that Kick It hopes to cultivate. His moves and skillful sporting dominance, while normally celebrated very overtly by peers, induced a different social reaction within a co-gendered environment. The girls did not approve or praise such showboating and exertions of sporting dominance that can be read as masculine preening. Paul's muted

reaction and the girls' active rejection of positive acknowledgment of Matt's moves indicated that a social norm of Kick It had been violated. During unstructured pick up play at Kick It, it is rare to see an older kid, and more specifically, an older boy who is experienced and skillful, a girl of similar or younger age look "soccer silly". Natalie and her peers' reaction to Matt megging her a second time and exerting sporting dominance indicated that such a masculine social performance was in fact a violation of status, skill, and power. It's ok for Matt to work on such moves, but not at that moment against that particular opponent.

During many observations of unstructured, pick-up, and co-ed soccer at Kick It, I encountered other moments where the social position of girls was marginal. The following note highlights how unstructured youth soccer is gendered and that co-gendered soccer environments can center boys and a seemingly masculine form of sport and play.

Fieldnote: *Sally is Barely Getting the Ball*

Sally, a 9-year-old, who is really skilled, eager to play, and always active on the field was the only girl participating in free play before the more formal training session began. She was on a team with 4 other boys and I watched her team play for ten minutes straight. During that entire session, she touched the ball less than 5 times. In comparison, her male teammates touched the ball with regularity and 2 of the more skilled players got dozens of touches on the ball. Now because the winning team does stay on, this system does lend itself to more talented and athletic boys dominating the game because they want to keep playing. Additionally, the playing style and philosophy lend itself to kids at the younger ages just trying to individually dribble at an opponent. This happened in this case with two of the more skilled boys on Sally's team dominating play. However, even with the desire to win and stay on the court, the boys would still pass other boys. I did not count one exchange where Sally got the ball passed to by a teammate. She would call for the ball and try to win it herself, but she was not centered in this unstructured and free play game. As Sally was playing in the pick-up game there were a handful of girls at the community center, but they were all opting out of playing in this free play scrimmage and instead were waiting for the formal training session to start.

During unstructured play at Kick It, if the gender breakdown between boys and girls was even or if girls were in the minority, it was common to observe girls being on the periphery of play. When coaches (90% of the time it is male coach) are present during unstructured play, they do not intervene or comment on play. The hands-off approach coupled with a style of play that is centered around individual dribbling ability and exuding skillful dominance over other individuals creates a seemingly gender neutral and organic environment of soccer. While this style of play and coaching may have many soccer benefits in terms of skill, creativity, and fun it is also vulnerable to broader gender norms and power that exist within sport, and as a consequence, boys are often at the center of the game, while girls try to maneuver on the edges to get involved and participate.

Girls who play at Kick It and girls who play in interscholastic soccer are aware of how gender shapes unstructured and pick-up spaces of soccer. Angela, a Black 18-year-old who played for Lowland high school and various organized travel soccer teams—including Fusion Lake—actively sought out pick-up games in her neighborhood and trained on her own in an attempt to improve her game. She explained that whenever she played in unstructured/pick-up soccer she was always the only girl and that it was extremely hard for to get her teammates and other girls to come and play outside of an official and organized practice session.

Alex: Have you ever tried to get other girls to come play pick-up?

Angela: Yeah, plenty of times.

Alex: Why do you think that happens?

Angela: In Littlefield, the girls play for fun so anything extra outside of the season… no

> Alex: That's interesting, because to some people you can understand pick-up as fun.
>
> Angela: Oh yeah, that's true.
>
> Alex: But you think it's seen by your teammates [girls] as 'we're going to go play pick-up to get better'?
>
> Angela: Yeah.

Angela understands her teammates as not interested in pick-up soccer because they aren't as interested in becoming better soccer players. From this perspective, pick-up and unstructured soccer is viewed by girls in her soccer world as extra work and not as fun. Rather it is for people that are passionate about the game and interested in their own personal soccer development. I also infer from Angela's experiences, that pick-up soccer is understood as predominately male and masculine space. It isn't necessarily 'for' or welcoming of soccer players who are girls. Later in the interview, Angela talked about what environments of soccer she liked and the differences between formal organized practices and unstructured pick-up games.

> Angela: I really like organized games more, but I like pick-up because you don't have to pass a ball and playing with boys, you really don't pass the ball at all. So, you're working on your own stuff. And they never pass the ball to girls anyway so when you get the ball, you have to make it worth it.

Similar to what I observed at Kick It; Angela spoke to how girls often are pushed to the edges during unstructured, pick-up soccer. She understands boys to not include girls in the game — "never pass the ball to girls anyway"— and that it's on each individual to get the ball, dribble, and figure out a way to make the experience worthwhile. Angela's experiences and recognizes that boys somewhat dictate

unstructured and pick-up soccer and that the way soccer is played in those settings often benefits boys over girls.

Girls at Kick It also articulated similar experiences within co-gender soccer environments. The following field note is from a meat and potatoes meeting where coaches and players held collective conversations about goals, expectations, and things to improve on at Kick It.

Field note: An Almost Impromptu Focus Group

This was a somewhat different meat and potatoes meeting because I was requested by Coach Kelly to help facilitate a group conversation with the high school age kids about the culture at Kick It and what everyone wanted to accomplish for the upcoming fall and winter season.

About 11 high school players showed up to the meeting (6 boys and 5 girls) and we sat on the floor in the workout room, and a few parents sat in to listen to the conversation as well. I had a handful of questions/prompts that along with the other coaches I had come up with. The kids were fairly quiet in this setting of interaction, which wasn't surprising given that 95% of the time the center is theirs and they are for the most part dictating social interaction amongst themselves. For each general question the kids wrote down their answers in words or pictures and then we shared what we answered as a group. We spent most of the time talking around three major points: 1) What do you like about Kick It and what do you get out it? 2) What are your goals for the season? 3) What can we improve at as a group at Kick It?

Multiple kids liked that they could be creative, try things on the field and be skillful without a lot of criticism from coaches or peers. Many, such as Antoine and Dan talked about soccer skill and improving as players. Claudia, 16, talked about striving to be a smarter player (more tactical awareness, effective and efficient soccer decisions on the field). In this part of the conversation, the philosophy and culture of Kick It was validated by the kids.

When the conversation shifted towards what could improve at the center, a handful of things were brought up by all of the kids. A few kids wanted kids to take training a more seriously and show up on time. Others wanted teams during pick-up play to be more even, and some said that coaches needed to communicate and organize better when it came to participation in tournaments. The newer boys to the center (Dee and Stewart), talked about kids being better at including less experienced players

But what stood out was that the five girls in the group, immediately brought up that boys hog the ball and that girls get less touches during unstructured pick-up play. Claudia, Becky, Lindsey, all individually criticized boys at the center for not sharing the ball. "Boys need to share the ball in free play" "It is really annoying when they just pass to themselves". We spent a good 5-10 minutes on this pattern at the center. I asked the kids if they had any solutions to this problem, and most of the suggestions were just requests for the boys to be better and share.

The voices and frustrations of girls who have played at Kick It for years indicates a gender-based tension that is constantly present at Kick It. They are aware and criticize how their soccer space is dictated by boys. This is especially important because Kick It is a community that believes deeply in the positive power of unstructured soccer and little direct coaching for all soccer players and intentionally tries to have boys and girls play together as much as possible. The staff at Kick It are aware that many girls are not as involved in unstructured, pick-up soccer in comparison to boys. In my interview with Coach Ramon, he believed that the Kick it was inclusive for girls and that some really thrived under the more unstructured, co-gendered, and hands-off coaching environment. But at the same time, he recognized that girls have generally been discouraged or excluded from sports participation and that there are gendered patterns within Kick It.[63]

> Coach Ramon: So, we're so used to getting a lot more boys, and the girls were always tough to get them going and, like I said —
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> Alex: What do you mean by like tough to get them going? Do you mean like get them into the system?
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> Coach Ramon: Get them into the center, get them come to free play. Get them to get involved with the boys.

[63] "Bigger picture, I feel like the girls have always been excluded by the guys, you know, by the guys or by the parents, just because they don't want their daughter playing with the boys or, you know, kind of that social aspect."

Staff at Kick It spoke quite often about gender representation during unstructured pick-up play. They want girls to be active and half of the population of kids playing in pick-up and unstructured settings. And there was regular concern for how the girls who attended various Kick It programs were actually engaged in relation to their philosophy of play and development.

Field note: Staff meeting

Coaches Ramon, Xavier, Kelley, and I all met in the shared coaches' office to go over how the summer camps and summer leagues went and goals for the upcoming fall session. The conversation moved from how to engage kids that may be less interested in soccer, to creating more fun and imaginative games (soccer and non-soccer wise) to encourage vibrant and active social play. Coach Ramon mentioned that the kids as a whole responded best to the unstructured games and unstructured time in general. Coach Kelley agreed for the most part, but then complicated Ramon's assessment of unstructured play working for every kid. He brought up that girls may not play as much and be involved within the game if it's just unstructured play. "Within free play if you just say play, girls will take a touch and kick to pass". Ramon nodded and brought up younger girls at the center (ages 6-10) and mentioned that they often like to split up and play with their friends (other girls) and that they are not always engaged with the ways in which they want kids to learn and play the game. Building off of Kelley's concerns, Ramon wanted to make sure that girls do not just play amongst themselves in co-gendered environments, because "they'll play on their toes and just kick the ball away instead of running and dribbling with it."

The male coaches at Kick It express their concern over the form of girls' soccer participation at the center because it does not match their philosophy and ideals of soccer development and style of play. Since the staff cares deeply about players individually dribbling and getting comfortable on the ball, any type of soccer performance that counters that is troubling in their eyes. Girls who are newer to the game and just kick the ball to their friends without trying moves or carrying the ball is not the Kick It way. Coaches never expressed similar concerns about boys as a group in relation to keeping the ball as individuals and being engaged dribblers during unstructured, pick-up play.

In this meeting the coaches did brainstorm ways to get more soccer-inexperienced girls to dribble more like many of the boys and be more individually assertive and selfish on the field. Coach Ramon proposed splitting the younger girls play into a separate group for some of the program, but Xavier pointed out that there's often not enough players to make that happen and that more skilled, soccer-experienced, older girls do not always want to play with, and at times, get frustrated when being forced to play with younger and less experienced players.

Though there is an awareness of unstructured and pick-up play not being entirely inclusive of girls, the coaches' belief in the Kick IT style of play, coaching instruction, and notion of how a player should learn and play the game does not really waver. One reason they do not waver is because of their commitment to co-gendered soccer and creating an inclusive community of play.

> Coach Ramon: As in general, yeah, with the community, because everybody's — you know, from a young age, everybody's told, you know "You want to play with the girls. You're a girl, you play with your dolls, or you — whatever you want to play, you're going to play with the girls." Now, at Kick It, for free play, we tell everybody, it's like, "No, nobody's excluded," and the girls get involved and the girls are going to play with the boys. That's part of the game. We're not going to separate the girls from one section and then the boys on the other section. No, that's still excluding them from just having fun. So now, when we put them together, it's like, "All right, everybody's involved." The girls are with the boys. They meet new kids, they have — they become good friends.

Coach Ramon also believes in the positive aspects of unstructured soccer and a philosophy that emphasizes individual dribbling skills because there are a handful girls who have played at Kick It for years and are understood as skillful, individually assertive with the ball, and comfortable playing with boys in pick-up settings.

> Coach Ramon: I think, we've learned — is it's good to have them to play together, because then now they're more comfortable. Once they get more confidence, they want to be part of — with the boys, because they know the boys

are so competitive, they want to win. So now when they're comfortable with their skills, they want to be a part of that, they want to, you know, get a little taste of the competitiveness, and once they get ahold of it, they just kind of let go.

While there is strong belief in the principles and soccer developmental outcomes associated with unstructured pick up play, coaches also have explanations for why girls engage with soccer differently than boys and may struggle to play in accordance with skillful, individualistic, creative, and technical style of Kick It. When I travelled with a lot of Kick It families to watch the Women's World Cup, Coach Kelley and Luis, a Latino father of 12-year-old daughter who played at Kick It and organized travel soccer had a conversation about what environments of soccer suits girls best in terms of their individual soccer development.

Field Note: How to coach girls

After walking back up from the beach, I ran into Coach Kelley and Luis, a very friendly man who was working on grilling all types of meats for the group cookout later in the evening. Kelley popped over to chat about the grilling and also how his daughter is doing with soccer.

When talking about the girls and other organized travel in the area, Kelley began to summarize his thoughts on the differences between boys and girls when playing soccer. Kelley articulated two different philosophies when coaching both genders. Kelley pontificated that girls are "not into battles" like boys. By battles he meant 1v1 duels, physicality, and 50/50 challenges, that often require aggression and strength. Since girls are not into physical "battles", Kelley perceives the soccer environment in organized travel soccer to be not as a fun, and actually stressful. He talked about and criticized rival coaches coaching girls to "play like boys", which only helps certain girls and creates teams that are very physical and intense, but not necessarily skilled or creative.

Coach Kelley even described his ideal girls' soccer team and style. Each player would have individual and technical ability, but then play as a team with collective style of passing. He referenced the men's Spanish national team as a model for this vision. He would de-emphasize defense, fitness, and individual physical collisions and battles. Kelley argued for this because "girls like to solve problems in a collective manner rather than individually".

Nick's supported his ideas by referencing differences in acquisition learning. According to his own readings of psychological and educational research, girls absorb more through acquisition than boys and girls are better at collectively sharing, care more about team cohesion, and social relationships.

In this moment, Coach Kelley articulates that boys and girls require varied coaching approaches.[64] Since many girls are understood to not be into 1v1 physical "battles", learn differently than boys and care more about social relationships and the collective over the individual, the style of play should reflect that gendered style of learning. Thus, Kelley merges Kick It's Brazilian inspired emphasis on individual skills, creativity, confidence with the ball with a team-centered approach (passing, team movement) that better fits the sensibilities of girls who play the sport. Though Kelley criticizes approaches to coaching soccer that emphasizes physicality and aggression over skill and creativity because it is linked to a masculine, too-intense, and unsophisticated environment; he does not view playing in an unstructured game that is centered on individual dribbling and winning 1v1 battles of skill through a similar gendered lens of critique.

[64] Other coaches in different sites of soccer repeated the sentiment that there is a social and even biological difference between how boys and girls approach sports and soccer specifically. The head coach of Littlefield high school said the following in explaining why girls enjoy a collective style of play and coaching. "For girls, it's more about social interaction. You know, they like being a part of something. When I coach boys, they have a desire to win. Girls have that same desire, but boys have an individual desire to win. Girls have more of a team desire to win. I think it comes down to more of the nature of — you know, basically that it's biological, I think. I mean, girls are — and girls always ask, you know, they always ask, "How did you do?" It's always, you know, "We won 3 to 2. We lost." Boys, it's, "I scored four goals," and I think it's all based on biological — maybe a little how society — how they're raised, but mainly biological.

There is much talk amongst coaches at Kick It about girls' soccer development and how to get girls to thrive in unstructured pick up play, to be confident on the ball, comfortable dribbling and taking on players 1v1 and comfortable on the field with boys. But there is little interrogation or concern about the role of boys in Kick It's soccer environment or if the space is set up for boys to thrive and be central at the expense of girls. Part of this can be explained by a belief that boys are 'naturally' comfortable in this sporting setting.

> Alex: How would you describe how like boys play?
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> Coach Ramon: Oh, boys, play? Boys are — they're more of doers and they jump in. You know what I'm saying, like more doers than the girls are. They're just going to do — like whatever works for them, they're going to go do it. Like they're going to keep trying things without nobody — you know, they're comfortable on doing things. They're more comfortable, and they don't really think about it as like a social thing. They just want to go and win. They're so competitive.

Here, Coach Ramon reproduces the notion of boys' being suited for sport and naturally competitive. In this conventional understanding of soccer roles, boys do not need encouragement from coaches to play in unstructured settings, to try new moves, or to individually beat their friend/opponent. The unstructured soccer environment cultivated by Kick It seems to work for most of the boys in the eyes of the coaches and when it is co-gendered, boys also positively benefit.

> Coach Ramon: Yes, from kids, yes, because it's very important for kids to learn. I mean, they all learn from each other, you know. They're very smart at picking things up, and I feel that girls and boys, if they play together, they learn from each other, and they benefit from that. The girls, when they play with the boys, they get aggressive and more aggressive, you know, in the soccer aspect. They're more aggressive, they're not afraid to go in and —
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> Alex: So, what do the — what do you think the boys gain from playing with the girls?

> Coach Ramon: I feel like the boys benefit from understanding that it's not always competitive, you know, that they can learn from the girls, where they've got to think more, like they get more involved where, if a girl's put on this team and if they want to win, he has to make her better in a way. Also, leadership. I could see like the girls obviously learn from the boys, but the boys will kind of learn more of that leadership, more of patience, social, you know, the social aspects.

In explaining the positive outcomes associated with co-gendered soccer environments a combination of social and essential gender difference is reproduced. For boys, they ideally learn to be less selfish, be less physically aggressive, and learn to help their teammates because girls possess such qualities. For girls they learn to gain the aggression necessary to thrive and compete in soccer and the willingness to take individual risks on the field and dribble. It must be noted that Coach Ramon assumes the girl in this scenario is less skilled or influential on the field than her male peers.

Girl Power: A girls-centered soccer space

Though the staff at Kick It believes a great deal in the positive soccer and social power of co-gendered unstructured pick-up play and hands-off coaching, over time they did create a program to both recruit more girls and address the ways in which girls are marginalized in co-gendered pick up play at Kick It. In these girls only settings, similar Kick It principles of fun and individual skill were present, but when boys were removed from play the environment did shift in particular ways. The program is called 'Girl Power' and it runs 1-2 days a week during the fall, winter, and spring. These aren't entirely unstructured soccer environments or pick-up only, but the coaches are pretty hands off. They often have the girls work on a skill move, scrimmage each other and play games that apply that particular technique.

Field note: Girl Power Session

There were 15 girls in attendance for the younger girls (7-10) session, which is much less than the year-round program or other co-ed skill programs/day camps. This is reflective of Coach Kelley's frustration that they don't have more girls in the program. Both sessions had more of a participatory feel to them, because more than half the girls were less experienced players and did not train with the center year-round.

During the scrimmage portion of the session, whenever a girl got near an opposing player, they passed it quickly to a teammate. Though there was a lack of experience, skill, and Kick It style of 1v1 individual play. These girls were clearly having FUN. Laughing and smiles were frequent throughout the session and when the girls went to get water, they were excited and eager to go play again.

In Girls Power sessions, younger girls learn through the methods of Kick It. The coaches are minimally involved in terms of giving feedback, individual skill moves, and creativity are encouraged. and for the most part play is minimally structured. Unlike much of co-gendered soccer at Kick It, there is no risk of girls being on the periphery of play due to boys occupying space. The positive and fun vibes of the younger girls' session was on display during the older girls (11-15) session that followed.

Field Note: A Twist on Tag

This was a tag game with slightly altered rules. Everyone except for two people lied down next to each other in pairs across the gym floor. Almost in a circle or oval. The person who was 'it' would chase someone around the gym while carrying an orange penny. The person running away could run anywhere in the gym and if they were tired, they could lie down next to an individual player. If they did this the person lying down would then have to get up and run away from the "it" person. If you were tagged the 'it' person would throw the penny up in the air and start running away to find the one person available to lie down. They did this warm up for a good 10-15 minutes.

As the tag warm-up was going on the girls were frequently laughing and occasionally squealing. one of them dropped to the ground just in time before being tagged, Laura a mom of one of the daughters participating was watching, turned to me and said "I wish all girls could play in this environment. It's not about performance."

During this Girl Power session, Kick It lived up to its goals and standards of making soccer all about fun enjoyment, play and with the near elimination of stress and

intensity. Kick It is excellent at making soccer fun and engaging and there were positive and energetic vibes being produced in the gym and importantly, girls were at the center. In this moment, the praise from a mother on the sideline also indicated that a minimally structured sporting/soccer environment for girls that was more about fun than intense competition isn't as prevalent in other youth soccer environments. There was something unique and special about Girl Power because girls weren't being overtly coached to intensely perform and there was a sense of comfort and looseness that the girls couldn't express in co-gendered spaces of soccer.

Field note: Dribbling, but no boasting

After tag, the girls worked on individual moves and skills for 30 minutes, and then transitioned into a game. During the game some of the players attempted to use the move or dribble past 1 or more opponents. But it wasn't constant like in a boys' centered Kick It game. Even after one of the players made a skillful move past an opponent no on the court commented or reacted. The move happened and the girls kept playing.

Many girls at Kick It are very skilled, creative, and comfortable with the ball while playing. And at Girl Power sessions, this becomes obvious to see when there are no boys taking up space and thus pushing girls to the periphery of play. When boys are not present the masculine styles of pick-up play that dominates co-gendered soccer at Kick It shifts. Minimal coaching, individual creativity and skill remain when girls are at the center of play, but the social performance and interactions that surround such soccer actions are different. The girls' only Kick It environment of play has minimal trash-talking, teasing, or boasting.[65] Such differences are likely tied to broader patterns of

[65] There are individual girls at Kick It who do boast and are very expressive when either they individual make a skillful move to beat an opponent or if a friend does the same. Onyama is one of those players as she often overtly displays competitiveness, teases boys when she beats them through a moment of skill. Yet, when she was in a girl only soccer space, her social expressions and social performance shifted too. In my observations of Girls Rock sessions, I only noted one

gender socialization and sporting socialization, and it is telling how easily gendered norms and social interactions can change within sporting environments when masculinity is de-centered.

Discussion

As Messner (2011) writes, "gender is seen as a multilayered process that is not simply part of the personality structure of individuals but is also a fundamental aspect of everyday group interactions, divisions of labor and power in organizations, and cultural symbols around us (22)." Youth soccer is a social arena where such processes occur, whether that be through how boys and girls interact amongst themselves and each other on the field, how girls' experience and understand unstructured/pick-up co-gendered environments of play, styles of play, or how coaches articulate differences and coaching approaches to boys' and girls' soccer.[66]

In the case of Kick It, an alternative site and idioculture of youth soccer that aims to push back against hyper-competition and discourage physically aggressive playing styles, aspects of masculinity associated with dominant sporting culture are articulated and performed in varied, but persistent ways. Similar to other pick-up team sports (see Thangaraj 2015), individualism through a combination of skill, physical athleticism, and social performance play a key role in unstructured soccer at Kick It. There is a cultural decorum at Kick It where players appraise, judge, and evaluate their peers' actions and movements on the field of play. For boys at Kick It, demonstrating skill through creative

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incident where Onyama let out an "ohhhhh" after a skill move from one her teammates. And it stood out because no one other girl said or reacted in a similar way.

[66] People within the field of youth soccer are not passive dupes in gender systems, but active participants who exercise agency in both reproductive and resistant ways (Messner 2011).

and skillful dribbling—normally at the expense of an individual opponent—serves as a way to reinforce their community and to secure athletic status through a form of 'soccer cool'.[67]

Robin Kelley (1997) argues that the process boys and men one-upping each other, whether through sporting skill or verbal sparring on the basketball court is a form of intimate community building in African American communities. While Kick It is not a 'black' sporting space, attempts of creative skill, flair, and 'cool' soccer moves are tied to jokes, light trash talk, and collective praise, and is a crucial way male bonding happens amongst youth within the organization. Such moments or performances of masculinity amongst boys at Kick It are common because of the substantive amount of consistent time boys spend at the center socializing and playing soccer. And at the same time such interactions and performances are fleeting, but always in need of constant iteration (Fine 1987; Thangaraj 2015; Pascoe 2007; Parker 1996).

