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Jugadores del parque: Immigrants, play, and the creation of social ties

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Jugadores del parque:
Immigrants, play, and the creation of social ties

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

by

David Alexander Trouille

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Jugadores del parque:
Immigrants, play, and the creation of social ties

by

David Alexander Trouille
Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology
University of California, Los Angeles, 2013
Professor Jack Katz, Chair

This dissertation examines the social uses and meanings of a public park for a group of primarily working-class Latino immigrant men who regularly gather there to socialize and play soccer. Based on over five years of in-depth participant observation, the findings shed light on the men's everyday experiences in and away from the park and uncover social processes and human concerns that resonate well beyond the particulars of the case.

Specifically, the dissertation shows how a group of primarily immigrant men make and sustain social ties through their regular involvement in park life. The social life of the park works effectively as a site of network formation and resource exchange because it is made fun, compelling, and revealing. The findings show that people require shared commitments, in this case, a fascination with soccer and beer drinking, to create new relations. These emergent qualities not only bring the men together and break down boundaries between them, but help them develop trust in one another over time. With greater knowledge and confidence, the men

are more willing to network and exchange resources, a key way they make ends meet. As opposed to seeing networks emanating from pre-existing ties, this study shows how the men manufacture a basis and foundation for networking and making new ties in their everyday lives.

These men—their histories, experiences, and concerns—are developed in the dissertation chapters. Like a cubist painting, the chapters offer different slices and perspectives on park life and beyond, especially employment relations. Together, they paint a portrait of how group life at the park is made meaningful and transcendent in ways that affect the men's personal relationships and life chances. Along the way, the project aims to better specify how migrants form and sustain new ties in new places, paying special attention to the meaning and organization of sports and public parks in generating social connections and resource exchanges over time. The findings encourage migration scholars to look more carefully at the contingent and social nature of network formation and to examine less traditional research sites of interaction and meaning making.

The dissertation of David Alexander Trouille is approved.

Roger Waldinger

Stefan Timmermans

Anastasia Loukaitou-Sideris

Jack Katz, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

2013

For Maureen, Marcel, and Alana

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I was certainly not immune to the appeal and excitement of the park and it is with considerable sadness that I leave the area. While the men will always be in my heart, I hope my relationships with them does not end here. I also thank the various local residents, park activists, city employees, and local politicians who met with me to share their views and experiences with the park. Though some may disagree with part of my analysis, I hope they all recognize that my dissertation was carried out with the best intentions.

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sailing, problems sometimes associated with the park, but they never stopped supporting me. A special debt of gratitude and appreciation is reserved for my wife who not only tolerated my time in the park, but left her family and country to join me in Los Angeles. For all these reasons, I dedicate this dissertation to Maureen, Marcel, and Alana. I cannot begin to thank them enough.

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2008	"Association football to fútbol: ethnic succession and Chicago-area soccer, 1890-1920." *Soccer & Society* 9.4:455-476.

Introduction

"Jugadores del parque"

Pass by the Mar Vista Recreation Center in West Los Angeles and you are likely to see people playing soccer on the park's artificial turf field. Come by around noon, Monday through Friday, a lively pickup game may draw your attention. The passing observer may notice several things about the players, the games, and the park.

Almost all participants are men and most appear Latino, both in their physical appearance and in the predominance of Spanish emanating from the field. The passerby may also presume that the men are immigrant and working-class. For example, some of the men play in paint splattered work clothes, others arrive in pickup trucks carrying tools and equipment. In contemporary Los Angeles, working-class Latino immigrant men playing soccer in city parks is a familiar sight, yet a walk around the surrounding neighborhood casts the men's presence in this park in a less expected light. For some, the seemingly upper-class homes and predominately white residents contrasts and even clashes with player demographics.

The intensity and liveliness of the games may also bring pause to the passing observer. Linger long enough and you are bound to hear the men loudly cheer and jeer game action, the proverbial "golazo" marking extraordinary goals, chants of "estupido" (stupid) greeting shoddy play. The mix of players on the field, differentiated by age, physical condition, and playing ability, may also intrigue the passerby. The sizeable minority of non-Latino participants, representing roughly 20 percent of the players, potentially is also of note. The active presence of men lining the field, most congregating on bleachers at each side of midfield, similarly distinguish this game from versions outsiders may be more familiar with. On some days, there

are over 60 men watching and commenting on the games, a small portion of whom appear to have little intention of playing.