Boys are socialized into a hegemonic masculine identity through sports and other prominent social institutions, and such an identity is constructed at the expense of queerness and/or femininity (Anderson 2009; Clayton & Harris 2009; Britton & Williams 1995; Messner 1992). Often, this can occur overtly through jokes, trash-talk, and crass talk about desiring other women (Kelley 1997; Thangaraj 2015). In part because of the age of youth at Kick It, lack of emphasis on physical aggression and domination, and the co-gendered environment of play, I did not observe discourse or social action amongst boys that overtly rejected femininity or homosexuality. This is a variation of research that

[67] Thangaraj (2015) discusses how different basketball actions are associated with basketball 'cool' and that men often exude a type of confidence and self-assurance ager pulling off such athletic acts.

has established sport as a conservative gendered social institution and a last bastion of traditional male values (Adams 2011; Hawes 2001; Messner 2009).

Though masculinity at Kick It is not expressed as an explicit rejection of femininity and queerness, Kick It's everyday culture and youth soccer is still very much tied up with hegemonic masculinity and dominant gender relations. My ethnographic observations and the experiences of girls in youth soccer, specifically within co-gendered, unstructured/pick-up soccer demonstrate how the sport continues to center boys and marginalize girls through a particular form of borderwork.[68] When boys and girls play together in an unstructured soccer environment, girls are frequently on the edges of the game. They touch the ball less, pass more, and often do not try to one-up their opponents with individual flair and dribbling skill. Similar to what Barrie Thorne (1993) observed on school playgrounds, boys control more space than girls at Kick It. Boys take up space in part because individualistic style of play and the celebration of skillful dominance is central to everyday culture at Kick It. Lawrence Wenner (1998) notes that players in sports come into contact with one another in forceful and space-occupying ways. Due to the structure of soccer combined with Kick It's philosophy of play, players occupy space through expressing their soccer abilities at the expense of an opponent. And when play is co-gendered, gender boundaries become visible within the game.

[68] Thorne (1993) draws on Fredrik Barth's (1969) analysis of social relations across ethnic boundaries to conceptualize interactions across gender boundaries. Thorne (1993) argues that contact between genders can sometimes undermine and reduce active sense of difference, but also such interactions can strengthen gendered borders (p.65). On school playgrounds there are moments where gender boundaries are activated and more rigid separate boundaries between boys and girls are reified. Importantly, borderwork is also episodic, ambiguous, and always context dependent.

Girls who play the game understand pick-up soccer as a masculine space, express frustration when boys take up space and identify that boys rarely involve girls in the game on their own accord. Girls at Kick It and interscholastic soccer know that they must negotiate this gender dynamic in order to participate and work on their own soccer skills. While girls recognized that not passing the ball and dribbling were cultural and gendered norms of unstructured and pick-up soccer, they did not attach hierarchal meaning to said norms or internalize a marginalized gender status. Rather, the differences between boys' and girls' soccer was just understood as that, a difference. This matches Michela Musto's (2014) work on how in co-gendered youth sport settings, youth affirm essentialist, categorical, and nonhierarchical beliefs in differences between gender. Yet, their experiences of being marginalized within co-gendered soccer does indicate how boys' and girls' interactions within athletic contests often strengthen hierarchical and categorical group boundaries between genders (Messner 2000; Throne 1993).

The experiences of girls at Kick It and soccer more broadly is not invisible and does not go unnoticed by adult coaches. Male coaches at Kick It are aware of how girls can be marginalized during unstructured, pick-up soccer and explain the way boys and girls engage with soccer in ways that often naturalize gender differences. The coaches and Kick IT as an organization want, believe in, and organize co-gendered soccer environments. Unlike most youth soccer settings and most organized team sports, where gender segregated play happens after the age of 9, boys and girls at Kick It play together up until age 14. While the coaches believe that it is important for girls and boys to play soccer together, they frequently articulate that boys and girls engage soccer in distinct ways, and that such differences explain social interactions and social patterns at Kick It

and youth soccer more broadly. According to male coaches, boys thrive and are at the center of unstructured, pick-up soccer because they like individual battles, are aggressive, are 'doers', and like to individually solve problems (beating your opponent) on the field. Such gender characteristics make boys a good fit for unstructured soccer and Kick It's emphasis on individualism and creative dribbling. In contrast, girls struggle in such settings because they are viewed by male coaches as more cooperative, shy and deferential in soccer settings, and not into individual 'battles' on the field.

Messner (2011) argues that coaches often struggle to weave a coherent narrative about coaching, youth, gender, and sport; often moving between discourses of equality, natural difference, and equity-within-difference. There is a somewhat similar messy coherence when male coaches at Kick It discuss gender and soccer as they understand gendered patterns on the field through a combination of natural difference and socialization. Youth sport is a place for such messy narratives about gender to co-exist because it is an institution premised on making people's bodily abilities and limitations visible, is historically built on values of essential differences between men and women, but is also a place where women and girls are more prominent and active participants (Ezzell 2009; Heywood and Dworkin 2003; Messner 2011).

At Kick It, the consequences of such narratives about gender results in what Messner (2011) describes as 'soft essentialism'. Soft essentialism is an "emergent ideology that negotiates the tension between the contradictory beliefs that girls and boys should have equal opportunities and that they girls and boys are naturally different (Messner 2011, p. 20-21)." This tension is apparent in Kick it because the staff believes that boys and girls should have equal opportunity to play soccer and learn through their

philosophy of training, unstructured play, and hands-off coaching. At the same time, Kick It staff and coaches at large assigned fixed characteristics to boys and girls. Boys are seemingly defined by their biology (aggressive, like battles) and in turn predisposed to fit into the world of competitive sports. In contrast, girls are defined with somewhat more flexibility and choice, but still bounded within essential difference (according to this view, some girls are aggressive on the field, but many are more collective-oriented, unselfish, not as competitive).

Kick It, like youth sports in general, is an ideal site for the construction of soft essentialism and a comfortable zone to pleasurably talk about the ways boys and girls differ (Messner 2011). This is in part because gendered interactions are unavoidable, routine, and salient and that many people are committed to the idea of and take shared pleasure in discussing natural difference between the sexes even as we live in an era of dramatic changes in gender relations throughout society (Messner 2011; Risman 1998). This commitment to natural difference is on display through social action at Kick It because their solution to girls being marginalized in co-gendered spaces of play was to create a sex-segregated sporting environment. Such actions make sense when situated within an equity-with-difference framework that accommodates the reality, demand, and increasing normalized presence of girls and women in sport and other domains of public life (Messner 2011). The creation of a girls only soccer environment further fits within the ideology of soft essentialism because the style of play, forms of social interactions during a girls-only play differs from a boys-only and co-gendered play, and is in turn interpreted through a gender based framework that can reify difference based on gender.

Conclusion: Is Youth Soccer Beyond a Male Preserve?

Nancy Theberge (1985) argues that the institution of sport is a male preserve because it has been dominated by men and masculinity and centered on the subordination of women and active resistance against their presence in sport. Such gender-based domination in sport is evident through a few indicators: 1) gender differences in participation in youth and adult sports, 2) male dominance in the administration and organization of sport and 3) Cultural images, media coverage, and the trivialization of women's sport (Theberge 1985). Other scholars during this period have also interpreted sport through the framework of a male preserve, whether that be through socialization and the maintenance of hierarchical rankings of sex roles and patriarchal relations (Boutilier and SanGiovanni 1983; Dunning 1986; Lenskyj 1983; Willis 1982). Today, research also references how many men's sporting environments and practices still serve as a male preserve in that men interact with men without the company of women (Thangaraj 2015; Mohammed 2017).

Due to the efforts of feminist scholars and the feminist movement more broadly, the male preserve of sport has been challenged, disrupted, and partially transformed as girls and women have moved into sport at multiple levels and most families and sporting organizations view sport as for both girls and boys (Carpenter and Acosta 2008; Ezzel 2009; Messner 2011).[69] Youth soccer in the United States is situated within this historical challenge and movement, and by many measures—participation rates, professional leagues, national recognition—has seemed to overcome many aspects of the male

[69] Though girls' participation in sports has sky-rocketed in the last 3.5 decades, when intersected with dimensions of class, race, and immigrant status gender disparities in participation in organized sport drop significantly (Sabo et al. 2004)

preserve. Perceptions of soccer in the U.S. as a gender inclusive and equitable sport is evident at local levels, and at Kick It there is no active resistance against girls playing the game, co-gendered play is a central part of programming, and there are transparent efforts to recruit and encourage girls to play the game. Yet, the male preserve of sport persists in altered, but persistent ways through everyday interaction within youth soccer. Kick It is one case where we can see how sport remains saturated within masculine meaning, hegemonic gender relations, and can remain an unequal social field for boys and girls.[70]

Coach Michelle, the only female coach at Kick It, was very in tune and critical of how gender and masculinity shaped the everyday culture at Kick It, youth soccer more broadly, and her own experiences as a woman who coaches.[71] Whether informal conversations or a formal interview, we often discussed what it means to be a skillful soccer player, her relationships with other players and coaches, her coaching philosophy, and what unstructured play looks like to her.

During our interview, Coach Michelle shared a story about gender talk at Kick It and how she understands skill in comparison to other coaches at Kick It.

> Alex: Do you think boys and girls play the game differently or are pressured to play it differently? How have you seen that in your own experiences?
>
> Michelle: This is something that Kelley tries to point out and wants to talk about a lot. (laughs). And again, I think any differences are due to pure socialization. And the other day at practice with our 5-year-olds, he's pointing out how… There were two separate groups. There was a boys' group who was playing 1v1v1v1, so

[70] Gender relations, and gender-based meaning varies across different social contexts and this is true for the field of youth soccer. Gender dynamics at Kick It are likely different than other sites and places of youth soccer. Some social contexts of soccer may be more or less socially organized around meanings of gender, other settings may support more equitable patterns of gender relations, and in some contexts there could substantively different meanings attached to gender (Musto 2014).

[71] Coach Michelle is a white woman in her mid 20s with high level playing experience. She coaches in different soccer spaces, including immigrant soccer and interscholastic soccer. In those settings she coaches girls' teams.

> someone had the ball and everyone else was on defense. And then there were 3-4 girls who were just passing and standing still. Ya know and he's pointing this out to me at age 5 like it is a fundamental difference between boys and girls and its ya know, yeah, they're young, but they've still been affected by ya know gender norms. Um… so no I don't think there are innate differences. But again, socialization will affect how they play, and girls are taught to be caring, and like the way you show that you care is that you pass. And boys are taught to be aggressive and the way you be aggressive is that you go score yourself. And in terms of soccer skill, neither of those things is inherently good or bad.
>
> You need both passing and dribbling and I think at Kick It, we overvalue dribbling and his (Kelley) take is ya know, 'oh anyone can learn to pass a ball. We can do that later.' But ya know, I really enjoy passing, it's my favorite part of the game and it's like really nuanced and intricate, the weight of a pass, the texture of a pass and so I think that one of the things that bothers me a little bit is like if these are differences that he (Kelley and Kick It) is seeing why can't he just embrace teaching girls to pass and what that could look like.

Coach Michelle rejects the way many coaches (often men), view boys and girls as inherently different. Instead, she understands all gender-based patterns and interactions on the soccer field as firmly rooted in socialization.[72] Moreover, she critiques what is considered at skillful at Kick It and acknowledges that individual dribbling is given higher status than passing, a soccer action and skill that in the context of Kick It is messily linked to notions of natural gender-based difference. Later in our conversation, Coach Michelle emphasized that being comfortable dribbling is not due to natural gender difference, but dependent on the social and soccer context.

> Coach Michelle: I think it's a skill thing. Right, so if I am playing in a setting where I'm not the most skilled player, I am not going to take people on. I'm going to pass the ball. If I am the most skilled player, I am gonna have some fun and try some stuff. Ya know and to go back to socialization. Boys just play more on their own. They have a better sense of perception of, they're more coordinated, so when they show up in this co-ed spaces they are more likely to be more skilled or ya know more along in their physiological development, so it makes sense that

[72] Such an understanding drives her approach to coaching and contrast to the male coaches that I spoke too, Michelle did not think boys and girls needed to be coached differently. For her, demonstrating to a youth player that you care about them as a person is the foundational and motivating principle for being a good coach.

> they are the ones who are dribbling. If there was a space with boys who were younger and girls were older, I think the girls would be dribbling more.

Whereas other coaches at Kick It explain gender dynamics during unstructured pick-up play by emphasizing that boys are naturally more comfortable and individually assertive and that girls are more collectively oriented; Coach Michelle argues that performing Kick It's desired soccer skill is also dependent on experience and age distribution. At Kick It, such variables, often unintentionally tilt in favor of boys.

> Alex: How do you read, when you watch unstructured play, do you think it's inclusive for girls?
>
> Coach Michelle: Umm, I mean in large part, I don't think so. And I don't think it's actively trying not to be, I just think it's not trying actively to be, so by default it's not.

Coach Michelle's critical analysis and insights give voice to my own observations about how, through a combination of gender socialization, soft essentialism, and cultural values of soccer skill and soccer development, the male preserve of sport persists in youth soccer. At Kick It, individual dribbling is valued and trained because it is viewed as the most important aspect of soccer development. Success in the unstructured pick-up settings cultivated by Kick It is demonstrated through individual skillful dominance over an opponent in 1-on-1 interaction. Such a practice of soccer is saturated with masculine meaning and exerting dominance over an opponent is a very embedded within the institution of sports and takes on substantive gender meaning. Thus, despite being co-gendered, the unstructured soccer environment cultivated at Kick It lends an implicit endorsement of masculine play that many boys are more socialized to fit into and perform in. Since Kick Its culture of soccer is so focused on the individual, it almost becomes normal to see/think that boys are supposed to be at the center of play. Since coaches

rarely intervene, the soccer environment quietly reinforces hegemonic masculine culture which instills that boys are 'naturally' at the center of sports, are more into winning athletic competitions, and more "suited" to individually beating an opponent than girls, thus reinforcing traditional values of male superiority, competition, and success (McGuffey & Rich 1999; Messner 2011; Thorne 1993).

At Kick It, and potentially unstructured pick-up soccer environments more broadly, there is little to no discourse or action that disrupts the institutional center of sport that often affirms hegemonic masculinity (Messner 2002; Musto 2014). Though there is much conversation about how to get girls involved and comfortable in co-gendered unstructured soccer, the actual environment of play, notions of what is considered skillful, and the social actions of boys is not interrogated or challenged. It is taken for granted and assumed that all boys easily fit in and thrive in unstructured environments of soccer. Boys are not asked to play the game in different ways that do not reify gender difference or potentially disrupt fixed ideas about what 'boys are like'. Additionally, Male coaches do not consider ways to make unstructured play socially equal for boys and girls of varying skillsets and soccer personalities.

The saliency of hegemonic masculinity in co-gendered unstructured soccer is clear because girls who play and woman who coach have to negotiate and maneuver around this masculine center. Sometimes this means being on the periphery of play and other times it means carving out separate spaces of play where boys and the specter of masculinity are removed. Girls-centered spaces of soccer are important because they provide comfortable and inclusive settings for girls and women to play and love soccer and sport more broadly. They represent a form of a feminist alternative to sport

(Theberge 1990). Such spaces are due to feminist efforts and has paid off given the overall cultural status and normalization of women participating in soccer in the United States. At Kick It, when girls are central on the soccer field, stereotypically masculine play diminishes and gender marginalization through soccer specific actions is greatly reduced. But, the intentional creation of girls' only soccer spaces are not completely removed from the institution of sport and cannot solely dismantle and transform hierarchical gender relations, essentialist discourses of gender, or the hegemonically masculine center of soccer culture.

Ultimately, Kick It and by proxy youth soccer, is very much a part of the contested terrain of gender and is a locus of tension between change and continuity in gender relations (Messner 2011). The male preserve of sport continues to be challenged and the presence of women and girls in soccer cannot be questioned. But despite the now normalized presence of girls and women in youth sport, and especially within US soccer, sport's patriarchal foundations and its ties to natural categorization of gender regularly re-appear to demonstrate that the beautiful game is still a good distance away from being a site of equal conditions for boys and girls in the US.

Chapter 5: Diverse and Cosmopolitan Youth Soccer Spaces

Field note: Wednesday Night at McMillan Park

Between parking lots, a main thoroughfare, and below a set of train tracks, resides two large soccer fields with aging artificial turf; one baseball field and four softball diamonds. The two soccer fields are divided into six smaller fields where kids in a range of colorful shirts run around and parents observe while scattered along the sidelines. As I walk down the steep slope and entered the fields, I notice a handful of teams from Kick It, the rec center I have been working with for the past year. After stopping by and saying some quick hellos, I move on to watch other teams and attempt to keep up with the dizzying number of community centers that participate in this recreational city league.

The first field I spend time at is a game between Franklin community center, whose players are wearing orange t-shirts, and a team in blue representing Adams community center. The Franklin boys are all white kids and they have two supportive and energetic dads coaching the team. They are very encouraging and emotive about positive plays. There is no negativity or intensity, but a decent amount of enthusiasm. The coaches for Adams are also very positive and the kids all seem to enjoy the match even after giving up a goal to Franklin. At the match on an adjacent field, the Promise Rec center (run by a former professional soccer player), a team that is Hmong, Karen, Somali, and Black, are playing a team of mostly white girls from Gill park, a comfortable middle to upper middle-class neighborhood.

On most northwest field, I stop and watch young (9-10) kids from Kick It who are playing against Pickfair River rec center. As these boys are rocking bright yellow shirts with blue lettering, it is hard to miss them. In this game there were six Asian kids on the team, which was the most I've seen with Kick It. I had not seen these kids at other Kick It programs, so I stay at this match for about twenty minutes. Half of the kids on the Kick It team were pretty skilled, but not to the level of the regular Kick It attendees. The other half of the team were more at the recreational level in terms of soccer skill.

After this match I meander to the field where Dennis and his son's Kick It team were playing. His team was dressed in red with green lettering and was a mostly white team (Dennis' son is Greek and American) with one Latino boy. Their opponent was Parkview community center. Parkview is coached by two white women and their team wore white, football like jerseys. The Parkview community center was more demographically diverse than the Kick It team. They had four kids of color, three of whom were black. The Parkview kids often kick the big and long passes downfield to a fast player. This is pretty successful, and they score a few goals this way.

On the middle field there is a boys' match (12-year-olds) between another Gill Community Center (all white) and a team in red and black shirts that features Latino kids and two white kids. The kids from Gill are very loose and relaxed, and not particularly skilled at soccer. The Gill team wore casual attire, some kids were wearing cargo shorts or shin guards without soccer socks. The only thing they needed was the red shirt with the community center on it, signaling the more relaxed vibe for recreational soccer. Whereas the Latino youth from Benning community center team is much better at soccer and dominated the game.

The last match of the evening features a group of 12 years old from Pickfair and Franklin. An African-American dad in a white shirt and jeans is standing next to two other white parents dressed at the end of the goal. The white parents dress in a way that presented upper middle class (coats from a fancy outdoor brand), whereas the African American dad dresses (work boots, worn jeans, and a black leather jacket) speaks in a way that indicates and presents a normative working-class disposition. As this man is watching his son sprint and chase after a loose ball at the other end of the field he booms "GO Marcus! Get it! Get it! Awwww Good try!!" This is audible from a distance, and also the loudest voice I hear the whole night. The white adults watch and cheer alongside this dad and make small talk about their children who play on opposing teams.

As a part of my multi-year immersion into youth soccer culture I spent multiple weekday evenings at a public park in the Twin Cities as a coach, referee, and an observer.[73] On these fall nights, four days a week and from 6-9 PM, families from all over the city and a range of social backgrounds (race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status) gather to play in an official league put on by the local parks department. Some teams contain social difference within teams, while others are more homogenous, which is not surprising given residential segregation in the city. In a city defined by systemic forces of racial inequality and class stratification, residents that use community centers from all over the city come together in this particular and familiar park and have consistent social interaction. People from different social backgrounds are civil, respectful, make small talk, and support their kids. As I will show and argue

[73] In the first chapter of my dissertation this soccer environment is identified as "recreational and participatory". This environment of soccer is more accessible and affordable compared to club teams, less specialized, less competitive, and can have more co-gender interactions.

throughout this chapter, the McMillan park rec league is important not because it represents one unique pleasant sporting/social space where social difference exists in comfort and leisure, but because there are other spaces of soccer like it within the Twin Cities. In other words, it is not an exception, but rather reflects ideals and imaginaries pertaining to multiculturalism, racial integration, and diversity.

In this chapter I begin to answer the broad question of "how is the field of youth soccer raced?" And more specifically, what is the racial and ethnic composition and representation of various soccer communities and how do participants understand race in relation to their experiences in youth soccer? In part one of this chapter, I identify multiple racially and ethnically diverse soccer spaces and situate them in relation to the larger social field of soccer in the Twin Cities (as described in Chapter 2). I provide ethnographic examples of racially and ethnically diverse youth soccer spaces in participatory/recreational soccer, organized travel soccer, interscholastic soccer, and hybrid/alternative soccer. The prevalence of such diverse spaces indicates that the culture of youth soccer in the Twin Cities provides a solid base for substantive racial and ethnic representation and interaction.

In part two, I interpret and analyze these spaces through Elijah Anderson's (2011) conception of cosmopolitan canopies because, in addition to soccer being a place where people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds interact with seemingly little tension or conflict, the sport is culturally idealized and holds a global reputation as cosmopolitan. I connect the existence of these common, varied, and actively made cosmopolitan youth soccer canopies to the ways in which parents and players discuss soccer, race, and diversity. By doing so, I paint a descriptive picture of what diverse,

racialized youth soccer spaces look like, how they are actively made in the everyday, and how such environments match well with the experiences of some participants and the happy and aspirational diversity discourse that surrounds soccer in general. I conclude this chapter with a discussion about the particular power and unique characteristics of soccer in relation to the formation of cosmopolitan canopies.

Popular Ideology of Race in Relation to Sport and Soccer

In the US and other nations, sport is often centered around larger social ideals and norms pertaining to racial inclusion, multiculturalism, and meritocracy (Diamanno 1990; Frey & Eitzen 1991; Hartmann 2000; Stzo 2018). Whether it be youth, collegiate, or professional sports; athletes, fans, pundits, advertisers, and journalists often view sport as a social arena that is more racially progressive and even color-blind compared to other areas of society (Carrington 2013; Hartmann 2000). Sport has a historically popular reputation as a positive racial force dating back to the 1930s and reached its zenith in the 1950s and 1960s as prominent African American journalists documented the success of African American athletes (Carrington 2013; Hartmann 2000; Young 1963). During this period, sport was described as being closer to the American "democratic ideal", a gift of inspiration for the downtrodden to rise to unimaginable heights, and representative of the beginning of "total freedom" for people of color (Young 1963).

This legacy remains today as sport continues to be popularly understood as a "great racial equalizer" and a positive force against racism and racial inequality (Hartmann 2000). Carrington (2013) categorizes the popular and dominant ideology of sport and its relationship to race as a "functionalist-evolutionary paradigm." From this paradigm sport is as a non-racial space that is closest to American ideals; essentially

harmonious and socially cohesive; it integrates individuals into communities and communities with each other; is a progressive force for social change; and moments of racial discrimination with sport are atypical and external to sport and its racial harmony (Carrington 2013).

Today, ideals of colorblindness (Bonilla-Silva 2017; Gallagher 2003) and happy diversity talk, which are linked to popular desire for sport to be a positive, progressive, and tension-free racial arena (Bell and Hartmann 2007) surround US culture (and many other nations). Sport is a social-cultural institution ripe for critical sociological engagement of race because it is rich with racial discourse and racialized social interaction, and as Hartmann (2000, 2007) notes is nearly considered, "a literal model for race relations in the United States" (p.232). Given this context, sport is a social-cultural institution ripe for critical sociological engagement of race.

The popular ideology that surrounds the social potential and cultural power of soccer around the world is very similar to what Carrington (2013) and Hartmann (2000) describe in the United States and late 19th century and 20th century belief systems that view sport participation as crucial to the reproduction of societal norms, values and institutions (Messner 1992). Participation in soccer is considered by many organizations, practitioners, and scholars as an effective way of addressing and intervening in a range of social problems, including racism, social exclusion along ethnic, religious, national and other cultural lines (Coalter 2007; Houlihan & White 2002; Krouwel et al. 2006; Tacon 2007; Walseth & Fasting 2004). Though there is a plethora of attempts to use soccer as a tool for reducing racism and increasing multicultural integration, there is little evidence of soccer demonstrating concrete proof of its progressive and positive social force

(Müller, van Zoonen, and de Roode 2008; Tacon 2007). Despite a lack of evidence and critical evaluation, a belief in soccer's inherent progressive characteristics and social potential along the lines of race and the reduction of racism remains strong within our cultural imagination and practices.