While increasingly common in the region[1], the quality of the artificial turf soccer field is also attention grabbing. This includes a smooth and shiny playing surface, bright field markings, regulation goals and nets, and metal bleachers at each side of midfield. Since 2010, a 15 foot gated fence encloses the field. Upon closer inspection, the passerby would notice several placards affixed along the fence announcing field rules, the final reading in boldfaced and italicized text: "Please be considerate to our neighbors." Those familiar with the park before the field was installed in 2005 presumably recall the dirt, dusty, and open playing space it replaced. Some may even recognize men from past games played on the irregular surface, which have been ongoing in various forms since the 1970s.

When contrasted to other enclosed soccer facilities in the region, which can be accessed only by permit, some may be surprised to find the field seemingly open to anyone wishing to use it at this time of day. Travel less than two miles to the Santa Monica Airport turf soccer field at this time of day and you are likely to see it locked and empty. The visibility of jerseys and a referee, plus the many "spectators," however, may confuse observers about the official status of the Mar Vista games. Questions over how these men gain access and organize the games may surface, especially for those interested in participating or using the field for other purposes.

Returning to the park later in the day, the passerby may notice many of the same men hanging out by the field. A series of adjacent picnic tables are typically home to 15 to 20 men engaged in animated conversation and horseplay. Smaller pockets of men are scattered nearby,

[1] According to my research, as of June 2013, there were 14 turf soccer fields in Los Angeles city parks, up from 3 in 2005, when the Mar Vista field was installed. The first artificial turf soccer field was installed in 2003 at the Ross Snyder Recreation Center in South Los Angeles, with financial backing from Nike. Many area schools and community centers have also opted for artificial turf playing surfaces over the years.

including in the two parking lots near the field. Venture close enough and you may detect beer drinking and the smoking of marijuana. Those conversant in Spanish and English overhear a range of topics discussed, from the humorous and mundane to the serious and controversial. Over the course of several hours men come and go, some greeted and sent-off more enthusiastically than others. Roughly twice a day, a police car drives through the park, sometimes stopping to interrogate the men, often citing them for alcohol consumption. The passing onlooker may also ask questions about the men's sobriety, whether provoked by the spotting of beer cans, smell of marijuana, or the men's perceived comportment.

On most afternoons and early evenings, the men constitute a small fraction of park users. The 18-acre park typically buzzes with activity and is home to a diversity of uses and users, from teenagers playing basketball to toddlers racing around the playground to middle-aged couples walking their dogs. The men are conspicuous to the outside observer in that they generally socialize at the same picnic tables or on the nearby grass at this time of day. They are not, however, the only Latinos in the park, especially in the afternoons and evenings when the park swells with Latino children and adults. A walk around the adjacent streets again suggests that Latinos are drawn to the popular park from more distant areas.

If the passerby had visited the park between the installation of the field in 2005 and erection of the fence in 2010, they may have seen or received a flyer about a series of community meetings held at the park auditorium about the field. Most invitations listed park neighbors' concerns over field use and demands for greater controls. A few notices called for a more balanced and inclusive resolution to the "problem." Some may have been approached to sign a petition, either in favor of "field regulations" or "open access." The attentive passerby may also

wonder why a fence that originally enclosed the field in 2005 was hastily taken down only to be replaced by a more elaborate fence five years later.

*

This contemporary urban scene raises a series of questions for the passerby. For example, who are these men, where do they come from, what are they doing in the park, how do they get by and along, and why are they always in this park? The men's presence in the park presumably sparks a range of emotions as well, from anger and fear, to approval and curiosity, to indifference and ambivalence. Or maybe other features are noticed, different questions are asked, and multiple interpretations and responses are expressed. Or quite possibly little attention or concern is given to the games and men.

Living in the city means encountering different social worlds, some drawing more notice and interest than others. In most cases, urbanites make snap judgments about the people and practices they come across in public settings, rarely lingering or advancing far enough to move beyond surface appearances and first impressions. While it is hard to know what others think about the games and men, it is safe to say that onlookers have minimal understanding or appreciation for the inner workings and meanings of this social scene. It is impossible for distant observers to know what is *really* going on when these men play soccer and socialize together in this park.

The social meaning and significance of the setting and activities are not texts to be deciphered from a distance. How soccer and beer drinking are used as meaningful activity, for example, is not readily apparent to outsiders. The men's biographies and relationships, as well as the field's history, are also hard to see from the outside. Connections between park life and beyond are similarly difficult to detect without formal observations and interviews.

Interest and uncertainty about pockets of interaction and sociability in the city have motivated urban ethnographers for close to a century. Ethnography is a largely qualitative research method where researchers learn about the lives of people by getting close to them over an extended period of time. In many cases, ethnographic writings challenge what the research site looks like from the outside, serving as a bridge connecting subjects with imagined readers (Katz 1997, 2012). Ethnographers also uncover social processes that help illuminate other settings and situations and explore how extralocal processes—social, political, and economic—impinge on and play out in the particular sites and peoples they study. While emphases and orientations differ (Tavory and Timmermans 2009), ethnography is always about apprehending and representing local knowledge and everyday experiences in a form others can comprehend.

Elijah Anderson's *A Place on the Corner* (1978), an ethnographic account of working-class African American men who regularly congregate in a Chicago bar and liquor store, exemplifies the approach and promise of urban ethnography for at least five reasons. One, Anderson explored tavern life through first-hand and long-term participation observation, his findings largely a product of the relationships he developed in the field over time. Two, Anderson conveyed the social world of the tavern through vivid and comparative analysis of interaction, biography, and subjectively lived experience. Three, Anderson's study provided an intimate window into Black male working-class life in mid-century Chicago, a misunderstood group marginalized and stigmatized by poverty and racism. Four, while always rooted in the contexts of the situation and historical moment, *A Place on the Corner* also shed light on generic social processes, namely the making and remaking of social order and status hierarchies in small-group settings. Five, Anderson presents sufficient data from the field for the reader to assess for themselves whether the analyses seem valid. Altogether, Anderson's book brings to life the

human dimensions and sociological ramifications of the world he studied, which helps explain why it continues to captivate readers decades after its publication (Abbott 1997).

My dissertation follows in this tradition. Like prior studies of streetcorners and bars, I study the social uses and meanings of a public park for a group of primarily working-class Latino immigrant men who regularly gather there to socialize and play soccer. Based on over five years of in-depth participant observation, the findings shed light on the men's everyday experiences in and away from the park and uncover social processes and human concerns that resonate well beyond the particulars of the case.

Much like the imagined passerby, I approached the research site with basic questions: What is going on here and how might it matter? Unlike the imagined passerby, I lingered and advanced far enough to gain a fuller sociological appreciation for how the men understood what they were doing and accomplishing together. In constant dialogue with relevant theory and research (Timmermans and Tavory 2012), this led to a narrowing and broadening of focus.

As I developed a deeper understanding of the social significance of this setting, my research question narrowed in on the dynamic formation of social relationships: How do the men create and sustain social ties in this setting and what is it about playing soccer and socializing in a public park that is particularly conducive for generating social connections? Over time, my research question also broadened as I recognized something more generic and universal in the men's park interactions: How is social activity, in this case, playing soccer and drinking beer together, made meaningful and transcendent?

I unravel answers to these questions in the pages that follow. I hope by the last page I have conveyed the multiple and rich meanings of this public park for the many "jugadores del parque" (park players) who tolerated my presence and incessant questioning over a five and half

year period. This dissertation is an attempt to provide a faithful rendition of a social world these men allowed me to see and experience.

I continue the introduction with a concise discussion of the dissertation's central argument about the making and maintaining of social ties in and through park life. I then situate the argument in response to the persistent yet under-developed focus on social networks in migration studies. Next, I return to the intellectual roots of the project, furthering positioning it in a tradition of small group ethnographies and interactionist research. I conclude by introducing the research sites, subjects, and methodologies and briefly outline the empirical chapters that follow.

The argument

Social ties do not emerge out of thin air, they have to be worked at and achieved. Analysis that uses networks as a kind of capital that helps explain outcomes, however, treats social ties as something people simply have (Goodwin and Emirbayer 1994). But a network is sociological shorthand for the work that people do through interaction to build, sustain, and occasionally capitalize off of their relationships.

How people make connections is a substantive process to study and understand (Small 2009). People need opportunities to come together and develop relationships, situational factors that vary across time and place. The form and nature of interaction also affects the quality of relationships that can develop. The resources people are willing to exchange with others similarly depend on the conditions of their interaction. The contingencies involved is why the question of *how* people form social ties matters, especially if the aim is to understand and remedy network inequalities.

My dissertation focuses on the active making and sustaining of social ties in everyday life.[2] Specifically, it shows how a group of primarily immigrant men make and sustain social ties through their regular involvement in park life. The study specifies how park interactions are made meaningful in ways that affect the men's social networks and life chances, shedding new light on the role of fun and play in generating social connections and facilitating resource exchanges. To show how the context of interaction conditions social ties, the emphasis is on lived experience and process—what the men actually do and achieve in this setting over time.