Given this context, youth soccer, and sport more broadly, is a compelling social arena/case to study racial dynamics within racial and ethnically diverse social spaces, which are becoming more prevalent in certain social locations and gaining the attention of race scholars (Anderson 2011; Lewis & Diamond 2015; Mayorga-Gallo 2014). Youth soccer lends itself to analysis because it is a consistent gathering place for people from different class, ethnic, and racial backgrounds. These spaces of interaction are moments of ordinary cosmopolitanism (Su and Wood 2017) and everyday multiculturalism (Hardy 2017 & Wise and Velaytham 2009), thus reflecting ideals of diversity and sport's capability to produce social interaction between various racial and ethnic groups in a seemingly taken-for-granted manner.

Part 1: Racially and Ethnically Diverse Youth Soccer in the Twin Cities

So, what does race look like in the field of youth soccer? As described at the start of this chapter, multicultural and racially diverse spaces exist at local parks and recreation leagues, such as McMillian Park. McMillian Park is representative of community/recreational soccer where teams are formed by neighborhood association and the organization of the league is handled by City and Parks and Recreation employees. Other spaces within the field of youth soccer also are defined by racial and ethnic diversity. For instance, in organized travel soccer, games and particular locations can become gathering spaces for people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. I

learned about one such diverse space of youth soccer after spending a few months observing at Kick It.

As winter in the Midwest settles in, for youth soccer players it is time to shift to playing futsal in order to continue playing and developing their skills. Youth from Kick It regularly played in a futsal league that runs every Saturday from 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM from late October to April and has leagues for kids ages 8-18. The futsal league's games happen in a large YWCA and were in a neighborhood that is full of social difference and known as a Latino and Native American residential area. The Y, a large facility and community space for the neighborhood, sits across the street from a commercial area that is used by predominantly working-class Latino, Black, Somali, and Native people. There are basketball courts, workout gyms, kitchen space, meeting areas, and an indoor pool. In this portion of the city, there isn't much large public outdoor green space. There is a public high school one block away, with a field that is only used for school sports and one community center with a small and aging turf field. In general, there is not the sprawling access to fields that you can find in neighboring suburbs.

> ***Fieldnote: Futsal in the City (Organized Travel Soccer, Immigrant Youth Soccer, and Alternative/Hybrid Youth Soccer Meet)***
>
> *It's a cold and grey day, and I am surprised to find out that a large and regular gathering place for Twin Cities youth soccer occurs a five-minute drive away from my apartment. As I pull up in the parking lot, kids hop out of cars and run into the gym as parents leisurely walk in after them. I do the same as the parents and kids and enter the sports center building, which is a warehouse-like building with a large basketball court with an elevated track that rises above the court. On this day, there are a few Somali women and one White woman getting exercise on the track while the soccer games happen below. Courtside, the gym is divided into four separate futsal courts, with netting separating each designating playing field. Players and coaches sit on small folding chairs next to the netting and on the edge of the sideline. There is not a lot of space, and often players nearly collide into coaches and substitutes on the sideline. In contrast, parents stand or sit on portable aluminum bleachers at the end of one goal. Other parents, who*

need to move around, circularly pace around the inside of the gym during play. I spend the day moving between courts making small talk with parents and observing games. This soccer environment is a gathering place for different soccer organizations and communities, and I noted the following boys' teams during the few hours I spent watching:

***Kick It**: Each Kick It team reflected the diverse racial and ethnic composition that attends the center on a regular basis. For example, the oldest boys' team of ten players has three white kids, four Latino players, and three black kids.*

***Global Sky:** Is a predominantly a Latino team (with one white boy) and it takes time for me to identify them because they are wearing unfamiliar neon uniforms. They had a Black coach and their other futsal teams that play throughout the day are a mix of Black, Latino, and Asian players. None of their teams are majority white.*

***Fusion Lake Academy**: Contrary to their elite development academy teams and many other teams I had seen this group is entirely Latino. Later in the day, I learn that this team is from a historically and predominantly Latino neighborhood in the west part of the city*

***Grain United (GU)**: I see two GU teams, consisting of middle school aged boys, competing against each other in one match. They are wearing white shirts with blue and yellow trim. Both teams are middle school aged. One team has two Black players, one who plays goalkeeper and the other is a defender and is wearing soccer pants marked with the logo of an affluent suburban down the side of his pant leg. The team also has one light skinned, Columbian-American player, who is the son of a parent that I know through the dads at Kick It. The opposing MU team wore white and was a team of all White players except for one Latino kid. This game has a pretty chill vibe. Coaches are not animated or gesticulating throughout the game intense parents.*

***Green Valley:** GV is an organized club team from a first ring suburb. They are wearing black and red jerseys sponsored by Lotto and each of their teams are entirely White players. In both matches that I see that day they are matched up against all Latino teams (one neighborhood-based and one formal club team).*

***Flatlands FC**: The match next to the Kick It vs. Global Sky game features Flatlands FC, a team of 16-17-year-olds and only has seven players and thus two substitutes. The players are all Latino boys, with one white girl rounding at the squad. She is the only girl of her age playing in the futsal league and the only girl I see playing with the boys. Luis and his son Nathan are on this team and Luis comes over to me before the game and encourages me to watch this team play. "Alex, you going to watch? This is gonna be a good match." Flatlands is playing a team with a very large roster that was not formally affiliated with a club. Their opponent is a majority white team and I am unsuccessful in making small talk*

with the parents that I sit next to.

Throughout the match, Flatlands is full of laughter and smiles. This is much different than the opposing team, who is stern and tense the entire game. Adrian kept smiling the entire match. His teammates laugh after trying particular skills, moves, passes or shots. Whether someone messes up or pulls off a difficult move, the grins do not stop.

The good vibes are felt on the sideline amongst the Flatlands FC parents (mostly Latino). The laughter and enjoyment of the game are particularly noticeable with one of the families, which sat in the corner of the court. The mother is audible in a humorous way throughout the game. After one of the players misses a simple trap, she lets out a whistle and a comment in Spanish that seems to poke fun at her son for messing up on the field. Following the joke each family member laughs boisterously, the son looks back over his shoulder and smiles, and the rest of his teammates do the same.

Neighborhood Latino Teams:
Many of the teams in this league do not participate in official US youth soccer club soccer and just play in Latino organized leagues. There are multiple teams of kids wearing matching t-shirts with Spanish names playing throughout the day. These teams vary in terms of their equipment and uniforms. Some keep it simple, others rock full on replica jerseys and shorts from international powerhouses like Real Madrid, PSG, and major clubs that play in the Mexican League like Santos Laguna.

This is a normal Saturday at the YWCA during the late fall, winter, and early spring. Latino men and Black men who are recent immigrants from various parts of Africa, referee teams with different racial and ethnic compositions that gather in a working-class neighborhood and play futsal together every week. The futsal league is a consistent cosmopolitan canopy, but it should be noted that interactions between families from different soccer organizations are rare. The pattern of regularly gathering in a diverse and cosmopolitan space with surface level social interaction is a feature in other diverse spaces of youth soccer.

There are racially and ethnically diverse spaces of youth soccer that happen with less frequency but operate on a much larger and grander scale. One of these larger

canopies is an annual international tournament that takes place in a suburb of the Twin Cities, that I refer to as the Midwest World Cup. The tournament has existed for over 30 years and holds a strong and special place in the Twin Cities soccer culture. It has grown to be the largest soccer tournament (and possibly largest youth sports tournament) in the US and is advertised as the biggest youth soccer gathering in the Northern Hemisphere. The Midwest World Cup is a tournament that reflects the popularity and size of organized travel soccer in the US as each summer over 1,000 teams between the ages of 8-18 play in either a weekend long or entire week-long tournament. But unlike other travel-based tournaments that attract teams from across the state or region, the Midwest World Cup is a spectacle and destination for teams from all over the country and even the world. In the most recent tournament that I attended (2018) teams came from 20 different states and 20 different nations.[74]

The event strives to be a blend between the Olympics and World Cup for soccer families and the Minnesota soccer community. The motto of the tournament is "they come for a week and will remember it for the rest of their lives". This is repeated by many officials who work for the center and is repeated in local media coverage of the event. As one official stated to a local newspaper "This is the biggest week of the year in Blaine" (Herder 2017). "The impact is way, way beyond what happens on the field. You go into any restaurant that week and it's packed with soccer teams. People are speaking different languages. The economic impact is huge. There's a lot of traffic, but the impact on the community is huge. What other time of the year would you have visitors from all

[74] I attended this tournament 6 separate times between 2011-2019. It costs each team between $250-475 for a team to register for the tournament. Individual players on a team have to pay $90 to register. Players who are not affiliated with a team can register as a guest player for $125.

over the world visiting the city of Blaine (Herder 2017)".[75] So while this racially and ethnically diverse space of soccer varies because it physically takes place in a suburban location and is more explicitly tied to profit making, sponsorship, and local economic motivations than other spaces of youth soccer; it still serves as a social environment where people from a wide range of racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds gather and interact.[76] The following fieldnote is from one weekend at the tournament where I spent time observing matches played by Kick It and Lions FC, both of whom are regular participants in the Midwest World Cup.

Field note: One Weekend at the Midwest World Cup

I entered the Midwest World Cup and there was constant traffic trying to get into the parking 3-4 separate large parking lots where games are taking place. There are many SUVs, buses, and other family cars. Many have the classic "going to the Midwest World Cup" writing on the windshields that are popular when families and teams take road trips to sporting events. (Ex: We're Going to State!)

The cosmopolitan feel is on display in a variety of ways. Groups of teams will walk past you and be speaking different languages. The first team I see is from Brazil (all white Brazilians) and they are all wearing yellow and blue uniforms, matching their nation's colors. As they walk to their next game they sing loudly and joyfully in Portuguese. As I moved to one of the many other fields, I spot a Swedish team of 17-year-old boys lounging in the shade under a tree. They are putting on their gear in preparation for the next match. Later in the day, there is a girls' team from Japan in green playing a team from Wisconsin in the main stadium. Later I stop by a field where a team from Costa Rica is playing a Lions FC 12/13-year-old boys' team. On an adjacent field a 14-year-old boys' team from Haiti (which was supported/sponsored through a local non-profit soccer organization) played predominately white team from Illinois.

[75] Blaine is a suburb of Minneapolis that is a 20-minute drive away from the city center. The complex built in 1985 represents how towns can build infrastructure and economic hubs around youth sports. The national sports center has multiple hockey rinks, a velodrome, multiple softball/baseball fields, and 50 plus soccer fields. There chain malls, restaurants, and businesses dot along the highway and the complex itself sits on the intersection of a highway. It is not accessible through public transportation.

[76] Though all of the games take place at a massive suburban complex, some teams from other nations and states stay in hotels in the Twin Cities proper. For example, teams from Japan, Haiti, and Finland often stay at dorms at different Universities and colleges that are all in the Twin Cities. They then are bused out to play games in Blaine.

For matches featuring Kick It, I noted that teams from different age groups played teams from far away locations. In the two matches on Friday I watched the U13 boys play a team from Mexico. In a span five minutes, after I helped coach the U15 boys' team (which included two girls so that everyone could play in the tournament if they desired) against a team from Hawaii, which was all Asian, native Hawaiian and a few white kids. I, along with the rest of the team walked 400 yards over to a field where the high school aged boys were playing against a team from Panama in a final. These games had diversity in terms of region, nationality, racial and ethnic background. While moving through this space, the feel of global cosmopolitanism that is revered in global sporting events was palpable within a Midwest suburb 20 minutes away from the Twin Cities.

While teams and players from different racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds interact with each other in between the lines of the field; the cosmopolitan and multicultural reputation and image of the Midwest World Cup is visible through off the field activities. Tournament organizers also put much effort and resources into creating a fun spectacle for kids and their families. The opening ceremony, which takes place in a 7,000-seat stadium that was the former home for the local professional men's team, is the key event where cosmopolitanism is on display.

Fieldnote: Opening Ceremony

This is the 2nd time I have spent time observing the opening ceremony for the Midwest World Cup. In the past I sat in the stands with families, but this time I was on field level with a couple of Kick It coaches. The stadium is 90% percent full of families and the field is packed with teams. There is a smattering of bright colors as many of the teams' colors are bright orange, yellow, red, or blue. We are in an era of bold and noticeable soccer attire. There is a constant buzz of noise due to the crowd and the energy levels remain high as there is a stage at one end of the field with a DJ playing mixing EDM, Pop, and Mainstream Hip Hop as a large electronic screen simultaneously flashes graphics.

The ceremony mimics the Olympics, by having each club enter the stadium and then walk around the field for one lap. As clubs cross a certain point of the field, the club's team name and location are announced over the PA system. "Calgary Villains, Canada", "Southwest Rage, Oklahoma", "County United, Minnesota". After each team is announced the crowd applauds/cheers. The teams from other nations consistently receive the most applause from the crowd. When teams from Japan, Ecuador, Mexico, Sweden, and Uganda made their way around the field,

the PA announcer raised his level of energy and voice. "And now let's give a big welcome to "Edgars Youth Program" all the way from Uganda!!" [Huge round of applause].

Though there is a solid emphasis on and celebration of the international dimensions of the tournament, ceremony also contains moments of US nationalism and Americana. After all of the teams entered the field and were announced the pledge of allegiance was read out loud and military planes flew over the field to great wonderment from the kids. Then a man, who jumped out of a plane, parachute landed on the middle of the field to great applause. The event was capped off with fireworks and more high tempo pop music.

The Midwest World Cup is a spectacle of youth soccer that is filled with racial and ethnic diversity, and international interaction, while also being very much an American event. The tournament is a vacation, an athletic contest, and a cultural exchange for youth from all over the country and the world. It is a place where everyone can feel special as a participant at a one of a kind tournament. Many parents that I spoke with formally and informally reference how cool and enjoyable the opening ceremony is.

Such an event matches how many parents and players discuss soccer in relation to diversity and cosmopolitanism. In formal interviews with parents, players, and coaches we discussed reasons why they liked soccer as a sport. Often interviewees brought up the ways in which soccer is a global sport and popular amongst all types of people.

> Adam (father): I really appreciate the cultural pieces to it. When it's working properly. I grew up playing other games. Like baseball, football, track, wrestling. I did those sports. My kids have played some other things, but soccer is one of the activities where kids can be in a lot of different kinds of situations with different kinds of people. Checking different countries, and different clubs. It's what everybody says, it's a worldwide game. It's a game that transcends ethnicity, nationality, language, geography. There are so many different pieces to it that are transcendent.

In this formal interview, Adam, a white father who has two white boys who play for Kick It and in interscholastic soccer, describes soccer as particular sport because of its

social characteristics. His positive appraisal of soccer is a form of happy diversity talk (Bell & Hartmann 2007). Soccer for many parents is a social arena where racial, ethnic, and international diversity is celebrated and a key feature of the sporting community. More so than other American sports, soccer is not considered racially homogenous, but rather a sport where social difference is embraced, common, and where social tensions or inequalities are seemingly less impactful.

At the Midwest World Cup, such happy sentiment and motivations for soccer participation can be reinforced by common and normative social interactions that take place. A popular thing to do throughout the tournament for players is to bring decorative pins from their respective clubs/states/countries and exchange them with fellow players. Pin exchanges are celebrated by many at the tournament and there is even a pin exchange zone at the facility for participants. Younger players (8-14) are very into pin exchanges, and at the end of the tournament it is common to see players with towels, hats, or soccer bags covered with dozens of pins from other youth soccer clubs.[77] International players and US based players seek each other out for pin exchanges, and I noted on multiple occasions when a player smiled after interacting with a player from another part of the world.

Fieldnote: Causal Pin Exchange with Canada (2018 tournament)

Antoine, (14-year-old boy) a player on Kick It, suffered a wrist injury in the second match of the day and I ended up walking with him across the complex to the medical/trainer's room. After the trainer wrapped his wrist with ice we began to meander over to a field where his younger brother was playing. On the way to the field, Antoine was stopped by 3 white girls who were around his age and from Canada. They said hi and asked him if he wanted to exchange pins. Antoine smiled said "sure", reached into his bag and gave one of the girls a pin labeled

[77] Parents and players also hold onto these collections of pins as mementos of the tournament. Players and parents have shown me their collections from previous years. For example, one player has all the pins placed on a bath towel in his room.

"Kick It" and the organizations logo. He was then handed a pin and the kids smiled at each other and went on their respective ways. As we kept walking, I asked Antoine to show me his new pin. It featured the Canadian flag, a soccer ball and the name of the girls' club.

These interactions represent the uniqueness of the tournament, but also reflect popular ideals about sport being a place for positive, diverse, and pleasant social interactions for youth. In this case, Antoine, a Black and Asian-American kid from the Twin Cities, gets to interact with youth from a different national background. These are the types of happy diversity moments that are envisioned by organizers and parents and fit within the social and cultural appeal of the tournament. There are other social norms at the Midwest World Cup that bolster this perception and feeling about youth soccer and its connection to diversity.

Fieldnote: Team Photos After the Game (2017 Midwest World Cup)

In the 2017 tournament, I coached the 13/14-year-old boys' team (Kick It), a team I spent the spring and summer coaching. Before the tournament a few of the boys expressed their excitement to play and hopes to go further in the tournament compared to years past. This year the team ended up playing a total of 5 matches and three of our opponents were from outside of the state of Minnesota. The boys had two win-or-go-home matches on the 2nd to last day of the tournament. In the first match we played against a team from Costa Rica. This match ended in a tense and close win for Kick It, which meant that in the second match we played an all Latino team from the Chicago area. Both teams spoke Spanish to one another off and on the field. Similar to the game in the morning, both teams were very competitive, and emotions were high. Luckily, for the Kick It boys, they ended up edging out another one goal victory.[78] In each match the boys from Kick It and myself were thrilled about moving on to the next round of the tournament, given the amount of effort put in preparation for and during each match.

After each of these matches parents and coaches from each team encouraged and gathered around players from each team in front of a goal to take a photo. In the second match, it was the opposing coach who loudly shouted "hey boys, let's all get together and get a photo. It was a great game. This is what it's about." In both cases, players from opposing teams lined up next to each other in their

[78] I have recorded other fieldnotes that detail the competitive interactions that happened on and off the field during these matches. Especially pertaining to performances of masculinity and norms of sporting competition.

grass-stained uniforms, some arm-in-arm, and smiled as parents snapped photos with their smartphones. It was a nice way to end a competitive soccer match.

At home that evening, I saw and noted multiple parents on Facebook sharing photos from these two matches and captions stating how wonderful the tournament was.

A snapshot of the players on the field during those two matches reflects the notion of soccer as an inclusive, racially diverse, and culturally unique sport. Multiple nations and Black, Asian, Latino, and white players are represented on the field of play. The post-game photo is a social norm of this particular diverse soccer environment and reflects the motivations of some participants and the happy diversity discourse that surrounds the sport. It also adds another layer to the social and cultural appeal of the tournament because in the moment, the act of taking an inter-team photo reflects positive ideals about competitive sport regarding good sportsmanship and comradery with your opponent. Overall, the photo is an opportunity for families and players from diverse racial and national backgrounds to mingle, affirm that this is a shared and inclusive diverse social space. The cosmopolitan and multicultural characteristics of youth soccer and the Midwest World Cup are then documented and at times shared with others.

The inter-team post game photo norm also indicates the special occasion of the tournament and the intentionality of participants acting in a racially and ethnically diverse soccer spaces. I say this because in my observations of youth soccer across the Twin Cities, I did not observe such photo taking patterns between teams of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, within the Midwest World Cup specifically, I did not see teams from Minnesota take post-game photos with opponents who also resided in the state. Such photos occurred when a team was from out of state, out of country, and often a team with a different racial or ethnic composition. This pattern highlights the variations

that exist within different racially and ethnically diverse soccer spaces. It also signals how such pleasant (and potentially voyeuristic) social interactions in diverse social spaces may be encouraged through an annual spectacle and/or sport-tourism/consumption where interaction with different social groups is explicitly celebrated and encouraged.

Now I am going to move to interscholastic soccer, a less celebrated and less capitalistic youth soccer environment, that also has substantive racial and ethnic diversity (depending on which schools participate), and whose participants hold positive views of soccer's racial dynamics. The following fieldnote represents a racially and ethnically diverse environment that brings together youth who interact predominantly in immigrant soccer spaces and other players who spend most of their time within organized travel soccer (see chapter 2).

> ***Fieldnote: Archer vs Groveland***
>
> *Today was the first day I decided to venture out and check out the High School Soccer scene in the Twin Cities. One because the spaces I have been going through organized soccer have been very class privileged and also majority white. I picked Archer, a public high school because of its racial, class, and ethnic diversity, size, and because it had had a good soccer program in the past according to colleagues and other soccer friends in the area. Archer was playing at Groveland High, a public school located in a middle-class neighborhood that is majority white. The skies were dark and on the verge of storming. The floodlights were on and shined on the stadium, which rested in a mini bowl. Adjacent to the stadium were smaller fields for youth football, batting cages, and an open green space.*
>
> *I got to the stadium about twenty minutes into the first half. Both sets of stands were pretty empty, but there was a smattering of parents and kids on either set of bleachers. It was a typical weeknight high school sporting event. I walked around the small black track/walking path and took a seat on the wet bleachers on the Groveland side of the stadium.*
>
> *After taking a seat next to another high school kid (Latino boy) I took note of the racial and ethnic demographics of each squad. Archer consisted of entirely kids of color (brown, black, Asian) except for 1 white kid with blonde hair. The rest of the team was either Somali, Oromo, Hmong, or Latino. They were coached by 2*

white men, one of which seemed to be more of a technical coach, while other one just sort of stood there giving encouragement.

Groveland had a few kids of color on the team but was about 50% white. I counted 9 white kids on the 16-17-man roster with a Latino kid playing lone striker, one East-African player, a Black player (who I knew from Kick It) and three other Latino kids who were on the bench. I wouldn't classify their team as a team of whiteness, but it was much more visible than Archer. Groveland was coached by two men probably in their early 30s. One was a bald-headed white guy, with red shorts and a black/red long sleeve athletic shirt. The assistant coach was a man of color, who wore a backwards baseball cap and a black raincoat.

This match, and in turn, the City High School athletics league, is a form of everyday racial and ethnic diversity and multiculturalism (Amin 2002; Hardy 2017; Wise & Velayutham 2009) because youth from around the metro area consistently meet, interact, and compete against one another for 2-3 months of the year. Though it is more competitive (tryouts) and the players are older, interscholastic soccer in the Twin Cities for public schools is often racially and ethnically similar to local parks and recreation leagues. The high school teams are often extensions of the local neighborhoods and reflective of demographic shift and macro patterns of racial and class stratification in public education and neighborhoods. In the Twin Cities, students of color are the majority of students enrolled in all public high schools.[79] For this specific athletic event, interscholastic soccer provides the structure for Archer, a school and team comprised of many working-class and 1.5 generation immigrants of color, to travel to and interact with Groveland, a school that has a soccer team and student body with substantive

[79] In 2017, 65% of all students in Minneapolis identified as students of color. In St. Paul the number was 80%.

representation for youth of color, but also has many white players who play in organized travel soccer.[80]

I observed many matches between high schools and matches that where players of color (including 1.5 generation immigrants and American-born people of color) and white players are brought together on the field as opponents or occasionally teammates. Whereas the public-school city league provides consistent matches full of socioeconomic and racial difference, interscholastic soccer also provides moments with starker racial and class interactions. As the season moves towards the district playoffs and the state tournament, city public school teams can play against suburban and/or private high schools.