The social life of the park works effectively as a site of network formation and resource exchange because it is made fun, compelling, and revealing. These emergent qualities bring the men together and help them develop trust in one another over time. With greater knowledge and confidence, the men are more willing to network and exchange resources, a key way they make ends meet. As elaborated by exchange theorists (Blau 1964; Emerson 1976), relations form and develop through repeated interactions and exchanges at the park.

At one level, park life provides the men something entertaining to do together. By playing together the men creatively construct rich, vivid, and compelling social moments. Play is also often the first point of contact. It provides a separate sphere to engage one another without immediately getting into the personal troubles of their existence.

Over time, park routines and activities provide the base and impetus for a series of practical moves. While playing soccer and socializing in the park, the men develop relationships, exchange resources, and collectively cope with everyday challenges—marginality, stigma, and

[2] Mario Small (2009) examines the everyday making and sustaining of social ties in organizational settings, specifically, daycare centers. Matthew Desmond (2012) explores similar processes in moments of need, as often shaped by human service agencies. While this study focuses on more informal and unstructured interactions, the theoretical framework is inspired by their close attention to the contingent and fluid nature of social relationships, recent scholarship that builds, in particular, on Carol Stack's (1974) and Mark Granovetter's (1995) pioneering research on the connectedness and embeddedness of social and economic life.

advancing age of pressing concern for many of the men. For example, the men constantly refer each other for jobs, share tools, money, and information, and discuss the difficulties of living, working, and growing old in Los Angeles, especially when without full legal status. These developments, while originating in play, are more than "just play." Gradually the pathways toward more intimate kinds of relationships and exchanges are paved.

As most of these relations are based on reciprocity, trust and reputation are of fundamental importance. The working-class men, however, do not have formal credentials, credit checks, or insurance policies at their disposal. A distinguishing feature of social exchange at the park is the uncertainty and risk that potentially surrounds it. For example, the men constantly refer each other for jobs, sponsorships that put their reputations and future earnings on the line. In light of formal methods, park interactions become local ways to measure and project trustworthiness.

As the men learn to play together, they learn other things about one another. How the men perform on the soccer field or when drinking beer, for example, is revealing of character and intimately tied to their park histories and personal biographies. Accounts of failed and realized reciprocation similarly shape social standing at the park. The action is here because character is on display and reputations are in play (Goffman 1967).

The challenge the men face is whether they will live up or back down from the demands and expectations of their park peers. The realities of a tight economy and "illegality" can make it difficult for some of the men to repay their social debts. Personal challenges, such as alcoholism and separation, are similarly debilitating. The pressures of group life can exacerbate these problems and also cause the men to neglect more pressing matters, often family and work related. Unequal relationships with authorities and neighbors around the park, some of whom

object to their presence, creates additional threats. The risks and uncertainties of park relations, however, are essential for the development of trust and cooperation (Kollock 1994). The balance between risk and trust and pleasures and problems can be difficult to manage at times.

At the same time, much of the practical resources that emerge are more a byproduct of being together, than the result of calculated behavior or strategic tests of character (Coleman 1988). For example, someone may learn about a job opening after a restaurant worker is playfully urged to "go wash dishes" during the soccer games. As in this case and others, opportunities to network and exchange repeatedly emerge at the park through a shared focus of activity and common culture of interaction (Feld 1981). It is in the pursuit of fun and sociability that the men develop relationships, build reputations, and exchange resources. Park life and "being together" is given impetus by the social relations and exchanges it fosters.

That said, the men are well aware of the importance of networking, more so than social scientists give them credit for. This is how the men survive a challenging and competitive market for their labor, housing, and social needs. For this reason, reputation is of pressing concern, both in establishing one's own and judging the reputation of others. Social ties, however, are not automatically "there" or formed without work. Contrary to scholarly and popular images, many of the men did not arrive to Los Angeles with dense social networks at their disposal. Many tell me of a time when they knew few people and had limited opportunities to play soccer and socialize.

The men have to create social ties, but as foreigners they have to create a community that they cannot take for granted. They are not born with local history, knowledge, connections, and status, and the ties, credentials, and reputations they come over with can prove impractical over time. Also, categorical attributes assumed to generate ties, such as ethnicity, class, or even

hometown, are usually insufficient bases for forming new relationships in places like Los Angeles.