> ***Fieldnote: Archer Boys in the District Playoffs***
>
> *The boys at Archer High School made it to the district semi-final match and were two wins away from qualifying for the state tournament. Their opponent, Grant High School, was the first ranked team in the district. Grant High School is polar opposite from Archer for multiple reasons. Grant is a well-off public school located in small and well-to-do suburb 20 minutes Northeast of the cities. Its student body is over 85% white and very few of the students can be considered working class.*
>
> *It was a cool fall evening when I made the drive up to Grant High School and the physical scenery was distinct from the city league games that I usually attend. First of all, the town water tower was the tallest structure in town and stood over the school. The school and stadium were tucked away and enveloped by large trees, and across the street from the stadium was a large mega-like church. The athletic facility also indicated; the amount of resources available at Grant. The turf field was new, and the electronic scoreboard looked better than some college sports teams, with its graphics, HD resolution, and multiple local sponsors.*

[80] Groveland High School is located in a neighborhood that is 78% white and has a median household income of $73,000. In contrast to the residential demography statistics, the high school is much more racially and socioeconomically diverse. The school has 43% of its student body on free or reduced lunch and in terms of race, the school is 43% white, 22% black, 20% Latinx, and 13% Asian. This contrast is due to options of school choice and movement within the public-school system, and because many White families opt into private schools.

The Grant team had 15 white players and 3 players of color, whereas Archer is entirely players of color with the exception of one white player. The right side of stands were packed with families, the larger Grant student body, and even a dog dressed up in Grant school colors. I did not see a person of color in that section. There was more room to sit on the left side of the stadium, so I sat there, which is where a few of the Archer fans also watched the game. There were about 20-25 Archer fans who made the weeknight drive to watch the playoff match. A few Asian families (15 people) from Archer sat a few rows in front of me and were loud and proud whenever an Archer player pulled off a skill move. At field level, a few Somali boys watched and cheered on their friends as well.

On the field, the playing styles between each team was evident. Archer players were quick on their feet, moved the ball on the ground, played quick passes, and displayed their individual creativity and skill regularly. Grant, on the other hand played very direct soccer with long passes in the air to their forward, who was then expected to do most of the work to create a chance to score. Fans from Grant cheered big boots of the ball and hard tackles. There was very little flow or creativity from the Grant players.

The social and cultural differences between Grant and Archer also made an appearance before the game started. The PA announcer (a white woman) began announcing the starting lineups for each team, which is a norm for High School varsity matches. After energetically moving through the Grant High School boys, she worked her way through the Archer names. She announced Karen, Somali, and Hmong names as one might expect a suburban white Minnesotan might. She stumbled and mumbled over names such as 'Abdulaziz', 'Ywa Nay' or 'Ktru'. Each time this occurred the Archer fans in front of me quietly laughed and smirked.

This district playoff soccer match is taking place in social environment that is 99% of the time a 'white space' (Anderson 2015). Whiteness and a lack of racial and ethnic diversity is visible and even harder to miss given particular social interactions, such as discomfort and unfamiliarity when pronouncing non-Anglo names. However, due to interscholastic soccer, for two hours, the presence of youth of color and their families alters this white social space and shifts it towards the cosmopolitan. Now, this variation of a cosmopolitan canopy where whiteness is more central does not mean that this soccer game has a lasting or positive impact on the racial dynamics of Grant high school and the

suburb it is located in. I do not naively claim that one or two matches a year between distinct schools reduce prejudicial racial and/or xenophobic attitudes or increase interracial friendships. But it's meaningful to recognize that Interscholastic Soccer does create a form of social interaction between youth and families from distinct racial, class, and geographical backgrounds that do not spend time in similar social spaces.

Racial and ethnic diversity in Interscholastic Soccer does not just exist as a way to de-center or shift whiteness, socio-economic privilege, and 'white space'. Many matches exist outside of the prism of 'predominately white team vs. predominately youth of color team.' Interscholastic Soccer also creates environments between different communities of color that live in different portions of the city. During the 2017 season, I attended a few matches for Tesla high school, a smaller urban public school that is majority Black, Latino, and has 75% of its student body on free and/or reduced lunch. Since their new coach, Eddie, arrived a few years prior, the program had risen from a doormat to respectable.

> ***Fieldnote: Tesla vs. Arthur: Senior Night***
>
> *It was senior night (last home game) for the Tesla soccer team as they faced off against Arthur high school. These schools are located on opposite sides of the city, but they are near mirror images of each other in terms of racial/ethnic composition on the field and within their schools.*[81] *The match took place at Tesla's home field, which at the time had one small stand, an old school electronic scoreboard, and a 4-lane black track that wraps around the crowned and somewhat uneven grass field.*[82] *Tesla is in the middle of the standings and Arthur is near the bottom of the city standings. For each team, it was the final regular season game before district playoffs.*

[81] Similar to Tesla, Arthur High School has nearly ¾ of its student body on free or reduced lunch. Its student body is majority Latino (35%) and Black (35%).

[82] At the time, the coach and many of the players were frustrated with the field because of its heavy use. Often because of rain or football games the field would become nearly unplayable. In 2018, the school received a grant with a professional sports team to refurbish the grass and make it environmentally sustainable.

On the field, the game was a reflection of different immigrant soccer communities in the Twin Cities. Tesla's team was majority Black, with many of its players having lineage in Somalia and Liberia. Four of the players were Latino, one was Asian-American, and their goalkeeper was white. Arthur's starting lineup included 6 Latino players and 5 Black players (Somali). They had one white player in the team as a substitute. Each school was coached by a Black man, which is rare to see within interscholastic soccer and US soccer culture in general. None of the men were loud on the sidelines and were consistently talking with the players on the sidelines about the game.

The crowd was larger than normal because of senior night and most of the parents in attendance were there to see their boys' last game as high school students. There were only 2-3 parents on the Arthur sideline. For Tesla, there were about 12 parents in the crowd. In contrast, there are about 20-25 students in attendance (black students, Latino Students, and a couple of white students). The students were full of energy as they cracked jokes about the game, engaged in school gossip, and discussed what their favorite candy to eat was. A few carried decorative signs with the names of senior players.

Before the game started there was a brief ceremony where the senior parents are honored with flowers, having their name announced, a picture with family, a dap-hug from their coach, and a round of applause from the crowd. Tesla had 8 seniors on the team this year and each time a player went through the ceremony smiles were plentiful and blended in with a couple of tears from all involved. The keeper, a Latino boy who is beloved by teammates took the photo with his mother, father, and sister. He held a sign with his name and number on it while tucking flowers under his shoulder. His smile was so big and infectious that it transferred over to me and the other students in my area of the bleachers. Each player had some form of family representation, and for the one player who did not, he had teammates and friends take the picture with him.[83]

This interscholastic match has substantive racial and ethnic diversity where whiteness and the specter of consumption is not present or a reference point (say in comparison to mega-events like the Midwest World Cup). The structure of high school soccer brings Latino and Black immigrant communities from different neighborhoods

[83] On other occasions when watching interscholastic soccer matches that featured schools with more working-class populations and immigrants of color it was rare to see parents in the crowd. Attendance patterns can be explained because of work conflicts or other family responsibilities as many games take place in the early evening and all-around town. Multiple times I noted that on diverse teams that white parents were most represented in the crowd.

and sections of the city together on the field. Many of the players that featured in this match build high school soccer careers not through playing in organized travel soccer, rather, they play in self-organized leagues within their respective racial/ethnic groups. For both Tesla and Arthur players their training grounds are local Somali or Latino pick-up games and/or leagues that exist throughout the Twin Cities. Through soccer, immigrants of color in various neighborhoods, gyms, and parks, make space and place. This soccer-based place making is the foundational source for interscholastic soccer in the Twin Cities to be multiracial and multi-ethnic soccer environments.

Part 2: Youth Soccer, Cosmopolitan Canopies and Happy Diversity Talk

I have described and established that there are many spaces and places of substantive racial and ethnic diversity in the field of youth soccer across the Twin Cities. I argue that these racially and ethnically diverse spaces of interaction can, at one level, be understood as examples of a cosmopolitan canopy, which Elijah Anderson (2014) defines as "an island of racial and ethnic civility in a virtual sea of racial segregation" (p. 11). In these public and diverse soccer environments, people with a wide range of social differences interact with one another in familiar ways on a seemingly neutral ground. And like other cosmopolitan canopies, youth soccer is often seen as a "neutral space of familiarity" where a pluralistic embrace of social difference exists, and people understand the space to belong to all types of people (Anderson 2011).

Elijah Anderson has spent much of his sociological career analyzing the lived experience of race in America, especially at the level of every day and symbolic interaction within American cities. Philadelphia is the social site where he conducts

ethnography and contextualizes the process of racial integration and incorporation, the growth of the Black Middle Class over the past fifty years, and the persistence of racial segregation, racism, and the reproduction of anti-Black stigma in interpersonal interactions (Anderson 2011). In, *The Cosmopolitan Canopy: Race and Civility in Everyday Life,* Anderson (2011) describes and analyzes how people interact across and along racial lines in a Philadelphia that has become a more racially, ethnically, and socially diverse metropolis. Anderson is particularly interested in newly emergent spaces of interaction, that he calls cosmopolitan canopies, which reflect the ethos of civility and getting along. Cosmopolitan canopies lie in contrast to micro-interactions and a public ethos that has historically been defined by wariness, indifference, and avoidance, due to racial segregation and racial stigma (Anderson 2014).

Philadelphia, like other cities across the United States, can have white spaces, black spaces, and cosmopolitan spaces that may be in various stages of flux (Anderson 2014, 2011).[84] Cosmopolitan canopies, unlike white and black spaces, are "heterogeneous, densely populated public spaces where a mix of people can feel comfortable enough to relax their guard and go about their business more casually (Anderson 2011 p.3).[85] These are pluralistic settings where people can gain a respite from

[84] This is especially relevant because despite persistent systemic racial inequality, American society has gone undergone a major racial incorporation process post-Civil Rights.
[85] Black space is tied to the historical legacies of racism and the nadir of race relations where Black people were forcibly pushed in a caste-like place (Anderson 2015 p.11). Racial segregation and discrimination are the foundational structural elements of black space (ibid). Social spaces such, neighborhoods, shops, churches in which Black people are central and the majority are Black spaces. Black space is often denigrated and stigmatized by White Americans (ibid). In contrast, White space are social spaces and institutions where white people are central and an overwhelming presence. These spaces are very much tied to legacies of racism and segregation. In these settings Black people and other people of color are wary of racism because of their vulnerability.

lingering tensions of urban life and engage one another in a spirit of civility and goodwill. Within cosmopolitan canopies, there is an acceptance of such public space as belonging to all kinds of people, and this form of acceptance is the defining characteristic of the social place (Anderson 2011).

Anderson (2011) documents people displaying degrees of racial cosmopolitanism within Center City, which is a section of Philadelphia. Within this urban zone of interaction, there are multiple cosmopolitan canopies that vary in terms of size, image, and social definition.[86] But despite their variation, they are defined by people from diverse backgrounds to become "better acquainted with people they otherwise seldom observe up close" (Anderson 2011 p. 276). Anderson (2011) describes in detail how spaces such as Reading Terminal and Rittenhouse Square are places with a social atmosphere that is calm, pleasant and has people from a range of class, ethnic, and racial backgrounds who express civility and become more familiar with one another. The cosmopolitan canopy holds social importance for Anderson (2011), because such spaces can be a "profoundly humanizing experience" for people as they are "repeatedly exposed to the unfamiliar and thus have the opportunity to stretch themselves mentally, emotionally, and socially" (p. 267-277).

Similar to the implications associated with contact theory (Alliport 1954), and Oldenburg's (1999) description of the "third place", cosmopolitan canopies offer contact and exposure with different groups and ideally encourage the practice of taken-for-

[86] For example, Anderson (2011) describes one place within the Cosmopolitan zone of Center City, Gallery Mall, as a "Black space". Anderson labels this the "Ghetto Downtown" where blackness and working-class people are more central. While Gallery Mall is more racially and class homogenous, is still is a place where people from different parts of the city come together and interact and is not hostile to strangers who enter the space.

granted civility towards others, build community and sociality, and reduce levels of social difference. As cities become increasingly diverse, cosmopolitan canopies and such social contact gain significance because it can serve as a model of civility that can potentially positively encourage diverse urban people to co-exist under a shared ethos of social behavior (Anderson 2011). It must be noted that Anderson and others' (Hiebert et al. 2015; Oldenburg 1999; Watson 2009) largely positive accounts of the role of particular public places fostering tolerance and connection amongst diverse groups of people is not without criticism. Scholars have argued that we should be critical and wary of positive and almost romantic claims about the potential of public space to foster truly safe and inclusive environments of cosmopolitanism (Aptekar 2019; Berrey 2005; Lofland 2000). Apetkar (2019), through an ethnography of a diverse farmers market in New York, makes it clear that cosmopolitan canopies cannot be "bracketed away as calm spaces away from the conflicts and travails of the city at large" (84). Rather, everyday cosmopolitanism coexists with conflict and the reproduction of inequalities because such space is embedded within larger structures of stratification, institutions (ex: economy, state power) and cultural paradigms (Aptekar 2019).

I agree with Apektar's (2019) criticism and will apply a similar critical analysis in the next chapter, but Anderson's (2011) notion of cosmopolitan canopies maintains an analytical and descriptive utility when applied to youth soccer culture. Similar to how Anderson (2011) maps public areas of Philadelphia to serve as spaces where people from different racial backgrounds interact in civil and polite ways; the field of youth soccer in the Twin Cities structures public and relatively more private sites of interaction, where

race is perceived to be more neutral and cosmopolitan interactions are frequent, normative, and celebrated.

The cosmopolitan canopies of youth soccer that I identify are not uniform in their construction or uniform in terms of racial, ethnic, and class composition. Some canopies are formed through collision of different sites of youth soccer (US youth futsal), while others are made possible because the public parks system (McMillan recreational league) provides affordable and accessible soccer programming that brings together social groups that are separated due to larger patterns of residential segregation. Other cosmopolitan canopies of soccer happen with less frequency but exist on a grander scale and form in more in relation to sports tourism and the private youth sports industry (Midwest World Cup & organized travel soccer). The Midwest World Cup falls firmly within the boundaries of organized travel soccer and mainly consists of secure middle-class families; however, it still involves people from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds and the cosmopolitan aspects of the event are amplified and celebrated. Interscholastic soccer forms varied cosmopolitan canopies because schools contain wide ranges of racial and class composition and costs to participate are much lower. Cosmopolitan canopies within interscholastic soccer vary in form because they can involve predominately white and privileged schools sharing the field with working class immigrants of color or be about distinct communities of color interacting through soccer outside of the specter of whiteness.

Youth soccer holds a particular sporting and social power with regards to diverse social spaces and formation of cosmopolitan canopies. Because there are different sites of youth soccer and participants are in constant movement as they participate in the sport,

cosmopolitan canopies are constantly made, but also temporary in their physical location and frequency. There is not one particular neighborhood or place that is fixed—like Anderson's marketplace—for a cosmopolitan canopy to occur. Instead, players, parents, coaches, organizers, and clubs actively make cosmopolitan canopies at different locations throughout the Twin Cities through their movement and participation. In the fall, cosmopolitan canopies of youth soccer can occur at particular parks or high school stadiums once a few times a week for a couple of months. In the winter and spring, an urban YWCA is made into a canopy by organized travel teams, elite teams, and local Latino clubs. In the summer, a suburban sports complex transforms into a multicultural soccer celebration. And for some soccer organizations, they become smaller scale cosmopolitan canopies as families from different neighborhoods and social backgrounds seek out particular social environments.

Moreover, youth soccer and potentially sport in general, holds a distinct relationship to cosmopolitan canopies because the formation of said canopies is not centered around economic exchange, entertainment, or conspicuous consumption. Whereas Anderson (2011) describes many canopies that form in direct relation to places of work, nightlife, shopping centers, or dining; youth sport offers a different and less explicitly economic social arena and foundation for such diverse spaces to emerge and exist. Instead, physical recreation, sporting and social development, and competition are the cultural forces that are behind the movement of participants, which in turn form various cosmopolitan canopies.

Happy Diversity Talk

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, the ideological presence of sport and soccer as a racially positive, and progressive, and inclusive social arena is a prominent feature of sport as a social institution. This popular ideology and discourse pairs well with many different participants in youth soccer forming, moving between and interacting in varying cosmopolitan canopies of the sport. This pairing of soccer's positive racial and social influence and the reality of cosmopolitan canopies of soccer is reflected in how parents and players positively talk about their social experiences with the game regarding race and ethnicity. The following two quotes are from two different players that play soccer for Lake High School.[87] In this exchange, Hope—a Black immigrant from England—said the following.

Alex (A): So, how would you describe your high school and the soccer team?

Hope: Perfect.

A: Yeah?

Hope: Just perfect.

A: Perfect?

Hope: Perfect.

A: Why perfect?

H: Just so diverse. Like, people from Haiti, people from Somalia, Ethiopia, Egypt, England.

[87] Lake high school is another city-based public school that I spent time observing interscholastic soccer matches. As stated in chapter (x), Lake is a diverse school in terms of race, ethnicity, class, and immigration. About half of the school is on free-reduced lunch. 35% of the student body is black (African-American, and East-African immigrants), 33% of the students are white, 20% are Latino, and the rest of the student body is Asian and Native American. The soccer team consists of black, Latino and white players. Provide description of South High School if 2 of the quotes are from those players.

Students who play soccer for city-based high schools that have substantive racial, class, and ethnic difference, talk about racial diversity in relation to their soccer experiences in positive terms. Hope was very concise with his words during the entire interview, but without explicitly prompting for race, ethnicity, or national background, he brought up the social diversity of his team with regards to nationality. Lake's team being a place with ample representation of black players with family ties around the world, multiple Latino players, and a handful of white players is a part of why Hope considers his team to be 'perfect'. Hope's succinct description and positive feelings towards his diverse and cosmopolitan team is an example of happy diversity talk, a prominent and normative racial discourse in the United States (Bell & Hartmann 2007; Berrey 2015). In a separate interview, his teammate Juan, who moved to the US with his family when he was 8, and who plays in local Mexican leagues and organized club/travel soccer, also talked about soccer, diversity, and his feelings about having friends from different racial and ethnic backgrounds.

> Alex(A): Gotcha. And, um, so like, since you've played in a variety of spaces, do you think, like, being around people from different backgrounds, is that important to you?
>
> Juan: Ah, yeah.] Because I, I made a lot of friends from different races.
>
> A: Yeah.
>
> Juan: And, you know, I like that. I just don't wanna have, like, a group of friends that are, like, you know, just my, my race. Um, and like, I don't even like, I don't want to, like, I don't see them like, like, from the color that they are. I just see them as, you know, like, we're all one color.

In this case, after a specific prompt, Juan, a senior in high school, states that he has made a lot of friends through soccer. These friends, including those at his high school, are from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, which is important to him.

Juan's words also take on particular importance because later in the interview he mentioned how soccer was one crucial space where he was able to build confidence, find solace, and make friends after facing xenophobic treatment from peers in a mostly white K-8 school.

> Juan: Um, when I was like, when I was in middle school, like, around sixth grade, because my English wasn't really that good and, like, kids would make fun of me and, like, I would get frustrated. And then we would go to recess and I would, you know, just grab a kickball and then kick it against the wall. And, you know, I'd go back to class and then, you know, like, all of those problems would start again.
>
> Alex: Uh-huh.
>
> Juan: And, and that's when I realized. I was like, "Wow. I'm having such a fun time playing soccer at recess, and then I go back to class and…"
>
> Alex: It was all kids? Um, were the kids that made fun of you, ah, were they mostly like white kids? Or was it, or just people, kids that could speak English well?
>
> Juan: Ah, it was, yeah. I would definitely say it was white kids.

When contrasted with the racial/xenophobic treatment Juan faced within school, soccer is a place where he has a different and positive social experience. He interacts within a cosmopolitan canopy that is his high school soccer team, wants to have a diverse friend group, and aspires to apply a colorblind viewpoint of the world. Based on Juan's reflections, soccer lives up to its idealized discourse of being a truly inclusive game and is a place for him where race seems to matter less or not at all.

Multiple players consider soccer to be an inclusive, global, and diverse game based off of their own experiences with soccer. And this makes sense given that they regularly play in cosmopolitan soccer environments, whether that be within their own team, and at times in the opponents they face. The strong presence of happy diversity discourse and its connection to soccer culture is re-iterated by parents who have children

in soccer environments that do not racially/ethnically look like Lake, Archer, Tesla, or Arthur high school. The following quote is from Carl, a black father, who has a professional degree and upper-middle class income, and two Black/biracial daughters who play in organized travel soccer (Lions FC) and interscholastic soccer.

> Alex: Would you describe the club as diverse? And if so, in what ways?
>
> Carl: "I love seeing how competitively we have diversity. When we play teams like Cedar Point, teams like Woodcrest, teams like whatever, maybe there's one Black face. Our team, for the longest time, Native American girl, who's adopted, who is Chinese. My daughter, who is bi-racial. And another daughter who is Japanese. Another child who is Caribbean, from Jamaica. And it's so cool just to see that team play these other teams where the only diversity is whether the blond hair is curly or straight. And so, that I love. And I think that Lions FC has tried to do that. I don't know how much of its Jay (technical director). I think there's just lots of different reasons. But I love the diversity of it."

Carl views Lions FC as a racially and ethnically diverse club in comparison to other suburban travel teams in the metro area. For Carl, his daughter's team is racially and ethnically cosmopolitan, and it holds positive implications for how his two daughters exist in the social world. In my observations (see chapter 2 and 3), it is evident that Lions FC exists in a much different racialized and classed soccer environment in comparison to the experiences of Juan and Hope at Lake High school. But, in comparison to other organized travel teams that are entirely white, one can consider Lions FC be a varied form of a cosmopolitan canopy, one that is more securely middle to upper middle class and that is more explicitly linked to the presence of whiteness. But irrespective of the variations, 1.5 generation immigrants of color and Black middle-class parents tap into a similar happy diversity discourse and understand their experiences within soccer as diverse and full of positive social interactions and implications.

Parents at Kick It (hybrid/alternative) also talk about racial and ethnic diversity within their soccer community in similar ways to Carl. John, a Greek-American father with one son at Kick It likes Kick It because it has more racial and ethnic diversity compared to a previous organization his son played for.

Alex: So, would you consider both JOTP and … do you consider them diverse clubs?

> John: Kick It is more diverse. CRA is not as diverse. I like the fact that JOTP's more diverse.
>
> Alex: How would you describe it as diverse?
>
> John: The players are diverse. There's more diversity. That's the one thing… New York was a lot more diverse than here so I'm still getting used to the fact that there's not as much diversity in the Twin Cities. But I like Kick It because there's ethnicity, there's diversity. With the kids are not all blond, blue-eyes kind of thing. So, I like that. That's a plus for me.

John finds that Kick It is a more diverse and cosmopolitan space that reminds him of his childhood and adult life in global and multicultural New York City. And just as Carl described Lions FC, the racial and ethnic backgrounds of youth at Kick It is viewed as a positive and distinct from predominately white soccer communities. John's positive feelings about the diversity at Kick It is not purely aspirational. Nor a happy diversity discourse that does not reflect actual social interactions and lived experiences at Kick It.

> ***Fieldnote: Kick It Summer Camp, August 12th***
>
> *Roman (Latino male coach) asked me to provide some extra help during free play time at the center. When I arrived, it was free play time for the kids who stay at the center from 9-3 (some of the kids leave at noon). Outside, Gus (white, 15 years old) and Casey (white, 17 years old) were de-constructing the water slip n slide inflatable field and deflating the popular/giant inflatable soccer fields. The rest of the younger kids were inside the gym either hanging out in the small training room, rec room, or playing on the court. There were about 30 kids (about 20 boys and 10 girls) hanging out today, with the youngest being about 8 years old and the oldest being a 16-17 years old. In the gym Roman was overseeing a co-ed pick-up game that has an age limit of 11 years old, so younger kids get to*

touch the ball. On the court there was Emmett, a 9-year-old black boy, Kelly, a 10-year old white girl, Lela, a Black/biracial 12 year old black girl, Oscar and Marcel two 11 year old Black siblings, Riley, a 11 year old white boy, and Abel, a 8 year old Latino boy.