The park, both in routine and spectacular ways, provides a key space to develop and negotiate social ties. These connections, moreover, have proved invaluable for many of the men, in both material and nonmaterial ways—dual functions of park relationships that are often intertwined. In the pages that follow, I look deeply into the taken-for-granted processes by which immigrants form, sustain, and make sense of social ties in new places through a case study of a group of men at play in a Los Angeles public park. Let me begin by situating my argument within network analysis.

Networks and the social organization of migration

It is now well established in migration literature that networks are essential sources of social organization and resource mobilization (Boyd 1989; Massey et al. 1987; Hagan 1998; Menjívar 2000; Waldinger and Lichter 2003; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Tilly 1990). Social ties provide a range of resources and mechanisms that facilitate movement, settlement, and employment over time. Network-based models show how migrants' actions are embedded in their connections to others. People's social relationships, rather than individual attributes, are critical in various stages of the migration process.

The importance of network ties is not unique to migrants (see Fischer 1982; Granovetter 1973; Stack 1974, for three notable examples) but is molded to the special circumstances of movement across borders and settlement in new places. As famously argued, many migrants may be weak in terms of economic and human capital, but they make up for these deficits with strength in social capital, the resources and commitments that inhere in interpersonal relationships (Massey et al. 1987:170-171; see also Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993:1322.).

Scholars have also associated social networks with vital resources for migrants with widely different histories and characteristics (Gold 2005). Contrary to previous thinking on assimilation, this work also shows how group cohesiveness and cultural practices can serve as sources of mobility and well-being (Neckerman et al. 1999; Zhou and Lee 2007).

Migrants gain access to an array of resources through their membership in networks, which they draw upon in moving and settling into their new environment. These resources can include access to jobs, housing, and loans, as well as more intangible assistance for adapting to often strange and difficult circumstances. For example, migrant networks help not only secure employment, but guard against the drudgeries of workaday life through friendship and emotional support (Gomberg-Muñoz 2011). The concept of social network includes both the sociological emphasis on structural position and the anthropological appreciation of networks as cultural environments.

Reciprocity, mutual obligation, and a sense of commitment generate trust in these exchanges over time. The exchange of referrals and recommendations are particularly effective conduits for the flow of information and assistance, within and across social groupings. For example, employers and employees can mutually benefit from tapping into social networks (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). In the long run, the broadening of networks across space decreases the costs and risks associated with migration, even at times when the original incentives to migrate disappear (Massey et al. 1987). Supply-driven migration and entrepreneurship can also, in some cases, create new opportunities in destination economies (Light 2006).

Social networks do not, however, always "positively" or uniformly facilitate the migration and settlement process. Careful research has revealed "the other side of

embeddedness" (Waldinger 1995; see also Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). Migrant networks can be fraught with instability, conflict, exploitation, and inequality, and can constrain as much as they enable action (Kibria 1993; Mahler 1995; Menjívar 2000; Sanders and Nee 1987; Tilly 1998). In short, social networks differ in terms of the resources they yield and their restriction or facilitation of individual and group opportunities. While demonstrating the need for more critical and nuanced analysis, studies on the volatility and differentiation of social networks do not dispute their overarching function and importance. In fact, network analysis helps account for the sustained growth and relative achievements of immigrant groups in the United States, despite economic, political, and social conditions that would predict otherwise (Light 2006; Waldinger and Lichter 2003).

Social-network approaches are effective at showing how migration is an inherently relational process. By examining migrant experiences in light of agency and structure, this work has helped overturn under and over-socialized conceptions of migrant decision making. Researchers have also showed how social ties are important in explaining all aspects and phases of the migration process, while drawing attention to underlying constraints and inequalities.

More critical analyses invariably argue or imply that social ties change and evolve over time, although not always in ways migrants anticipate or desire (Hagan 1998; Mahler 1995; Menjívar 2000). As this research shows, changing conditions and expectations can disrupt and transform migrant ties. Put simply, scholars increasingly recognize that things change and to make ends meet, new ties must be formed.

For example, Menjívar (2000) shows how ties "fragment" when migrants are unable to equally share in resource exchanges, a result of economic instability and cultural changes in her study of Salvadoran immigrants in San Francisco. This basic point about changing conditions

and shifting orientations represents an important rejoinder to static "snapshots" of migrant networks (see also Cranford 2005; Krissman 2005; Mahler 1995; Zlolniski 2006). By pointing to a "confluence of factors" (Menjívar 2000:116), including policies of reception, opportunity structures, and internal divisions by gender or generation, for example, this work effectively shows why migrants cannot always depend on the same ties over the course of migration and settlement. Indeed, the connections that help migrants cross borders do not always prove reliable or relevant for getting by and ahead in new places. Presumed bonds of kin, kith, and country can also shift and dissipate over time and with new experiences.