During one rotation of game, two boys, Niko (12, white) and Ale (7, Latino) sat next to Ramon and preceded to bombard him with random questions. It was an endearing moment. Ale kept trying to play with Ramon's face and asked Ramon all types of questions about things 7-year-olds want to know ("what's your favorite food!?"). Niko egged him on the whole time and also teased Ramon while trying to convince him to let him in the game despite being above the age limit "Man, I wish I was 11".

This note from an average summer day at Kick It is the type of socially diverse environment that John's finds appealing and positive. His son regularly interacts with kids from different racial backgrounds in a causal soccer setting. On many days Kick It, is itself a cosmopolitan canopy where racial and ethnic difference is taken for granted and normal. These daily settings are what parents and some players draw on when making sense of the racialized soccer environments that they interact in. The racialized environment of Kick It and other perceived cosmopolitan canopies plays a role in being the base for happy diversity discourse to be used by adults and youth.

Many participants from different social backgrounds and social positions across the field of youth soccer enjoy and appreciate the diverse and cosmopolitan soccer environments that they (or their children) interact in. The language they use reflects featured elements of happy diversity discourse (Bell & Hartmann 2007; Burke 2012; Mayorga-Gallo 2014) and notions of exposure to diversity being socially important for children and a valuable social good (Ahmed 2012; Hagerman 2014; Underhill 2018). This racial discourse is easily tapped into because understandings of soccer as a global and inclusive game are deeply a part of the sport's popular reputation and image. And just as importantly, participants can match soccer's popular racial and socially inclusive

social image to the presence of cosmopolitan canopies that they see and interact in on a fairly regular basis.

A Brief Conclusion

Ultimately, youth soccer culture and its broader social field is a rich foundation for varied and multiple cosmopolitan canopies to be actively formed by social actors and soccer organizations throughout a diverse metropolitan area such as the Twin Cities. There are many racially and ethnically diverse places of soccer and they exist in varied forms and positions across the social field. In this youth sporting context, soccer can live up to its popular reputation as a multicultural game, where racial and ethnic difference is celebrated and even a taken-for-granted norm in everyday interactions. The common and even ordinary racial and ethnic cosmopolitanism that characterizes much of youth soccer in the Twin Cities lends itself well to the reproduction liberal and positive diversity talk and soccer's popular reputation as racially inclusive and a positive social force. But as I will show in the next chapter, the racial dynamics that infuse youth soccer culture do not simply produce tension free, familiar, and seemingly cosmopolitan canopies that greatly reduce racial boundaries. Rather, soccer does not always live up to its popular positive and progressive racial image of sport, nor do everyday interactions and discourses in diverse soccer spaces consistently and neatly reflect happy ideals of diversity that permeate racial thinking in the United States.

Chapter 6: Racist Ruptures in the 'Beautiful Game'

In the previous chapter I painted a picture of various cosmopolitan canopies of youth soccer and showed that racial and ethnically diverse soccer spaces are fairly common throughout the Twin Cities. Cosmopolitanism and positive feelings towards diversity within soccer culture is a discourse that is reproduced by a variety of parents, players, and coaches. And for many participants, the diverse and cosmopolitan aspects of their soccer communities are viewed as an important and positive aspect of their experiences. However, the multicultural and racially inclusive discourse that infuses youth soccer is complicated and challenged in multiple ways. Youth soccer is not a straightforward and consistently positive and happy social space of racial inclusion. Rather, many racist ruptures occur throughout the field of youth soccer, including cosmopolitan canopies of the sport.

In this chapter I document these racialized and racist ruptures in detail. They are made apparent through the experiences of people of color, everyday social interactions, the ways in which people discuss particular racial and ethnic groups, and the pressures facing certain youth soccer organizations to build competitive teams and develop top players. Such ruptures demonstrate that cultural ideals of diversity and cosmopolitanism do not escape or exist outside of racism, whether that be through blunt interactions or softer and subtle discourse that reflect larger racialized systemic social patterns.

The chapter is organized around three main findings. First, there are notable incidents of overt racist aggressions in different spaces of youth soccer. Parents and players of color share these experiences during interviews, and I witnessed such incidents during ethnographic observation. These overt racist incidents are not common, but also

not infrequent, and rarely lead to forms of reconciliation or resolution. The second finding is that there are many subtle racial microaggressions and feelings/experiences of differential treatment or isolation due to race and/or ethnicity amongst participants in youth soccer. The third main finding is that there is a prevalence of essentialized, and biological race talk that participants within youth soccer tap into and reproduce when discussing the sport.

To conclude this chapter, I discuss the significance of youth soccer being a fragile, yet stable racialized social sporting field and its implications regarding racial discourse, racial ideology and the social power of sport in relation to race. I argue that youth soccer is a particular and important socio-cultural arena that is built on two relational racial dynamics that on the surface may seem as antagonistic to one another. On one end, youth soccer is effective at creating cosmopolitan spaces of interaction, and legitimating happy liberal racial discourses of diversity. Simultaneously it is effective at containing racist incidents that sport quietly helps foster, while also reproducing damaging colonial discourses of race rooted in biological racism. When taken together, I argue that youth soccer, because of sport's particular meritocratic, racially inclusive cultural ideals, is a contested racial terrain full of cosmopolitan canopies that easily contain its foundational and relatively frequent racist ruptures and is limited in challenging or transforming racial hierarchy and racial ideology. I situate the racially progressive possibilities and limitations of youth soccer with race-based critical scholarship that discusses the constrained social potential of liberal racial discourse and racially diverse social spaces with regard to disrupting the racist social order in United States.

Overt Racist Aggressions and Ruptures

While there are racially diverse sites of soccer in the Twin Cities and many parents and players who affirm the inclusive and multicultural discourse that surrounds the sport's culture, race and racism still move within the sport, albeit in less positive and celebratory ways. Overt racism bubbles under the surface of the happy diversity discourse and cosmopolitan spaces, and on occasion ruptures into plain sight. In interviews with parents and players of color, their reflections and descriptions about their experiences and understandings of race—in relation to youth soccer—reveal the presence of these explicit racist ruptures.

Leslie, a Black mother with a bi-racial black/white son who plays in a variety of soccer environments (Kick It, organized travel, interscholastic soccer), shared multiple insights about the relationship between race and youth soccer culture. She is very much aware as to how race shapes the way her son and herself experience and negotiate different racialized soccer spaces (white, cosmopolitan). The following exchange starts after we discuss the ways in which she talks about race with her son and her perceptions of his racial knowledge.

> Alex: Does he (son) notice when he plays in different environments, like, when he plays against a Somali team or when he plays against some suburban team that you guys play against? Do you think he's aware of that or…?
>
> Leslie: Aware that it's all really White?
>
> Alex: Yeah.
>
> Leslie: Yeah. Because, you know, when we go on these tournaments, sometimes our little brown faces are the only brown faces there.
>
> Alex: Building off that, you witnessed that differential treatment of either people of color, or people from different ethnicities or maybe even class backgrounds in soccer?

> Leslie: Oh yeah. His one friend Alvaro, he's Mexican, and you know, with Donald Trump's crazy butt, one of the Northview girls told him 'I hope Donald Trump wins so they can deport you'. That kind of crazy stuff. You know, that they have to deal with. You just see it.

At first, Leslie mentions that she and her son are racially isolated when playing in white spaces of youth soccer. At the time of this interview, Nate (14 years old & Leslie's son) just left Kick It to try playing for a majority white, organized travel team in a well-off suburb.[88] This decision was not made lightly, and Leslie and Noah made the move to participate in a white soccer space with two Latino/a families that they were close with, as a way to ensure a welcoming social environment for their sons and combat potential social and racial isolation. Despite such efforts and racial awareness, Nate witnessed his friend, Alvaro, suffer from anti-Latino racism and xenophobia in an organized travel soccer space defined by whiteness. In this moment, youth soccer is a place where overt racist aggressions against youth of color can occur.

According to Leslie, Nate also directly experienced overt racist aggressions at Northview, an organized travel soccer club. This story came up after she stated that all black families have conversations with their children about dealing with racism.

> Alex: Has he had any experiences like that [racism], do you know?

> Leslie: Well, there was a time when, you know, some of the kids he was hanging out… they were calling him a 'nigga' and this, that and the other. And then, we ended up having the conversation about when's the appropriate time to use certain words. I was like 'it's not ok for your White friends to think that they can use these words because this is the basis of it, and you have to be in control of it. You have to set those parameters. And I think I've had those conversations with every one of my kids. Because at some point, they don't understand.

[88] Nate wanted to make the move in order to play in a more structured team-based environment. When he joined the club, it had a team at the highest division of organized youth soccer. One step below Elite Youth Soccer. Two years later Nate moved back to Kick It.

Alex: Did that happen… was that in the soccer environment? Or was that just in the school environment?

Alex: Was that recently? And was that the Northview team?

Leslie: That was like, maybe, two years ago. And yeah.

In this incident, the word 'nigga' is used by Nate's white teammates as a way to tease, other, and act out and misuse a word they likely consume through mainstream hip-hop, where use of the word is common. Their appropriation and mis-application of the word towards their Black teammate, is an example of racist rupture. Even if one is generous and recognizes that white youth may not have racist intent when trying to imitate the language used by the black music artists they consume, this incident reflects the precarity and vulnerability to everyday racism that black youth have when interacting in white spaces. No matter the intent, in this moment, soccer provides the social backdrop for a Black family to face and deal with an interpersonal racial aggression.[89]

As Leslie articulates, these are incidents that her son and his friends of color, "just have to deal with". This is a matter of fact understanding of the ways race permeates their general life experiences and how they navigate youth soccer culture. In preparation to deal with it, Leslie implements racialized parenting strategies in order to prepare her son for such racial/racist interactions. Such strategies include, encouraging a positive sense of blackness; constant dialogue with her son about the potential for racist institutions (ex: policing) and racist individuals "you haven't run into this yet, but someday you're gonna be in a room where somebody's gonna be hating on you because of the color of your

[89] Despite such incidents of racial aggression, Nate stayed with this organized travel team for one more season after this interview. He stayed with the team because they played in the top 2 divisions of competition within the MYSA and because he wanted to play in a more formally organized club and team-based environment.

skin"; and active work done to get her son into multicultural soccer and school environments, so he understands and is comfortable with people from a range of social backgrounds.[90] The racist ruptures Leslie and her son deal with are a part of youth soccer culture and their lives more broadly. And while they both enjoy soccer's cosmopolitan characteristics and the different cultures that participate, they do not experience or expect soccer to be a constant happy, race-neutral, tension free social environment.[91]

There are other clear ruptures to the multicultural and cosmopolitan ideals that surround youth soccer. And they do not only happen in white spaces of the game where people of color may be isolated and more vulnerable to racial prejudice and aggressions. Similar to the experiences of Leslie, people of color often just have to deal with it. This racist rupture occurred at the Midwest World Cup, a large and celebrated cosmopolitan canopy of youth soccer.

Field note: Racial slurs on the field

Yesterday, I subbed in as a coach for the 16-17-year-old boys' Kick It team, but today I am standing on the sidelines and watching them play an all-Latino team from Texas. I'm baking in the sun next to a few parents and the game proceeds without major incident. It's an intense game and fairly physical. There are hard shoulder charges and the occasional late slide tackle. There is one moment where one Kick It player goes face-to-face and jaws back and forth with one of the players from Texas, but his teammates and the referee quickly break up the confrontation. From my perspective, it is a typical high school aged boys' match with usual adolescent competitiveness, but later I learn that my impression wasn't right. About 20 minutes after the game, the referees leave the field and most of the players meander in different directions towards other fields and parking lots. Marcus, a Black-American on the team, walks towards me and says, "Alex, Alex, Nate was called the N-word by one of their players". I'm slightly taken aback

[90] Leslie taps into a couple of racialized parenting strategies (Manning 2019). Specifically, exposure to diversity (Underhill 2018) and preparation for bias (Hughes 2003; Winkler 2012).
[91] In my interview with Nate, who as 14 at the time, he discussed enjoying soccer in part because of the different styles and cultures that play the sport.

and ask if Nate is ok and if they told anyone. Marcus tells me that he told the coach and that he talked to the referee. But that's it.

Nate and Marcus are on the receiving end of an anti-black racial slur within a soccer environment that is perceived and celebrated as racially and ethnically diverse. One experience from a black player on the field demonstrates the fragility and ease to which a cosmopolitan canopy can be punctured with racism. What is telling about this interaction is that Marcus shares the details of this racist aggression in a matter-of-fact fashion. There is no uproar, display of strong emotions, meeting amongst the teams, conversation with the other coaches, or complaint filed to tournament officials. Instead, everyone goes about their business for the rest of the tournament. The racial slur is used and ruptures the celebratory, global, and multicultural youth tournament for two black players. At the same time, this racist rupture is contained within this sporting cosmopolitan canopy and has no lasting impact on the larger soccer environment.

Overt incidents of racial prejudice within different youth soccer spaces, while not frequent, are not rare. In interscholastic soccer, interactions with referees are commonly referenced by players and parents of color as moments racist treatment. Juan, a Latino player from Lake High school shared one story of overt anti-Latino and xenophobic treatment from an official during his freshman year.

> Alex: Yeah. Got you. Um, so kinda connecting back to soccer… Um, do you think soccer maybe this is more your own life, like, have you ever been treated differently because of like your social background? Maybe because of the language thing or your race or class? And is soccer like that? Is soccer different than maybe the rest of the, your experiences outside of soccer, or is it kinda like you were talking about earlier it's just like your safe, like your good space, right? Like, where you kinda forget about problems.
>
> Juan: Um, there was a time where there was a ref that was like, was like, "I don't wanna hear," like, I was talking to one of my friends in Spanish, and he said, "No more Spanish. Just English."

Alex: Oh, wow.

Juan: And I'm like, that just made me realize like, "What did he just say to me?" Like, why is he like making me, you know, like just talking to me like that? That's like, you don't say that kind of stuff.

Alex: Got you. So, you've experienced that on the field.

Juan: Yeah, yeah. It was maybe when I was like 14 years old.

This racist rupture took place during a high school junior varsity match and because Lake high school is a substantively multiracial and multi-ethnic team this match can be understood as a cosmopolitan canopy.[92] The racist action of the referee is especially notable because there are many multilingual players of color who play within interscholastic soccer. In matches that feature public school teams from the Twin Cities it is common to hear multiple languages being spoken on the field or the sidelines. But even though many interscholastic soccer matches are sites of multilingual, multi-racial and multi-ethnic gathering, they are still vulnerable to an overt anti-Latino and anti-immigrant aggression. Juan did not attribute such overt mistreatment from officials with a reduced enjoyment of soccer or say that it had a substantive impact on how he acted in soccer environments. But this moment sticks with Juan as memorable and demonstrates how his race/ethnicity is vulnerable to direct mistreatment from people within the sport.

Racial Microaggressions and Subtle Feelings of Mistreatment

While overt moments of racism stand out as clear ruptures to the inclusive and diverse image/ideal of youth soccer, race makes its way into youth soccer spaces in

[92] I failed to follow up and ask Juan which team he was playing against when the referee told him to not speak Spanish. Since I do not know who the opponent was, I cannot make a claim about the particular racial context of that match within interscholastic soccer.

subtler but similarly impactful ways, especially for parents and players of color. While in Juan's story a referee directly shamed and disciplined him for speaking Spanish with his fellow Latino teammate, other stories about experiences with referees and opponents were not as obvious, explicit or aggressive as a racial slur or xenophobic demand. Hope, another player at Lake High school shared a story about playing an interscholastic match against a high school team from the suburbs with a student body that is 75% white.

> Hope: She (his mother) wanted me to go to Jackson High School, but, I mean, we played them in soccer games my sophomore year, and they were pretty racist.
>
> Alex: Oh.
>
> Hope: So, I was like, "No." That's-
>
> Alex: So, how did, how could you tell, like, so, they were against you guys? What, what happened?
>
> Hope: Ah, they were calling us, well, first of all, they were all white.
>
> Alex: Mm-hm.
>
> Hope: 'Cause they're like, "Oh, look at that black guy over there." And then like smart remarks and stuff.
>
> Alex: Just like-
>
> Hope: I mean, like, they, ah, injured our captain, and then our captain cursed at them.
>
> Alex: Mm-hm.
>
> Hope: And then the, the injury was intentional, but then the ref just didn't say anything. And the ref was like, you know, you know how the games go.

During the interview, Hope explained that he and his mom had moved to the suburb in which Jackson high school is located. But he convinced his mom to let him stay at Lake High School in larger part due to potential racial isolation and racist microaggressions that he experienced and witnessed on the soccer field. In this soccer

match where a multiracial and city-based team form a temporary cosmopolitan space, Hope acknowledged and was wary of the racial dynamics on the field "they were all white." He experienced microaggressions (name-calling) from his opponents, and also perceived his teammate to be intentionally targeted who then failed to receive fair protection from the officials. None of these incidents were overtly racist (direct racial slur) but Hope very much understood the entire soccer/social interaction to be racialized and embedded within a racial power structure.

Hope isn't alone in his perception regarding race and referring. When asked if about differential treatment from officials due to race and ethnicity, Nathan an Asian-American player from Archer High School directly answered, "Yeah I have." Racially biased treatment from officials was an experience and observation shared by parents of children of color too. For example, Leslie casually noted "you can see that the reffing is different" when describing what it's like as a family of color to travel to and participate in organized travel soccer tournaments that are hosted in white spaces. Penny, a white mother who has three children, two of whom are transnational black adoptees, was in tune with how her black daughter was treated by officials in an organized travel game.[93]

> Penny: Well, I talked to you about the Kick It ones that weren't… In Mill City, the impetus for us moving were a couple of things that I mentioned. The last straw was when Taisha was playing, and her team was… there was one other little girl who looked like Taisha. And he and Taisha kind of moved the ball up the field. It was the two of them. And everyone else was doing cartwheels and picking butterflies, or whatever. They played in Hunter Square [suburb of Twin Cities].
>
> Alex: I played in a men's league out there.
>
> Penny: You understand what I'm about to say.
>
> Alex: Yeah.

[93] Penny's children play mostly at Kick It. But before joining, they played for another large organized travel team based in the Twin Cities.

> Penny: She played at the highest level. At Mill City, you have to play at your age. They don't do what Kick It does. She was at the highest level of her age group. We went there. The coaches were all lined up. They looked like football players, all stood there like this. And I'm like 'oh crap'. And the girls… She must have had four defenders on her. She's still able to move the ball around. She went up and over the ball and fell down. And I literally watched her head bounce off the ground. She passed out. They were still kicking at her head. And the ref didn't (inaudible: 49.00 – 49.01). I am crying, and I just ran on. I didn't care what protocol was. I ran on the field and I was like 'what are you doing?' So finally, the coach and I got to rip it up. After the game, the coaches came up to her and said 'you're the best player on your team, without you your team is nothing'[94]. And I looked at them and I said, 'well why did you have your players take her out like that?' and I walked out. And that was the end. That was it. And every single game up until that, she always had three or four defenders on her. And they weren't calling anything. And she said to me, finally, 'mommy', with the big brown eyes, 'why aren't they calling fouls on {for} me?' And I knew why, I'm not dumb. You know. I'm like… I didn't want to say… She's eight. Can't I protect her for a little bit longer? We were done. And that's when Jason [coach] and I talked about Kick It. That was a really bad thing for me to… it was horrifying.
>
> Alex: You're very aware of these racial dimensions going on.
>
> Penny: Thank you for s-… yes, yeah.[95]

Penny notices how her daughter's personhood and physical body is interpreted due to her race and gender, no matter the soccer environment she is in. In this incident, which took place three years before our interview, Taisha played for an organized travel team based in the Twin Cities and within a match was on the receiving end of multiple physical fouls from an opponent and suffered a head injury. Penny interpreted this

[94] Penny's description of the different cultures of youth soccer, reflects patterns of clubs and coaches being primarily interested in building competitive teams, recruiting, and even poaching players from other teams. The type of praise from white coaches received by Taisha is coupled with a lack of awareness and recognition that she was physically targeted demonstrates how many participants do not see how race informs the sporting environments that they are in.

[95] Due to my positionality as a Black person who is comfortable discussing race and racism, and familiar with the racial dynamics of youth sports, some parents expressed a form of gratitude for recognizing and affirming their own perceptions and experiences.

moment as racialized because her daughter received no protection from the referee (who in this incident was white) and in turn she directly intervened by running on the field to stop play. Taisha, even at the young age of eight, noticed that she suffers more uncalled fouls in comparison to her soccer peers. Penny chose not to explicitly discuss racism and differential treatment on the field because of Taisha's age and a desire to protect a form of innocence in relation to her own childhood and the sport.[96]

Regardless of Penny's choice to not explicitly discuss with her daughter the subtle racist treatment on the field at that particular moment, she is very aware as to how her Black daughter consistently was kicked and fouled by opponents at a disproportionate rate while white coaches and officials failed to notice or act. Penny's observations and frustrations with the ways in which her daughter is treated during soccer matches, is tied to how black people, and especially black youth are assumed to hold innate physical prowess and hold a higher threshold for pain tolerance. Biologically racist assumptions, that continue to have substantive and dangerous consequences on the life experiences of black people, is casually and quite easily reproduced on different youth soccer fields.

Coaches of color are very much in tune with the ways race and class intersect, appear, and inform youth soccer culture. Eddie, an African-American with roots in the southern United States and was the head coach at Tesla high school for four years, talked in great detail about how his experiences as a coach, and the experiences of his team are shaped by race and class.

> Alex: So, you kinda mentioned earlier, someone throwing slurs out, I'm curious about your experiences in the Twin Cities. Have you seen some of that overt… I

[96] Penny does not rely on or reproduce colorblind racialized parenting techniques. She discusses race and racism with her children openly. Later in the interview, she mentioned that Taisha came to the realization soon after this incident that part of the reason she's fouled so much is because of her skin color.

> guess it can be overt or subtle…have you seen more overt or microaggressions against racial and ethnic groups in the Twin Cities, and maybe even your own playing experiences as a whole with soccer?
>
> Eddie: Yeah, I think within the Twin Cities. It's probably more um… It's not as overt. In the south it was definitely overt (laughs), but man, there's definitely, ya know. From anywhere from coaches, when they see me walk up and what they maybe think of me. From referees and what they think about me. Especially my high school team. I can tell for a fact, that when we play against private schools, the Davis Academies, Memorials, to Harley Prep, we do not get a fair shake.[97] They don't understand why my team can be as good. I've said this for 2 or 3 years now, that I am going to bring my resume to every single one of my games in my section. And say 'look man, I've got a masters in coaching and athletic administration, I've coached at this level. I've coached for Liverpool, I've done this. My team knows how to play, and I know how to coach at a very high level.

Coach Eddie played and coached soccer in South Carolina before moving to the Twin Cities and is aware to the different ways in which racism can operate in different regions of the United States. Similar to other players of color, Coach Eddie's observations of subtle racism reflect that interscholastic soccer can be perceived as a place where public, city schools with diverse racial, ethnic, and class backgrounds are not treated equally on the field by officials. These moments are amplified when more privileged and majority white schools are the opposing team. Seasonal matches between Tesla high school and schools such as Davis Academy or Harley Prep, that on first observation serve as a cosmopolitan site of interaction, are often interpreted as filled with subtle racism. Coach Eddie's experiences also bring to light the way coaching as a profession is racialized at even the youth level. Eddie describes how other coaches are skeptical and surprised at his coaching ability (i.e. intellect, management, organization skills) and the sophistication in which his team plays the game. Coach Eddie understands these assumptions as disrespectful, racialized, and linked to anti-blackness; a fair

[97] These are pseudonyms of highly ranked private schools with well-established soccer programs

interpretation given that sport is one place where the relationship between management and race often culturally reproduce racist notions about black people and a lack of intelligence. And moreover, sport continues to be a social institution where black people are not fairly represented in managerial positions. For Eddie, one of the few black soccer coaches in the Twin Cities, he is aware of that his racialized experience is constant, and this consistency is evident given that he ruminates about strategies (bringing a resume to games) to overtly make a point and challenge such instances of racial mistreatment and judgement.

Later in the interview Coach Eddie gave a specific example of how such racist and classed assumptions about Tesla are subtle, yet noticeable.

> Eddie: Cus we are not respected the same ways as um… the others. I've seen it from other teams, when they feel like they should just beat us. Ya know, a team of ya know we don't have ya know hundreds and thousands of dollars in track suits and all that. We don't play club soccer. So, they don't know where our players are coming from, right. Like they're like 'you don't play club soccer and I know everyone who is worth knowing at club soccer' and they go and all of a sudden, it's like they lose to us or tie to us. And I've had kids at Lake [high school] who… we tied them and a kid's like 'what the bleep just happened'. He can't wrap his head around why they just can't beat Tesla. And to me, it's not because he looked at the players and said that they weren't as skillful. He looked at a bunch of players that don't play club soccer who are of different ethnicities and background than themselves, a different socio-economic class, and are wondering, 'we're rich, we have it all, why can't we beat these kids who don't. And so, you see it, I think more so, you see it there, and not someone necessarily coming up and saying, "who are these black kids?" (laughs) and whereas in the south they would just say that (laughs).

Coach Eddie's words highlight that many of his players (working class, immigrants, youth of color) are not participants in more prestigious and institutionally influential places of soccer (organized youth soccer or elite youth soccer). They are not "known" in the Twin Cities soccer scene and considered to be on the bottom level of local soccer's political and social order/hierarchy ("he looked at a bunch of players that

don't play club soccer who are of different ethnicities… a different socio-economic class"). Due to this, Tesla high school is disrespected by other players and coaches and his team disrupts prejudicial notions of race and class through their strong performances on the field. When Tesla plays well and wins a match against more resourced schools, opponents reveal their privilege and sense of entitlement when expressing their frustration with defeat "what the bleep just happened!" Rather than overt racist aggressions, Coach Eddie views this type of interaction as the subtle, but constant way, racism and classism are expressed in youth soccer in the Twin Cities.

Coach Eddie's story also demonstrates that subtle racism or classism doesn't just occur when a majority white and/or wealthier team play a working class and majority people of color team. In this case, Lake high school, a team that as mentioned earlier, is diverse in terms of race, class, ethnicity, and the types of soccer environments its players participate, is considered by Coach Eddie as representative of a more entitled, resourced, and respected soccer program. Players and coaches from Lake high school do not view themselves as entitled, mostly white, or a richly resourced school, and also able to identify regular moments of racial mistreatment from other opponents and officials. When Tesla and Lake high school play one another, cosmopolitanism is front, and center and whiteness is not dominant nor the central racial reference point. Yet, Lake, which generally performs well in the city league and state wide, regularly has a few white, securely middle-class players who play in organized travel soccer when it is not high school season. The combination of a winning reputation, high local soccer status, and the presence of whiteness (a few white players) can be enough to produce interactions that are understood as disrespectful, subtly racist, and a sign of class entitlement.

After Coach Eddie gave examples of subtle racism, I asked how he deals with such incidents and his own perceptions and experiences of racism and classism, and if his players notice too.

> Eddie: Ya know, when you're a team that isn't, you have to have those type of conversations. And my players, um… and there is no reason they would lie, and I've experienced it myself. But they come and tell me that players are saying racial slurs and things to em. And ya know demeaning them on a basis of their race. But trash-talkin is hey man "I'm gonna beat you, I'm gonna own you, give me ball because you don't know how to handle it. Not 'go back to Africa' trash talk. That's bigotry. Ya know we do face it directly. And we do tell referees, but there isn't much they can do about it and then the referees are kinda feeling uh... ya know. It's perception, but we record our games and I've looked it over and I'm not crazy (laughs)... Ya know, I am not making this up. (laughs). We get the raw end of calls

Coach Eddie and his players experience racism in youth soccer, and they talk about it as a collective group. Similar to other parents and players of color, the referees are understood as a prime way racist treatment occurs. Though earlier in the interview, Coach Eddie emphasized that racism operates subtly in youth soccer, here he mentions unprompted that his players are overtly demeaned on the field through overt racist aggressions "go back to Africa". When these racist aggressions happen on the field, Coach Eddie attempts to seek a resolution with officials (officials who are frequently understood as racially biased), but knows that they both rarely do anything to address such incidents and that they have little incentive, motivation, or capabilities to respond appropriately to such racist aggressions on the field. The lack of resolution or effective recourse strategies for Coach Eddie and his players also signals how racism is experienced in youth soccer and reflects larger dynamics of race and culture.

> Alex: Do you just feel like you have to internalize this with your group? Or do you feel like there is some course of recourse? Or is this something you just have to deal with, because that's the world?

> Eddie: Yeah ya know Honestly, that's how I do address it. That's the world. Right. And it's funny, this is how I was raised and people of color in this country should… I don't know should… But we're raised that we gotta be better. Ya know. And, and it's not even just like that you gotta be better at soccer, you have to act better, you have to take more, you have to accept the racial slurs with grace and poise. And… ya know, on one hand I do feel that you become a better person because you are not that jerk who is doing that, but on the other hand it's really difficult and really hard…. Ya know do I want to have to tell my kids [players] that. That's the question you have to ask, and I feel like in this country it is something that is not really addressed. Should we really have to tell children of color that they have to code-switch.
>
> Alex: Right, who should code-switch?
>
> Eddie: Or should we tell these teachers that are not of color, that they need to code switch! The professional with the degrees who is getting paid, or the child who doesn't know any better? And that is where I feel the country hasn't ya know… we address it and say kids should code-switch, and we think we're addressing the issue. No we're not. Cus, why should they? Ya know, why should this child who speaks Spanish, who speaks 2 languages to your 1, have to then also code switch for you as well. And why should children of color who are playing your sport have to take abuse, and then beat you and the referee so that they can prove that they are a better team that night.

Coach Eddie views experiencing and negotiating race, ethnic, and class-based marginalization as a fact of being a part of Tesla high school. He acknowledges the social reality that his team has to be prepared to respond to racism and classism in soccer and beyond. For a school like Tesla (and Archer) their racial navigational strategy of 'taking the higher road' or as Eddie says "you have to act better, accept racial slurs with grace and poise" is potentially the only practical and effective social practice to negotiate their marginalization in interscholastic youth soccer. This strategy reflects racialized parenting strategies for families of color. But Coach Eddie, through his analysis of educators and the education system, is very mindful of the limitations of this racial navigation strategy for his team and for reducing various forms of social marginalization facing youth of color and recent immigrants of color.

For Coach Eddie, it should not be the responsibility of his players to code-switch or act with near impossible levels of maturity and responsibility to prove their worth as people both on and off the field. Ultimately, these incidents are regular, but there is little institutional and/or cultural effort to address the ways racism informs everyday soccer culture. Whether subtle or overt racism, there does not seem to be any room for recourse, resolution, let alone anti-racist social change. Instead, racism, classism, and xenophobia are things for an interscholastic team like Tesla to figure out on their own; while at the same time other teams, coaches, and educational professionals with race and class privilege do not have to interrogate or actively concern themselves with such social realities.

> Eddie: I wish I had more of an audience or more support from my AD, or even other coaches. I mean I was section 5A coach of the year in 2014. Ya know what I mean? (Laughs). And I'm not sure coaches have those conversations with their players. Ya know if you're coaching players who play club and are of the majority. Do you have those kinds of conversations when you are playing a team that is not?

It is clear that Coach Eddie, a person with status and credibility within youth soccer in the Twin Cities, recognizes how there is little support from other key actors and institutions to address issues of racism and other forms of inequality within the sport. Moreover, he understands how whiteness and class privilege can make such forces invisible and seemingly not important or worthy of conversation for majority white and middle-class soccer communities. Thus, continuing to place himself and his players as the ones who have to take the burden, negotiate and overcome overt and subtle forms of racism within the sport they love and make great meaning from.

Casual Racialized Soccer Talk: Cultural Styles of Play and Slippage into Biological Essentialism

Through ethnographic observation and interviews about youth soccer culture, it is evident that race is articulated quite often in this social field. In this section, I will cover how race talk does not necessarily center around issues of racism (subtle or overt), but rather, appears in general discussions about soccer culture more broadly. One crucial way that the idealized diverse and inclusive features of soccer culture gets broken is through how people understand and talk about playing styles and athletic ability of different racial or ethnic communities. Through such talk and social interactions, sport and race can work together to easily and subtly reproduce natural or biological logic of race.

In an interview with Jeff, a white male coach for the 17-18-year-old boys' team at Fusion Lake Academy, he discussed soccer curriculum and developing better talent within elite youth soccer. Jeff talked about the various ways different elite clubs approach developing players, teaching the game at various age levels, and the tension between making sure players are improving and winning matches in a competitive environment.

> Jeff: There's clubs out there, that they just wanna win. I think US soccer can do more and this may shift the conversation, until they do more with implementation of curriculum.
>
> Alex: So, can you tell me more about that?
>
> Jeff: Ok, it's per club right now. There are very vague terms. Play a 4-3-3, and we want you to play out of the back, and we want you to play possession, and they throw out all of these vague terms at you, which are very easy to manipulate. We don't want you to play direct. Ya know I get the irony of them telling us every single… "you have to play 4 in the back" Ok fair enough, or "you have to play a 4-3-3", turn on the national team, they play a 4-4-2, so I feel bad for them in one respect, because I think globally the bar room debate is always "well the US is so big and they have so many potential players, how can they not be better?" I answer that by saying the very reason we're not good is because we're so big. You look at the global places that do it well from a development of their youth onto their full team. And not only the development, but the curriculum and the

> tactical exposure. It's easier to influence that size of a group. So 'how are we gonna play?' is an endless conversation. Ya know, are we gonna have more Hispanic players? Are we gonna have more African-American players, are we gonna have more Caucasian players, are we gonna be big? Are we gonna be small? In other global places, that is pre-defined. That's what you have. Spain has Spanish players. So, it's hard.

Unprompted, Coach Jeff links race as a factor to consider regarding the philosophies and practices of elite youth soccer development. He moves from specific formations and the difficulty of scouting talent and developing a national style of play in a country as geographically large as the United States, to the racial composition of a team. Implied in this statement is that there are particular characteristics associated with particular racial groups, including physical size. Coach Jeff understands other countries, such as Spain to be more racially and culturally homogenous, and thus easier to develop a cohesive elite soccer curriculum and development plan in comparison to the diverse and cosmopolitan United States.[98] After Coach Jeff explicitly named race in relation to elite soccer development, I followed up on the perception of US youth soccer not having certain groups represented at the highest levels of the sport.

> Alex: That was another point… I remember vividly after the US got knocked out of the World Cup in 2010, Klinsmann goes on and gives his little spiel about how the US has it backwards towards development and he specifically says that cause we don't have lower income players, we don't have, he specifically said Latinos. So, there is race involved in that.
>
> Coach Jeff: Sure, Sure.
>
> Alex: in terms of that "hunger", ya know?
>
> Coach Jeff: Without a doubt, we don't have Allen Iverson's in soccer.

[98] This perception of homogenous Spanish soccer culture is firmly a perception and not likely an entirely accurate summation. Different regions and cultures within Spain interpret and practice soccer differently.

In many interviews, especially with coaches, I referenced Jurgen Klinnsman's diagnosis of youth soccer culture and struggles for elite success as an entry point to discuss race and class within the sport. In this case, I brought it up after Coach Jeff mentioned race, and he agreed with the notion that American soccer culture does not have athletes who come poorer communities and/or are players of color. American soccer does not 'have Allen Iverson' because there is a perception of the sport still being played by predominately white players from upper-middle class backgrounds. Allen Iverson, a basketball icon, is revered because of his rise from struggle (poverty and racism) in a small city in Virginia to sporting glory in the National Basketball Association (NBA). Iverson represents a dominant and popular American sporting rags-to-riches narrative, and he was often celebrated for his inner drive, passion and obsession with sport, and relentlessness pursuit to succeed on the court. Moreover, cultural interpretations of his style of play, personality, and basketball aesthetic was associated as a reflection of urban, Black, and poor to working class culture.[99]

The desperation/hunger to overcome poverty and racial inequality is popularly understood and discursively reproduced as the key explanatory ingredient for elite sports success. Iverson's racial and class background/marginalization are popularly understood as a reason for his success in the ruthless and precarious world of professional sports. Such desire or 'hunger' in the United States is often attributed to Black and/or poor to working class athletes, and historically to the basketball and football, sports that are understood as predominately Black and working-class sports. It is this notion of 'hunger',

[99] Specifically, this means ability to expression of individuality, taking on players 1 on 1, highly skilled ball-handling, incorporating hip-hop/street fashion on and off of the court (braids, tattoos, jewelry, shooting sleeve), and zero fear of attacking the basket over and over again,

which is socially and culturally produced through racial and class marginalization, that partially explains why the US has such a high-level, vibrant, and compelling basketball culture.

US soccer culture is perceived to not have this type of culture and socialization for its players. Coach Jeff explained that US soccer, especially at elite levels of the game, does not have kids with a relentless desire to succeed in the game. "Yeah, you get dropped off in a mini-van and you get a Coke afterwards." For him and other soccer officials, and pundits there is too much social comfort and privilege for players, which from this logic means there are very few players who view soccer as the single way for them to overcome or escape disadvantaged social positions. There is no social environment that produces soccer players with the 'hunger and passion' like Allen Iverson.

Due to soccer's global popularity, and the various immigrant and cultural groups who play the game within the Twin Cities, participants do observe passion for the sport amongst different communities. While discussing diversity within the local youth soccer scene, Coach Ramon, a Latino coach in his 20s, reiterated that soccer is a "poor man's sport" and identified a few examples of communities of color that hold a distinct passion for the sport.

> Coach Ramon: I'm a little naïve saying this, but it's, from my experience, the minorities are always the ones that know a lot more about the game than anybody else because of their passion towards their family, you know. For example, my dad, my real dad, he played. My adopted dad, he played. Those were the things that they knew, just soccer, right? So then, as — okay, and then your dad — so my dad stopped playing, his brothers played, my real dad's brothers played, and they still — some of them still play, even though they're at an older age now. They still play. So then now, that kind of — you know, when you're growing up, you want to be part of that, so you learn the culture there

Alex: Yeah, so it's like more like a deep — like a deeper passion.

Coach Ramon: A deeper passion, yes.

Alex: So that's kind of your explanation for why people, those folks have more skills and succeed in the sport?

Coach Ramon: Yeah, because they have more passion. They read more into it than the others do.

Coach Ramon has an organically intellectual understanding of why communities of color have a passion for the soccer, skill, ability, and knowledge of the sport. This in part due to the importance and love of soccer to families within Latino communities. According to Coach Ramon, the game just means more for people of color, immigrant groups, and their families. For these different racial and ethnic groups, soccer is a type of social, cultural, and familial language. This was not just in reference to his own personal playing experience as passion came up when Coach Ramon described the different styles of play amongst various racial and ethnic groups in the Twin Cities.

Coach Ramon: Hmong players…. they're fast, they're strong, and they can hit a ball and, like I said, again — passion. They're passionate.

The communities of color that Coach Ramon reference as more invested and passionate about the sport are often not considered to be truly involved or supported within the most powerful institutions of youth soccer (elite youth soccer, organized travel soccer, US soccer federation).[100] But despite their lack of status within the political economy of youth soccer, parents and coaches comfortably identify the different cultural styles and practices of the game.

[100] The racial and ethnic context of the Twin Cities can lead to varied racialized narratives pertaining to soccer. Coach Ramon's characterization of Hmong players runs counter to dominant racialized, sexualized, and gendered constructions of Asian-American men in sport (Thangaraj 2015; Thangaraj, Arnaldo, and Chin 2016; Reft 2016).

> Leslie: There used to be a Somali league that came to Kick It that would play late nights. And he (her son, Nate) played. Each culture plays this game differently, and you learn so much
>
> Alex: So, how would you describe… how which cultures play? Or, how certain cultures play? That you noticed.
>
> Leslie: I think Somalians… they have this incredible foot work. You know what I mean? It's so, kind of beautiful to watch. They're like gazelles on the ball. They're so quick and so fast. And Mexicans are way more aggressive. They have this skill of bodying people. You know? So, it's kind of more of a brute force that they knock you down off the ball. I have seen some Hmong games and they play pretty well, too. You just have to go out and see some of these kids play. And you know that they don't have the best of the best.

Leslie, a parent who became knowledge about soccer culture through her son's participation, gave positive appraisal in her observations of different immigrant communities of color soccer abilities. Distinctions were made in terms of approaches to the game (physicality, flair, forms of movement), and awareness of how players from these communities are ignored by more powerful institutions and actors in the youth soccer system. Observations of different styles and interpretations of the soccer often is discussed with no hesitation, with a cosmopolitan appreciation and viewed through a prism of cultural and socialized difference.

> Alex: So, within the Twin Cities, do you think there are different cultural styles of playing soccer?
>
> Coach Eddie: Oh absolutely. Yeah, absolutely, ya know it's a lot of times. I don't like to play with the Hispanic and Latinos because they play very direct. And they look at me, and go 'you know, you can hit the ball every time, so hit it over the top' and ya know I like a more possession style, ya know versus South American or ya know European style possession, building, ya know that sort of stuff. Ya know there are definitely different styles, I feel like Africans play a little more of a uhh, physical… confrontational type of style, that's a little bit different in that regard. Ya know, but still they kinda rely on um, kinda force and uh skill is like get it to the best player and let him do what he does. So yeah, and that's what the beautiful part is about the beautiful game is there's different interpretations of that and what's successful and um I enjoy trying to bring that all together

Coach Eddie's described different cultural styles of soccer in racialized and nationalized terms. His summary reflects an appreciation of difference and preferences are attributed to his particular taste and personal skill set rather than an explicit hierarchy of proper play of assumed physical traits. Interestingly, his lack of preference for playing with Latino communities in the US (Mexican and Central American) does not reflect other evaluations for how Latino communities play. For instance, Coach Ramon, like many other people in the Twin Cities understands an umbrella of Latino communities to play the game with technique, complicated possession, and patience. "You play against a technical team, which is a lot of Hispanics, Mexicans, Central Americans, you know, South Americans, they're very good with the ball at their feet, and they love to just pass, play, shoot, you know, pass, pass, move." Though the content of the descriptions about how different Latino communities play soccer varies, the discursive framework to discuss ways of playing soccer is still bounded within notions of race, ethnicity, and culture.

The specificity to which Coach Eddie describes the differences in approaches to soccer is striking. African communities are considered to be physical and confrontational, while also deferring to one particular or special player to lead through creativity and skill. This is different than a European or South American style, which is implied to involve more collective and patient passing and play. At the end of the statement, Coach Eddie reiterates that this difference is a wonderful and crucial to soccer's culture. He loves the game as a player and coach, because the sport brings such difference together without necessarily saying one way or culture style or racial/ethnic/national group is better than another.

While Coach Eddie, Leslie, and Coach Ramon, and many other participants like soccer because of the different cultural interpretations and practices of the sport, it is easy for such conversations to slip from a discourse and logic of socialized cultural difference and happy cosmopolitan appreciation, to messy talk centered on fixed/inherent cultural traits and racialized physical characteristics. Coach Ramon's description of different African soccer players highlights such slippage.

> Coach Ramon: You've got the Somalians [sic] , like African style. It's funny, because, you know, even though they're in Africa, the Somalians, I don't consider them like Africans, because they love playing, and they love the fancy stuff. They're fast, they're good. Then you have the Africans who are like Nigerians. They're big, they're strong. Liberians are the same way. They're big, they're strong, there's — occasionally you get these guys that are not [inaudible]. They're skinny — from their upper body, they're really skinny. From the legs, they're strong, and they love to play. I have a few friends that are like that. I have friends that are big guys that can't even control the ball, but they go in and tackle. They go very hard. They're going to get you or the ball, whichever one, but they're going in without thinking about it.

As Coach Ramon, a player and coach who interacts constantly with soccer participants from a range of race, ethnic, and national backgrounds, easily categorizes styles of soccer within a broad racial and geographical category. Similar to Coach Eddie, "African style", involves confrontation, loving to tackle, and exerting physical force. Nigerians and Liberians are considered to be strong and better at the physical part of the game than the technical side, and even are considered to not be thinking on the field as they aim to win the ball back. The physical traits of black people are linked to a style of play, "from the legs, they're really strong". And even though Coach Ramon does not consider Somali players to be "African" because he considers them to play with more flair and technique, such a description softly, but clearly affirms a fixed and bounded understanding of race and ethnicity in relation to soccer.

Coaches can comfortably speak about soccer in a way that reifies and ethnic fixed and biological notions of race and ethnicity. In my conversation with Coach Jeff I asked to describe his ideal team if there were no social barriers preventing youth players from joining elite youth soccer. He responded as follows:

> Coach Jeff: I would love to have a team with an African striker, a Latino midfielder, and an American or European defender."

Coach Jeff wants a racially and ethnically diverse team because it would be the most competitive and seemingly would possess holistic set of soccer skills. If a coach could combine all of the stylistic variations and amplify the perceived strengths of such differences, then a higher level of soccer would be the result. Racial and ethnic diversity can be a team's greatest strength[101]. There is a cosmopolitan appreciation and happy diversity discourse attached to Coach Jeff's statement, but the positional associations Coach Jeff makes with different racial groups indicates that biological essentialism of race is firmly present. Racial stacking (the pattern of certain racial groups being disproportionally represented in particular positions) is transparent in Coach Jeff's dream team. The implication behind wanting an African striker is that the player would be strong, fast, and direct, and that are many black players with those soccer characteristics. The implication behind a Latino midfielder is that playing in the midfield well requires technical expertise, creativity, and quickness; soccer characteristics that are often associated with Latino/a players. The implication behind a European or American (white) defender is that they are players who are physically strong, but more importantly tactically astute and able to organize and lead their teammates on the field. An

[101] This type of diversity logic is prominent in business, universities, and other institutions (Berrey 2015). Ex: Diversity is good for the bottom line; diversity is our biggest strength; diversity of people and ideas leads to better outcomes.

essentialized racial logic that is firmly grounded in racist notions about race, the body, and intelligence is articulated in a common sense and acceptable way to discuss soccer culture.

Not all coaches reproduce essentialized notions of race, but race and ethnicity are a common cultural framework for most participants to talk through different styles of play. Cosmopolitan canopies of soccer can also rupture during everyday interaction. The following field note, from an interaction at Kick It (alternative/hybrid youth soccer), a racially and ethnically diverse community, demonstrates how biological notions of race are expressed and comfortably reproduced in youth soccer.

Field Note: Kick It, Blackness and USMNT U17 team

James (a Latino dad with two sons who play at Kick It) walks into the coaches' office. After saying hi and shaking hands, he asks Kelly (a White, male coach) if he saw his email about the U-17 United States Men's World Cup team. James is particularly struck by his own observations that if you're a Black player you are likely to play striker or defense, but not in the midfield. For Latino players it is the opposite. But James remains fixated on the positional patterns of Black players. He asks why that is and before I can explain positional stacking, Kelly jumps in awkwardly, seemingly as a way to prepare me for a racial comment. What he says at first said isn't alarming, but rather a critical reflection. He explains that White coaches often view Black players as naturally physically strong, fast, and undisciplined and that such assumptions are perceived to be a good fit for positions that require less "team responsibility".

Despite Kelly's evaluation of his peers, James is still interested in a natural explanation for why Black players played forward and not in the midfield. I chime in and explain quickly that Black players are frequently pushed to those positions, not encouraged to play other roles, and that there is no evidence of different racial groups having any innate physical ability compared to others. But James persists and says, "but there are a lot of cases where black players are faster and stronger." Kelly then relents on his more sociological explanation and said "yeah, they [Black players] are physical". James then ruminates about how maybe such attributes of black physicality aren't a match for the midfield. Kelly adds, "it is the hardest position on the field". The midfield (especially the center) is often noted in soccer circles as the most mentally and physically demanding position in the sport. Kelly's soft affirmation of James's words implies that Black players are not a fit for the position because of the need for game intelligence,

vision, spatial awareness, discipline, and the skills to handle multiple responsibilities on the field.

As the conversation continues, I emphasize that the Black players you see at the top levels of soccer do not represent the substantive diversity of athletic ability and styles of play amongst Black players. But, James buckles down and offers a completely different sporting example to support his point. "There aren't any White shooting guards or White Michael Jordans." James again associates participation and success at elite sport with the natural characteristics of the Black body that other racial groups and by proxy, other cultures may not have. A few moments later, Jame's six-year-old son came into the room and asks his dad to play with him outside, which mercifully ends the conversation.

The racial demographics and positional patterns of the US youth national team creates a seemingly tension-free and easy opportunity for two men to contemplate, pontificate, and reproduce racial talk that understands Black people to have 'innate' physical characteristics and superior athletic ability compared to other racial groups. Furthermore, compared to other racial and ethnic groups, Black soccer players are understood to lack the intelligence or mental capacity, which is then used to explain why Black players do not play certain positions at elite levels of the sport. The actual positions and different responsibilities associated with soccer are interpreted through notions of intelligence, the human body, particular physical demands, and social hierarchy. Such interpretations of soccer's sporting minutia are normative, but they are very much steeped in racialized logics that do not escape fixed notions of race and are deeply rooted in the legacy of racism.

In brief, but consistent interactive moments, it is challenging to discuss racial stacking, or cover how sports have historically been a relatively more open social arena for certain Black people compared to other social institutions. But in this case, biological race talk about blackness persists through the viewpoints of a White coach and Latino parent despite the fact that they often interact in racially and ethnically diverse soccer

environments. They coach and see many Black players within Kick It, and the Twin Cities area at large, who do not fit their stereotypes about Black soccer players and Black athletes as a whole. But existing in cosmopolitan and diverse soccer environments does not disrupt and overcome biological logics of race or anti-blackness.

Discussion

Racialized Repertories for People of Color in Youth Soccer

At the start of the chapter I shared multiple incidents, where players and parents of color shared their own experiences of racism as they interacted in various cosmopolitan youth soccer environments. Some of these experiences include incidents of direct, aggressive, and overt racist and/or xenophobic slurs. Anderson (2015) argues that nearly every black American has a moment in their life where they are "powerfully reminded of his or her putative place as a black person" (253). Anderson (2015) refers to this experience as the "nigger moment" because it talks place in a way that catches the victim of racist abuse off guard and occurs in a trusted social place of civility and good-will, such as a cosmopolitan canopy. Anyone with a provisional/marginalized social status can be exposed to a "nigger moment". Whether it be a non-black opponent or teammate using the n-word at a black player, or a referee directly telling a Latinx player to not speak Spanish, the "nigger moment" is present within youth soccer. The threat of overt racism is a dangerous and destabilizing presence, and such moments tear apart the civility, goodwill, and happy diversity talk that form the cosmopolitan canopy (Anderson 2015).

In American society as a whole, overt racist transgressions are considered to be socially more unacceptable, and less frequent as America becomes increasingly

multicultural. This narrative of racial progression matches well with public and diverse social spaces. Anderson (2015) even notes that public cosmopolitan canopies are environments where the "presence of black people is accepted without remark" (254). However, youth soccer, and sport more generally is a social arena where such overt racist aggressions, popularly deemed as a relic of the past and unacceptable, occurs with a decent amount of frequency and is seemingly normative within the social norms of sporting competition.[102]

For instance, in the United Kingdom, black and Asian athletes consistently report incidents of suffering of overt racial abuse, but the racist content of such actions are dismissed by white athletes as either a sensitive over-reaction or non-racial 'banter' that is universally applied and a part of the sporting culture (Burdsley 2011; Long & McNamee 2004). 'Testing' an opponent through various forms of abuse, supposed jokes, or violence is often considered part of an imagined sporting value system that is often used to justify or minimize the presence of prejudicial actions (Burdsley 2011; Long & McNamee 2004). Courtney Stzo (2018) documents common incidents of racist taunting suffered by SE Asian Canadian youth and adult hockey and argues that the players on the receiving end of such taunts often diminish the racist elements of such incidents by interpreting it as merely trash talk ('chirping'). These players often interpreted and rationalized racial slurs as reasonable gamesmanship because it emerged from an opponent's acceptable desire to defeat their opponent (Stzo 2018). As a consequence,

[102] After high school athletes started to emulate Colin Kaeperinick's symbolic protests against racism I began tracking if local media outlets reported on incidents of overt-racism in youth sports. In youth soccer, there have been a handful of overtly racist and xenophobic incidents across the country (Eversely 2018; Froh 2018; Mays 2018; So 2019)

athletes of color (and other marginalized identities) have to 'learn to take it' if they seek to stay in the game (Long & McNamee 2004).

My fieldnotes coupled with the soccer players, parents, and coaches of color who share their particular experiences of overt-racism, do not downplay the racist foundations of such taunting. But they still discuss such moments in a manner of fact way, that implies dealing with racist moments/taunting are an accepted reality of soccer/sporting culture. It is something they (we) have to deal with, learn to take, and move on from if they want to continue to play the sport they love. Overt racist incidents occur and can be understood as reality within youth soccer culture because there is no institutional or collective response to such racist aggressions. Coaches who want to protect their players from racist and xenophobic attacks feel they have a lack of support, officials and organizations do not get challenged on their behaviors, and perpetrators of such racist aggressions are often just remembered by the people on the receiving end of such taunts. But even if players brush off and 'learn to take' a white opponent saying "go back to Africa" after a crunching slide tackle, it does not remove the fact that trash talk on the field remains a discursive practice of power where social hierarchies are confirmed, where dominance is asserted, and particular social identities can be ostracized and deemed unwanted (Eveslage and Delaney 1998; Dixon 2007; Stzo 2018).[103] In youth soccer, even cosmopolitan canopies, people of color can be perceived as more 'deserving' of racist trash talk, and have to respond to and grapple with expected incidents of overt racist aggressions.

[103] Trash talk on the sporting field can also take the form of resistance to and subversion of racial marginalization (Mohammed 2017). In these cases, such trash talk is very much intertwined with racialized and heteronormative norms of masculinity (Mohammed 2017; Thangaraj 2015).

Anderson (2015) discusses the unavoidable tension that black Americans face within a cosmopolitan canopy, due to the possibility of overtly racist interactions. Other studies from around the world about diverse physical education classrooms also indicate the ways in which embedded power relations along race and ethnicity become evident through the experiences of marginalized social groups (Dagkas and Hunter 2015; Hill and Azzarito 2012; Thorjussen and Sisjord 2018). There is a similar racialized tension present for families of color and coaches of color as they interact in youth soccer environments. In this project, these tensions can also be more subtle than an obvious racial insult/taunt. Instead, it is a general and constant racialized tension that envelops various soccer-based interactions. Astute observations about the more subtle racialized tensions are made by participants with particular racialized knowledge developed from their own social position and racial socialization.

Officiating and racial/classed stereotyping is commonly identified by players, parents, and coaches of color as a prime site where racial bias is articulated. Players of color understand that they are stereotyped and perceived to have less social status compared to white and middle to upper middle-class peers, and thus do not receive equitable calls from officials. A white mother with black children recognizes that officials repeatedly fail to protect her daughter on the field from overtly physical play. And a coach of a diverse interscholastic team can identify when his team, including himself, surprises racialized and classed stereotypes and expectations from opponents, and also has video evidence demonstrating that his team of predominantly immigrants of color are consistently on the short end of refereeing decisions. They understand that racial

bias in youth soccer refereeing is extremely hard to prove, challenge, and overcome, but they know it exists because of their expertise and racialized experiences in the game.

Participants of color are very much aware of this racialized reality in youth soccer, a social dynamic that is not broadly understood as a problem within soccer culture. The field of youth soccer in the Twin Cities is a site of active racial socialization and is a racial social arena that people of color (players, parents, coaches) have to strategically navigate. Negotiating racialized spaces is a constant social dynamic that people of color take into account as they move through the world. When raising and advocating for their children, parents of color, especially black mothers, have to be very strategic as they interact in various social contexts embedded with racial, classed, and gendered hierarchies (Barnes 2016; Collins 2000; Pattillo 2015).

Parents of color prepare their children to perform such negotiations by implementing a variety of racialized parenting techniques. Some of these strategies include, cultural socialization and racial identity development; awareness of racialized social spaces; and strategies of racial navigation (Manning 2019). Cultivating a general racial awareness, and management of their racial identity in particular social contexts serves as both a proactive and protective way to prepare children of color for a racial world (Allen 2016; Burt et. Al 2012; Feagin and Sikes 1994 Lacy 2007). Some parents of color and white parents with children of color involved in youth soccer implement particular racialized parenting techniques, such as preparation for bias, as a way to actively help their children be aware of race, racism and also how to cope with it (Hughes et al., 2006; Tatum 1987; Ward 1991). Even soccer parents who shared their experiences with me who do not want to break perceived racial innocence and colorblindness, which

is often attached to young children, have to explicitly cultivate racial awareness in their children as they experience forms of racial socialization and subtle racial prejudice on the field of play.

In addition to parenting, youth of color are racially socialized in a variety of ways: media, schools, peers, neighborhoods (Winkler 2012). As a consequence, they learn and develop an understanding of "racial border crossing" and often an ability to "culturally straddle" different social spaces and social institutions (Allen 2016; Carter 2006; Delgado-Gaitan and Trueba, 1991). Some scholars have noted that youth of color are racially socialized to manage their racial identity in private and public spaces (Lacy 2007; Rollock et al., 2011). This can include adopting particular masculine behaviors in interviews and school settings to diminish racist stigma associated with Black masculinity (Allen 2016); or equalization, a racialized repertoire where people of color demonstrate high levels of competence, ability, discipline, hard work, and preparation as a way to overcome a racialized and racist society (Lamont & Fleming 2005).

Among the players and coaches of color that I spoke with in the Twin Cities, they demonstrate a clear awareness of the racialized dimensions of youth soccer and they are able to straddle and move between different spaces of soccer (organized travel soccer, interscholastic soccer, and hybrid/alternative soccer) by using particular racialized skills and strategies. They are generally prepared and aware of potential racial bias on the field and many implement a form of equalization as a way to protect themselves and attempt to overcome racial mistreatment and race/classed stereotypes. Within soccer, it means that players of color and coaches work very hard to act with grace, class, and dignity at all times, no matter the racist aggression (overt or subtle) that they face.

Equalization, though a sensible racialized strategy of interaction has its limitations in terms of challenging the power relations and racist culture that is embedded within youth soccer, including cosmopolitan canopies of the sport. Soccer, and sport in general, because of its deep 'sacred' and apolitical ethos (Hartmann & Green 2012), and strong idealized norms of sportsmanship, meritocracy, and colorblindness (Frey & Eitzen 1991), does not offer much room for more racial repertories that are more race-conscious, confrontational and de-center actors and institutions that reproduce such racial harm and marginalization. Thus, within cosmopolitan canopies of soccer, where diversity is celebrated, and norms of civility and pleasant tension-free social interaction are cherished and believed to be common; participants who are people of color are constrained with equalization as the only legible strategy that can maybe prevent some racial harm and still allow them to play soccer.

People of color that participate in youth soccer articulate a resignation and frustration with having to act better, work harder, be more civil, and graceful in order to potentially receive fair and equal treatment (see Coach Eddie). Such frustration comes from having to negotiate and navigate social environments that can at any moment ostracize and harm, even if you live up to all the norms of that said environment.[104] Perfect racial navigation, racial identity management, and alignment with the social expectations associated with sports and cosmopolitan canopies is still not enough to erase or overcome racial stigma and prejudice. For people of color, abiding by and exceeding

[104] Smith et al. (2007) argue that people of color often deal with racial battle fatigue due to constantly dealing with racial microaggressions. Coach Eddie articulates similar fatigue when navigating the racial microaggressions in Youth Soccer.

the norms and expectations associated with cosmopolitan canopies does not prevent racist ruptures from continuing.

Ultimately, within different spaces of youth soccer, including those that are cosmopolitan and full of social difference, acting civil and pleasant around other racial, class, and ethnic groups has much deeper implications for players, coaches, and parents of color and signals the embedded presence of racial hierarchy within diverse spaces of social interaction. People of color, with a keen racialized awareness, strategically present themselves in order to diffuse and prevent potential racial mistreatment. They (we) are bounded with a limited number of productive and legible responses to inevitable racist ruptures within soccer spaces, and a consequence 'take the higher road' and 'brush it off' in order to keep playing the game, but also because they view such racist ruptures and racial hierarchy as a feature of society and youth soccer that shows little sign of substantive anti-racist transformation. As a consequence, youth soccer and its cosmopolitan canopies can be spaces of perceived civility, inclusion, and happy diversity, and yet simultaneously easily have consistent overt and subtle racist ruptures in everyday social interaction that only people of color are burdened with.

Racial Discourse within the Ruptures: Implications

Anderson (2015) argues that moments of racism and prejudice within cosmopolitan canopies weaken or strengthen them depending the on the reaction of individuals and bystanders. These ruptures are considered to be rare and cosmopolitan canopies are framed as positive and full of great social potential because interacting in such spaces can be a profoundly humanizing experience for social actors (Anderson 2015). I push for a more critical analysis of cosmopolitan canopies and its relationship to

race, especially when it comes to racial discourse that surrounds soccer and sport in general. Youth soccer and the cosmopolitan canopies associated with it are not simply positive and inclusive social and racial environments, that on occasion, due to an individual actor, are vulnerable to a racist rupture that must then be repaired. Rather, youth soccer because of its particular sporting, and socio-cultural dimensions, produce cosmopolitan canopies where in addition to incidents of racial prejudice, biological notions of race rooted in colonial thought persist and come across as common sense.

Racist ruptures, whether at a discursive or micro-interactive level, are deeply relational to the norms and ideals associated with soccer-based cosmopolitan canopies. The combination of youth soccer culture and racial discourses associated with diversity and cosmopolitanism works well to incorporate, manage, and contain relatively frequent racial struggles and tension, while constraining the possibility of transforming embedded racial hierarchy or creating a sporting environment where racist ruptures cease to exist.

The ways in which various participants in this project talk about the relationship between culture, society, and soccer is an excellent representation of how prominent racecraft, meaning the "the mental terrain and pervasive belief in the ideology of race", is in youth soccer (Fields and Fields 2014, p. 18). At a seemingly more benign level, race and ethnicity is used as a descriptive vocabulary to describe and make sense of different styles of play between different racial, ethnic, and national groups. It is possible for racial and ethnic categorization of different cultural practices of soccer to not be directly linked to power and racial hierarchy found more broadly in society. Generalizations such as: Mexican Americans are technical, aggressive, and use their body really effectively; Somali Americans play with a gazelle-like flair and style; and Hmong Americans play

well and can strike a ball with power can reflect a cosmopolitan appreciation of the various ways soccer is played in the Twin Cities and beyond. Appreciation of different cultural styles of soccer, that is in part 'power neutral' and on the surface not linked to racism, still shows that race as an ideology is constantly imagined, created, and verified in social life. Even within arguably 'less serious' and mundane social routines and discourses of sport, racecraft exists and is readily traversed (Field and Fields 2014).

Appreciation of different styles of soccer among various racial and ethnic groups produces notions of race through a cultural prism. But, as race scholars have argued, the distinction between definitions and understandings of race as biology, versus race as culture and/or identity is messy and often not that distinct from one another (Fields and Fields 2014; Lizardo 2017). As coaches make sense of attempting to develop excellent soccer players and even criticize the lack of elite skill, passion, and 'hunger' for the sport within mainstream and resource secure soccer communities, they draw from and reproduce a rampant and dominant race and classed sporting narrative. This narrative celebrates athletes that come from humble and marginalized beginnings and overcome extensive social barriers to make it in the meritocratic, but highly competitive world of professional sports. In global soccer culture, there are a plenty of examples of this trope: Brazilian players come from favelas, working class Dutch players and Black British players dedicate hours to cage soccer on concrete in rough neighborhoods, or Senegalese youth learn to play in barefoot on dirt fields before being 'discovered' by a scout or club.

There is a racial implication to this popular narrative that soccer coaches tap into to explain a lack of US success at elite soccer. In order to envision success in US soccer a working class, person of color is desired because emerging from a social position of

disadvantage, is understood as the cultural base for the development of sporting abilities and required characteristics ('hunger') to succeed in global soccer. Race is required for this narrative to be legible and for key actors in youth soccer to make sense of their social field. Such a narrative is another example of racecraft and solidifies the idea that a particular race and classed subject is pre-disposed for particular social roles, in this case professional athletic success, because of their culture and social identity.

In sports where marginalized racial groups are substantively represented, this narrative easily shifts away from a holistic social explanation that takes into account hard-work, cultural environments, and structural barriers to other social opportunities outside of sport. Often it moves to a reductionist line of causation from racial and ethnic groups to fixed and monolithic notions of cultural, and to 'innate' athletic ability. Sociologists of sport have done in-depth empirical analysis to correct and disprove of common racial stereotypes regarding athleticism that are associated with people of color (Brooks 2009; May 2008; Smith 2007; Thangaraj 2015).

In particular, basketball, a sport that is often understood as 'black space', has been one social arena where notions of 'natural' racialized athletic ability has been interrogated and appropriately de-constructed. Brooks (2009) shows how elite black male basketball players enact great agency and produce a positive social identity in relation to a racist social system and stigma associated with black masculinity. They achieve this by constantly working, learning, planning, and strategically making decisions within their networks, schools, and teams, in order to pursue and succeed in their basketball careers and overcome. Similarly, May (2008) notes that high school aged black male basketball players are aware of race and racism within their sporting experiences, but often reject

notions of black people's purported superior athletic ability compared to the other racial groups that they compete against. Instead, they embrace sense of meritocracy and individualize athletic success through notions of work-ethic and skill (May 2008).

But the racialized context of basketball in the United States is not exactly the same in comparison to youth soccer. Scholars of sport can disprove, and some participants within youth soccer reject assumptions of intrinsic racialized athleticism. But, the discursive slippage from working class, players of color are well represented in particular popular professional sports due to broader socially constructed circumstances to—"it's just something innate in their culture"—is in part possible because the meaning of culture can change very easily and can signal something essential, something learned, something bounded, something without boundaries, or something ascribed (Eagleton 2000). My interviews and ethnographic observations confirm this slippage because in conversations about soccer race as culture can often become race as biological in polite and acceptable terms (Fields and Fields 2014).

Descriptions of different cultural styles of play comfortably move from a benign observation about passing the ball to an essentialized and racialized categorization of physical traits. Racial athleticism is very much salient and common-sense within sports, soccer included (St. Louis 2007). Soccer played by Black people with lineage in Africa is understood to inherently be physical, fast, confrontational, and reliant on strength more so than intelligence or technical skill, which other racial groups/other racialized cultural styles of soccer are associated with. Notions of an innate African style of play or a culturally fixed Latin style of play are still common-sense ways to make sense of and describe soccer culture.

Since fixed cultural styles and racial athleticism is a common-sense idea within sport, it is easy for racial stacking to occur within youth soccer, and I find substantive evidence of biological notions of race being reproduced in everyday interactions. There has been substantive documentation of racial stacking in collegiate and professional sports (Lapchick 1999; Staples 1976; Smith & Leonard 1997) both in the US and increasingly in European soccer contexts (Maguire 1988, Melnick 1988, Jones 2002). Yet, soccer's cosmopolitan culture and attachment to diversity in the United States provides an acceptable framework to reproduce colonial logics of race amongst youth players. It allows for a white coach to imagine the perfect youth team to consist of specialized and diverse racialized athletic traits applied to specific positional areas of the field. From this logic it is common sense to understand an ideal central defender as a white player because he/she inherently possesses the correct amount of athleticism, intelligence and leadership. Moreover, it allows for adults involved in the game to explain the racial demographics of national youth teams with confidence by articulating that black players have particular natural physical strengths (power, pace, strength) and lack other physical attributes (long-distance stamina) and intellectual attributes (spatial awareness and leadership abilities).

Colonial racist logics undergird positional stacking and racial athleticism throughout sports (Carrington 2010; Mangan 1998; Mohamed 2017; Thangaraj 2015). And it is no different within youth soccer in the Twin Cities. One can draw the line from the social invention of the 'black athlete' in the early 20th century to how blackness is articulated on the youth soccer fields of Minnesota. Carrington (2010) argues that the 'Black athlete'— a fantasmatic figure produced during European colonialism, and rooted

in centuries old racial folklore, religious fables, and the scientific tales of 19th century racial science—is now a typical type of image in popular and public consciousness. Blackness can often contain the bodily association of 'typically exceptional', which fits extremely well with notions of the 'black athlete' (Carrington 2010). It is not hard to find evidence in different youth soccer environments of numerous black youth players being understood through 'typically exceptional' terms of physicality. As a consequence, soccer culture can turn and reduce Black youth and blackness itself into semi-humanized categories of racial otherness, a social and racial social dynamic found too often within the world of sport (Hoberman 1997; hooks 2004; Lott 2013).

I want to note that people of color within sport can subvert, contest, play with, and/or mobilize racial and gendered stereotypes rooted in the body and tied to colonialist legacies (Mohammed 2017; Thangaraj 2015). Mohamed (2017), notes that basketball for black men is a mode of everyday resistance and that some alter stereotypical personas of a 'black athlete; in order to manipulate said stereotype and temporarily alter the balance of power that governs their everyday lives. This is important to acknowledge because it centers the agency of people of color within the broader racial project of sport.

In youth soccer, I believe that there is potential for similar racialized social performances and subversions to take place, but I did not observe this consistently in part because of racialized context that surrounds soccer in the Twin Cities. As mentioned earlier, soccer in the Twin Cities and US more broadly is not a sport where blackness is central throughout its culture. Soccer's racial landscape is more diverse, cosmopolitan, and in a way messier than other US sporting cultures. In the Twin Cities, Latino communities and Asian communities who are often made invisible within the US

sporting landscape are very much present, influential and occasionally praised by various participants in the sport. Yet, like black communities, they are simultaneously othered along racial and cultural characteristics. Soccer's cosmopolitan context allows for more racial and ethnic groups to be more intimately related to one another and destabilizes a straightforward white/black hierarchy. But, like other sports, discourses and common-sense understandings of the body, race, and athletic performance permeate soccer and still reproduces and articulates a dominant racial order that just exists under a cosmopolitan canopy.

Conclusion: The Contested Terrain of Soccer and Cosmopolitan Complicity

When placed together, the two chapters in this section show that in US youth soccer, racial discourse and racialized interactions are not infrequent. Sometimes they are benign, sometimes serious, sometimes both. And as a whole they reveal a great deal about how race and sport work together. I interpret the racial dynamics in youth soccer through Hartmann's (2000) conception of sport as a contested racial terrain. Youth soccer is a contested terrain because it is a space where racial ideologies, images, and inequalities are circulated, imposed, resisted, changed, and potentially altered. Drawing on Stuart Hall, Hartmann (2000) articulates that sport is a double-edged sword when it comes to race and society because one end of the sword it is popularly understood and idealized as a site of racial progress. On the other end of the sword, sport is a site of strong scholarly critique because of sport's role in reproducing racism at a cultural and institutional level, and failure to live up its popular ideals of anti-racism, colorblindness, and meritocracy (Hartmann 2000).

Youth soccer in the Twin Cities is very much a double-edged racial sword. On one side, youth soccer is a site of racial progress because there are sites of interaction where there seems to be significant racial inclusion and limited racial tension. In daily practice, there are many spaces of the sport that I identify as cosmopolitan because of the racial and ethnic diversity present on fields of play, and within particular teams. Participants from across social backgrounds often champion the global, cosmopolitan, and progressive characteristics and potential of soccer. This is what they enjoy about the game, and soccer's racial and ethnic diversity is viewed as a distinct positive attribute in comparison other U.S. sports. In turn, they reproduce popular cultural narratives of sport being a near colorblind site of racial and ethnic progress, especially compared to other social arenas/institutions in their lives.

Yet, it is also very clear how youth soccer is the other edge of the sword and matches scholarly critiques about how sport can reflect and reproduce racism at multiple social levels. For youth soccer, there are many racist ruptures to the sport's multiple cosmopolitan canopies and the happy diversity discourse that permeate the sport, both discursively and in everyday interaction. These ruptures are made apparent through how participants talk styles of play, through the experiences of people of color (parents, coaches, and players), and through mundane, everyday social interactions in youth soccer communities.

Youth soccer, like other sporting environments, contains deep social contradictions that are a feature of sports in modern society (Eitzen 1991; Hartmann 2012; Carrington 2010). But more than just holding contradictions, youth soccer is a sporting arena and not only a field that serves as a clean mirror to see racism clearly.

Rather, it is a productive cultural activity and social institution that remakes ideas about makes and remakes race beyond the boundaries of sport itself (Carrington 2010; Hartmann 2003). The racial dynamics found in youth soccer facilitates the development of race-based critical theory and critical approaches to social analysis of sport.

Youth soccer provides us a rich empirical case to explore how sites of cosmopolitanism, liberal diversity discourse, and popular ideals and cultural norms of sport are intertwined with racial hierarchy, racial ideology, and racist interactions at the micro level. Soccer serves as a double-edged racial sword because the sport is itself founded co-constitutive racial dynamics: 1) utopian, transcendent, diverse/cosmopolitan tension free interaction and discourse, and 2) deeply racialized logics or racecraft and racial inequality. I claim that this is a co-constitutive racial dynamic because the relationship between cosmopolitanism/diversity and racist ruptures are foundational to youth soccer culture. They are not explicitly antagonistic, but rather meld and function together. These seemingly oppositional racial dynamics in fact co-exist together because soccer is a unique, contested, flexible, and powerful racialized social force. Soccer can be a place of inclusion and diversity and legitimate and produce happy liberal discourses of diversity. At the same time soccer is a socio-cultural force that can be a site for overt racist aggression and a relatively more open social arena to speak bluntly about race and ethnicity in fixed, and biological terms through the slippery framework of "nature/culture", all under the framework of cosmopolitan appreciation.

Youth soccer and potentially sport in general is socially powerfully because it works well to quietly produce, incorporate and manage racist ideology, discourse, and interpersonal racism in everyday cosmopolitan social environments. People of color are

aware and suffer from overt and subtle racist ruptures in cosmopolitan canopies of the sport with relative frequency, yet there are rarely attempts at resolution, prevention, or possible anti-racist transformation to the culture of youth soccer. Instead, the sport continues to march along and despite such racist ruptures within the sport, the belief in and reproduction of happy diversity discourse associated with soccer can hold with ease**.** This tension holds with ease in part due to the social particularities and power of sport. Soccer, like other sports, can be understood as apolitical and offer a transcendent place idealistic liberal racial ideology and a melting-pot vision of American culture to thrive (Carrington 2010; Hartmann 2003).

Soccer's power to produce, manage, and contain such racist ruptures in diverse social spaces demonstrates the limitations of cosmopolitan canopies, liberal racial discourse, and sport in disrupting racist logic, ideas, and systems. Critical race scholars have astutely argued that liberal racial discourse and diversity talk does work to reduce and minimize racial power and privilege (Bell and Hartmann 2007; Berry 2015; Bonilla-Silva 2017; Burke 2012). Others have argued that diversity itself is a racial project and discourse that manages anti-racism movements, codifies racial difference, and maintains a dominant racial hierarchy within a system of capitalist and neoliberal market rationality (Berry 2015; Ferguson 2012; Melamed 2015; Rosaldo 1994). And scholars who interrogate social environments of racial and ethnic diversity observe that the power of whiteness and racial hierarchy persists, and people actively reproduce such inequality through actions that they themselves see as common sense and nonracial (Lewis and Diamond 2015; Mayorga-Gallo 2014; Tilly 1999). The contested racial terrain of youth

soccer and its unique socio-cultural features allow for a clear empirical picture of critical race-based arguments.

Youth soccer is a near-perfect arena to form frequent diverse and nearly taken for granted cosmopolitan spaces of interaction that coupled with diversity ideology helps individuals and groups live and play in a multi-racial and multi-ethnic environment seemingly tension free and under the abstract humanist ideals of egalitarianism that imbue sporting culture (Mayorga-Gallo 2014). The combination of diversity ideology, sporting ideals, and the persistence of racecraft in sport, results in a cosmopolitan containment, rather than a transformation or elimination of overt and subtle racism that people of color have to negotiate. Ultimately, the beautiful game of soccer that the world loves may have potential to contest and transform aspects of racism and social exclusion, but a canopy built on cosmopolitanism and infected with racecraft, and hegemonic sporting ideals is too compromised and foundationally flawed for such a possibility.

Conclusion: Extra Time

If this dissertation were a soccer match, we are now in the equivalent of extra time. We are attempting to get over the line of a comprehensive and tension filled 90-minute match that was ideally filled with clear ebbs and flows, lulls and surprises, and hopefully, a few moments of brilliance. I hope you are not calling to the bench for a substitution just yet, as ideally, my in-depth exploration of the world of youth soccer has exposed you to the sociological importance and power of soccer and sport more generally. At different stages of this manuscript I have shared empirical evidence and provided a handful of theoretical contributions to how sociologists can understand powerful social forces and dynamics of race, gender, culture and group identity, and families through sporting culture.

You have worked through why I began this sociological adventure and why soccer garnered so much of my personal and scholarly attention. You have read about my methodological choices and process of ethnographic immersion and interview recruitment and how this shaped my broader analytical framework for the entire project. I've taken you through how multiple sites and places of youth soccer in the Twin Cities emerged as a case study—a case study that allowed me to identify, construct, and map out the interrelated social field of youth soccer in the United States.

In Chapter 1, my process of multi-sited and relational ethnography provided an organic path to identify key analytical dimensions of variation between different cultural spaces of youth soccer, to avoid the pitfalls of an incomplete and flat binary analytical conception of youth soccer culture. A conception that is very present within popular discourse about soccer in the United States. Immersing myself into different youth soccer

communities in the Twin Cities fortunately made it very difficult and nearly irresponsible to just paint soccer as a rigid two-sided social field with immigrants, people of color, and working-class communities on one side and upper middle class, suburban white communities on the other. Instead, I highlighted the social realities of relatively newer and underappreciated sites of the game (elite youth soccer and alternative youth soccer). And through analytical categories of competition and intensity, organizational structure and costs, and purpose of participation and group identity; I compared and connected such sites to more visible places of the game (ex: organized travel soccer, interscholastic soccer), and spaces normally deemed as separate from dominant soccer and youth sports culture (ex: immigrant soccer).

My broader analytical framework and holistic mapping of youth soccer as a social field can be understood as a tool for future scholarship on youth sport and other popular youth extracurricular activities in the United States. There are methodological, analytical, and theoretical lessons to be drawn from my approach to understand the popularity and wide range of cultural articulations of youth sport and organized youth activities in the United States. I can name a variety of sports (basketball, football, volleyball) and activities (band, chess, dance, outdoor groups) that are likely popular and dynamic social fields in of themselves with their own particular cultural and social power, contain substantive cultural meaning, and have significant broader sociological implications.[105]

In chapters 2 and 3, I went more deeply into the day-to-day cultural practices of four soccer communities that exist in four locations within the social field of youth soccer. Here, I showed how different idiocultures of youth soccer are rich with cultural

[105] I do not consider this to be the only model for studying sport and other popular organized activities as a social field. See Gary Alan Fine and chess (2015).

meaning and important in processes of group identity construction. These different communities of soccer are simultaneously distinct, similar, and relational in their motivations to learn, teach, and play the sport; their understandings of youth soccer culture; and their daily cultural practices of the sport. Such motivations and practices of clubs, coaches, parents, and players revealed how important youth soccer is in terms of how people draw group boundaries.

Coaches, instructors, and families across different social contexts invest substantive time in youth sport and extracurricular activities in the United States (Lareau 2011; Levey-Friedman 2014; Putnam 2015). I have shown that it is important to take such social investment in an extracurricular activity seriously. Such investment and social commitment are common and frequently tied to larger discourses and cultural norms about parenting, sporting culture, childhood and youth development, and ideals of community. Based on how participants in youth soccer make sense of their own soccer communities and the field more broadly, such norms and discourses can vary in meaning due to social location, be contested and critiqued, or reproduced in ways that match dominant discourses and social relations.

As scholars continue to grapple with questions and dynamics of families, group identity, culture, and youth development, sport and extracurricular activities will continue to be primary and fruitful sites of research. They are underappreciated, but important sites because when families sign up, show up, and then continue to show up to practices and game, such dynamics are front and center. Moreover, participants spend so much time in these environments and want to share their experiences, and in turn, often hold great

relational awareness and sociological insights about the extracurricular/youth sporting social fields that they consistently navigate.

In chapter 4, I centered gender as a social category and system of power and its relationship to the culture of youth soccer. I demonstrated how, like the social institution of sport, the field of youth soccer is useful social arena to interrogate gendered social performance, gender-based discourses, and the reproduction of gender hierarchy. US youth soccer culture holds a particular social power because of its popular reputation and status as a sport that is relatively more equal in terms of participation, opportunity, and status in comparison to many other dominant American sports.

Though this is the case in certain contexts and girls are not overtly excluded from the sport; hegemonic constructions of masculinity, subtle marginalization of girls in co-gendered settings of sport, and essentialist discourses of gender persist are comfortably re-articulated within the sport. Moreover, there are other dynamics, that indicated how youth soccer is a site where gender relations tilt towards the traditional and patriarchal. Some of these dynamics are the limited number of women in coaching positions throughout the field of youth soccer, Kick It being a social hangout and club for fathers, and the gendered patterns of parenting and volunteer work in various sites of the sport.

Despite this, I am confident that the field of youth soccer and youth sport as a whole is not an uncontested male preserve, but such contestations are mainly because of women and girls fighting to insert themselves into the game and creating their own sporting environments. After exploring co-gendered settings of play and observing boys' only soccer interactions, it is clear that, at the moment, contestations of masculine centered play and 'natural' understandings of boys' social behavior are very limited. If

youth soccer and sport as a social institution can be truly transformed and overcome sport's patriarchal foundations; de-centering hegemonic masculinity needs to happen in co-gendered settings of play and in 'taken-for-granted' settings of sport where boys and men are the only people present.

In chapters 5 and 6 I focused on how the field of youth soccer is raced and demonstrated that the sport is a double-edged racial sword (Hartmann 2000). In many instances, the field of youth soccer has multiple observable cosmopolitan canopies where racial and ethnic diversity is normal and not hard to find. Many people that I interviewed celebrate this perceived diverse, multicultural racial reality and image of youth soccer and such understandings match popular discourses of soccer as the world's game and a model for multicultural and cosmopolitan inclusion. Though I share many of scholarly criticisms of happy diversity discourses that permeate sport and American society more broadly, we cannot dismiss the social power of such discourses or the presence of racially diverse sporting and social spaces. Notions of sport being racially progressive, colorblind, or free of racial tension are rooted in sporting ideology, but also emerge from everyday experiences.

My immersion into cosmopolitan canopies of youth soccer, coupled with interviews with players and parents of color, revealed the other edge of youth soccer's racial sword. I witnessed, experienced, and listened to people share experiences of racism in youth soccer settings. Racist ruptures, whether overt racist aggressions or subtle moments that essentialized racial difference, were quite regular and rarely resolved or grappled with. That such racist ruptures co-exist with the cosmopolitan and racially diverse realities of youth soccer is indicative of the racial power of soccer and sport as a

social institution. Soccer culture can effectively produce, incorporate, and manage racist ideology, discourse, and interpersonal racism in everyday cosmopolitan social environment—all while not disrupting the cosmopolitan and happy diversity reputation of the sport and crucially, abstract liberal racial discourse that often skirts around conceptions of race as a structural and hierarchical system of power.

There were other forms of racist ruptures and racialized interactions that were not covered in this section but will be analyzed in future iterations of this work. I observed and talked with participants about recruitment or 'poaching' of players of color and working-class kids into elite and organized travel soccer clubs. In terms of racialized interactions, the way youth at Kick It played and made sense of race during interactions on and off the field were rich with racialized meaning and reflective of racial socialization and childhood agency. Through soccer, youth at times inverted or disrupted dominant notions of race, but also reproduced essentialist notions of race as a social category. Moreover, my own racial identity and social position as an adult coach led to youth and parents initiating conversations about race and racism in their own lives or the social world more broadly. Such moments could be benign (ex: Do Black people like a cartoon series?), about the future (conversations about Historically Black and/or Majority Latino Universities) or the very serious (police violence against Black people in the Twin Cities). I highlight these other findings and threads of inquiry because they further prove youth soccer and sport is rich with sociological meaning that can be unpacked and analyzed in different directions.

This multi-year project and finally completed dissertation has been a wonderful and engaging endeavor. I have aimed to humbly follow the footsteps of CLR James

(1963), who took readers and scholars well beyond the perceived apolitical boundaries of Cricket fields. I applied a critical paradigm of analysis to sport (Carrington 2013; Hartmann 2000) and have gone well beyond the boundary of soccer and its popular cultural reputation. I have demonstrated that soccer, specifically youth soccer in the United States, is both an atypical social formation with its own distinctive social power and a profoundly contested social and cultural terrain where actions are imbued with deep social significance across dimensions of race, gender, class, families, identity and culture. Soccer and sport are not just a mirror of society, nor is soccer only a sacred institution that is inherently socially positive, and in turn removed from social tensions, power, and inequalities. Rather, the social conditions and cultural meaning produced within soccer is constantly constructed, contested, and messily re-articulated in everyday and relational social interaction. Implementation of an analytical framework that understands sport and popular social institutions as contested cultural terrains made it possible to unpack the messiness and make clear the sociological implications and of academically taken-for-granted cultural phenomenon. Soccer in the United States has intellectually been taken-for-granted, but it is clear that the social contributions and dynamics of the beautiful game go beyond a simple kick of a ball or a delicious and refreshing halftime orange slice.

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Appendix

I. Summary of Interview Participants Demographic Information

	Coaches (N=8)	*Parents (N=22)*	*Players (N=12_*
Median Highest-level Education	4-year college	4 year-college/graduate degree	Parents of players have Associates or high school degree
Men	7	15	10
Women	1	7	2
Person of Color (Black, Latinx, Asian)	2	8	7
white	6	14	5

II. Primary Location of Interview Participants in the Field of Youth Soccer

Elite Youth Soccer	Organized Travel Soccer	Interscholastic Soccer	Hybrid/Alternative Youth Soccer
3	6	15	18

- Participants can and do move between these locations of youth soccer. This table is constructed based off of when and where I interviewed them.

III. Interview Guide for Parents

Background and intro to soccer
How long as your child played soccer?
How did they get started in the game?
--Did you encourage them to play or stick with the game?
What does your child like about the game? Why have they stuck with the game?
What do you like about the game? What makes it different, special or better than other activities?
Do you or your partner have any experience or knowledge of the game?
What is the best or most memorable thing in seeing your kid play the game?

Goals and Perceived Current/Future Benefits:
What are the benefits of playing soccer for your kid? What do they get out of it? (social, cultural, physical, development)
What do you hope your child gains from playing soccer? Do you think soccer will influence their lives as adults?

Do you think your child will play this game as an adult? Into high school?

Evaluations of the club, other clubs, and youth soccer as a whole?
How did you learn and get involved with (your club)? How much thought/research did you put into choosing this club? Was your kid involved in this decision?
Why do you and your kid play for (your club)?
How would you describe the club? What do you like about it?
What makes it different from other youth soccer clubs and other activities that your kid participates in?
Is there anything that you do not like or wish the club did better?
Is there anything about organized youth soccer that you like or don't like?
-Are coaches to intense? Is there too much competition?

Coaching
What characteristics do you want from a soccer coach? What type of a coaching style do you prefer?
What have you and your child's experiences with coaches been like?
How important is coaching for you when looking for a soccer club? Did this influence your choice of soccer club?
Have you had any particularly good or bad experiences with coaches?

Parenting Culture and Social Vibe of the Club:
Do consider the club to be a diverse soccer club? How so?
Do you consider soccer in the cities to be inclusive to people from multiple social backgrounds? (race, class, gender, sexuality, ability)
Do you notice the social backgrounds of people at your club and other soccer clubs? Did that matter at all when finding a club for your kid to play in/for?
Does your child have a lot of friends at the club? Do they hang out with them outside of soccer?
How would you describe the parents at your club? Do people get along, are they intense?
What is the relationship between parents and coaches at the club?
Do parents volunteer a lot with the club?

Love of the game and Involvement in the game
Does your child watch soccer or pay attention to it outside of playing it? Do you pay attention to soccer or play it as an adult?
Is there anything about the game itself that frustrates you?
How much time does your family spend playing, practicing, or watching soccer?
How involved are you with your child's soccer life?
-Talking about their performance
-Playing the game with them
-Driving them or others around to practices and games

Family Time, Intensity, Labor
How important is soccer in your family's life? Your child's life?

Do you spend much time travelling for youth soccer? Do you think it is appropriate, draining, or too-much?
Take me through a soccer schedule. Do you or your partner do most of the soccer labor?
Would you describe your family life as busy or very scheduled? Is there much down time or unstructured time?

IV. Interview Guide for Players

Getting Involved, and why you play

When did you start playing? Do you remember why?
What do you like about soccer? Why do you play?
What makes it different from other sports and other things you do?

Goals, Benefits and the Future

What do you think you gain out of playing soccer? What does soccer help you with in your life?
Do you think you'll play soccer when you're older? (High school, college, adult for fun)
What are your goals for playing soccer?

Unstructured and Structured Play

Do you like playing in organized games? Pick-up? Why?

Soccer, Identity and Time

How important is soccer to you? Do you consider yourself a "soccer player"?
How much time do you spend playing soccer? Do you watch soccer in your free time?
Do you spend much time travelling for youth soccer?
Are you competitive? How so?

Your Club and Past Clubs

How did you learn about your current club? How did you decide to play for certain teams?
How would you describe the club? What do you like about it?
-How good are the players? Is it intense? Competitive? Fun?
Is there anything you do not like about the club or soccer?
How is it different from other soccer clubs? How do you know it's different?
Have you ever left a club? Why?

Kids and Teammates

Does your child have a lot of friends at the club? Do they hang out with them outside of soccer?
Are they similar to you or different from you? Do you hang out with mostly boys or girls?
Are they competitive? How good at the game are they? Are you at a similar level?
As you've gotten older has the game changed? Do you have different motivations for playing?

Kids and their parents

Do your parents know much about the game?
Do talk to them about how you play? What do they focus on?
Do you think the parents on your team are well-behaved? What about other team's parents?
Do your parents talk to you about the future a lot? Do they do so through soccer?
Do you think parents get along with each other and the coaches?
Do your parents spend a lot of time driving you to practice/games?

Kids and Coaches
What type of a coaching style do you prefer?
What have you and your child's experiences with coaches been like?
Have you had any particularly good or bad experiences with coaches?

Soccer, Diversity, Race, Gender, Class
Do consider the club to be a diverse soccer club? How so?
Do you play against teams that are diverse?
Does playing in such an environment important to you? Why? Do your parents talk with you about this?
Do other cultures play soccer differently? Do they play the game differently?
Are there differences between the ways boys and girls play soccer? Are they treated the same?
Have you ever seen differential treatment within soccer? Have you ever been treated differently?

Balanced Life and Unstructured Time
Do you think you have a balanced life?
Do you think you are busy?
Do you have down time? Is soccer down time for you?

Costs and Conflict
Have costs ever been an issue to play? Do your parents talk with you about costs to play?
What other sports/activities do you do?
Have you ever had to pick activity over another? How did that make you feel?
Has soccer conflicted with anything else in your life?

Ending Questions:
Is there anything about youth soccer that you would change?
What is the best or most memory you've had playing?

V. Interview Guide for Coaches

Getting Involved
Can you describe how you got into coaching?
Did you know you wanted to be a coach after your playing career?
How long have you been a coach? Where have you coached? Why did you want to coach at this level?
How did you get involved with the club you are working at now?

What do you like or love about coaching? Differences in comparison to being a player?
Can you tell me about a top coaching moment you've had?
How would you describe your coaching style? What type of relationship do you have with your players? How does this shift depending on the age and level of the kids you are coaching?
What goals do you have for your players? Has this shifted depending on the ages of kids you are coaching?
Can you describe your day-day schedule? And could you do the same for when the team is in-season.

Ok now I want to talk briefly about your playing career:
When did you know or decide you could play at a high level?
How did that process happen? Were you recruited out of high school or club soccer?
-What were your coaches like?
-Did you do a lot of unstructured free play?
-Did you play in mostly male spaces or did you play with girls

Soccer and Benefits:
What do you think kids get out of playing soccer?

Gender
How do you approach coaching boys? How do you approach coaching girls?
Do boys and girls play the game in similar ways?
Is the game inclusive for girls?
Have there been any challenges involving gender at your youth club?

Race, Ethnicity, Diversity
Do you consider your clubs to have racial and ethnic diversity? How does it compare to other clubs in the area?
Is that important to you as a coach? Did you grow up playing in diverse environments?
Do you think there are different cultural styles of playing soccer? Does this exist in the Twin Cities?
Do you consider soccer in the Twin Cities to be accessible for people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds?
Is soccer inclusive for all racial/ethnic backgrounds in the city? Do you see kids being left out for any reason?
Do people of different racial/ethnic/national backgrounds get treated differently within the Twin Cities soccer world? Or US soccer culture at large?

Coaching
What do you consider to be good characteristics in a coach?
As a coach how do you negotiate being inclusive to kids who love the game, but are not as skilled/talented/physically gifted?
How would you describe coaching culture in US youth soccer?
What criticisms do you have of youth US soccer coaches?
Do you see yourself as a coach doing different things than most coaches?

Unstructured Play and Competitive Youth Soccer
What are the benefits of unstructured play?
How much does fun matter to you as a coach?
How do you know that kids are having fun?
What do you consider a good soccer environment? Or good free play?
Do you think there is too much competition in youth soccer?
Is there pressure to win as a coach? How much do you care about winning?
How would you describe US youth soccer culture?
Are there things that you would change about US youth soccer?

Club Specific Questions and Parent Questions:
How is your club different than other youth clubs?
What challenges do you face as a coach?
What could your youth club improve on?
What is your relationship with parents?
How would you describe the parents you generally interact with?
Are parents too intense, too focused on winning or status?

Player Development at large
A lot of talk in the US, MLS, fans, and soccer media has focused a lot on the idea of player development. In the past few years the USSF has begun to implement more hands on development policy.
What does player development mean to you? Is it more than just soccer ability?
Can you compare your own experiences as a player interested in pursuing soccer to what players face now?
There are 96 development clubs directly associated with the USSF, all MLS teams have some versions of academies. Players in this system now are required to play a 10 month season and cannot play for their high school teams.
As a coach, do you see these structural changes as beneficial to US soccer? Do you see any drawbacks?
Player perspective, Coaches perspective, Parents-family,
How do you view the USSF becoming more directly involved in youth player development?
Do your coaching peers have opinions about increased presence of USSF, Academies, 10-month seasons etc.?
Also, there has been some debate about the USSF decision to not allow players under the USSF to play for their high school teams. What are your opinions about this rule?
I want to ask you about something Klinsmann has repeated nationally when talking about the flaws of US soccer in terms of winning internationally, developing better players, and making soccer (professionally) more popular in the US. He has repeatedly stated that the US needs to get lower income and urban kids to play the game. He wants more Latino-Americans and other racial minorities in the US player pool. His words reflect the popular conceptions of soccer in the US as suburban and upper-middle class, and orange slices. And that success in sports is helped when players from disadvantaged backgrounds are competing.

Do you think these are fair or accurate statements? Should such ideas be influential in how the USSF develops youth players and implements soccer policy?
As a coach, this sort of relates to your recruiting process and the composition of your team. Do you make efforts to recruit players from such backgrounds? Players that someone like Klinsmann (and potentially other members of the USSF) believes are needed.