While scholars like Menjívar (2000) and Mahler (1995) skillfully show the effects of broader structures on social networks, it is not always clear in this research how new ties and commitments are formed and sustained. That is, how do migrants form and sustain new connections when old ties no longer meet their needs and concerns? In other words, while the consequences of social ties are widely appreciated, the ways in which they are made and maintained have received less attention, especially as time and changing conditions propel immigrants beyond the familiar bonds of kinship and home-country relations. As many reviewers have argued (Boyd 1989; Gold 2005), the dynamic processes by which social networks erode, change, and develop over time have been largely missing from the study of immigration, despite the fact that theories are built on the assumption of their existence and utility. In mapping social relations in structural terms, they have been reified and abstracted from the dynamic processes that give them form and meaning.

There are certainly many ways that migrants meet new people and find new resources. A variety of factors are also shown to affect network formation. For example, Hagan (1998) finds that men were more likely than women to form new ties because of their employment relations in

her study of Guatemalan immigrants in Houston. According to Hagan, men's work in a supermarket chain facilitated the development of new connections and settlement opportunities, while women were more isolated and constrained by their work as domestic workers in private homes. In her study of domestic workers, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) shows how women combat seclusion and informality through "off the job" interactions in a range of social settings. As in Hagan and Hondagneu-Sotelo's research, public parks repeatedly emerge as key sites for the maintenance of old and formation of new ties in migration studies (see also Brown 2001; Small 2004; Smith 2006).

In one of the foundational texts on the social organization of migration, Massey et. al (1987:145-147) point to "Los Patos" park as a central meeting place for a dispersed community of Mexican immigrants in Los Angeles. Gathering on weekends to socialize and play soccer, "this reunion breaks up the routine of work and isolation and provides a forum for communication and interchange" (146). Moreover, as park life brings migrants into contact with other migrants and nonmigrants, they gain "new sources of information and exchange" (147), thereby "greatly expanding the radius of migrant networks" (147). For Massey et. al, it is in these informal interactions in a public park that migrants sustain the community and develop new connections and exchange opportunities.

As in *Return to Aztlan*, soccer—which the authors refer to as "probably the most important" voluntary organization (145)—frequently surfaces as a central organizing and orienting activity in the lives of Latino immigrants. Hagan (1998), for example, also shows how Sunday soccer matches became an important networking space for male migrants. The general implication in these studies and others is that soccer plays a significant role in the lives of Latino immigrants by supporting the settlement process in rich and culturally familiar ways (see, for

example, Hernández-León 2008:124-126; Smith 2006; Menjívar 2000:181-182, Waldinger et al. 2008).[3] In particular, social ties are made and sustained when socializing and playing soccer in public parks; a robust relationship between sports, parks, and integration that parallels the experiences of previous newcomers (Cranz 1982; Riess 1989; Rosenzweig 1983).

Despite consistent references to their popularity and importance, we have little understanding of *how* soccer and public parks structure and facilitate network formation and group life. What is it about playing soccer and socializing in public parks that appears so conducive for developing social ties? How are park and game interactions made meaningful and compelling in ways that foster interpersonal relationships and resource exchanges?

While answers to these questions may seem self-evident, this study shows all the work that goes into forming and sustaining social ties in and through park life. How group life at the park supports social relationships and resource exchanges is not so obvious or straightforward, but emerges over time in complex and sometimes paradoxical and problematic ways. A focus on everyday park interactions helps see network development as obviously relational but also as a contingent and transformative social process. Moreover, by showing how relationships and resources emerge as a byproduct of creative and intimate social activity, this study pushes network analyses beyond static and narrow representations of their form and function.

Put simply, park life has to be made fun, compelling, and revealing by the men for relations and exchanges to develop. In turn, while the findings about network formation and resource exchange do not substantially differ from what Massey et al. (1987) and others claim to have discovered in public parks, this study details the interactional dynamics and contextual conditions that help account for these largely assumed and taken-for-granted outcomes. Indeed,

[3] The few studies that directly examine soccer in the lives of Latino immigrants show the potential for more nuanced and sociologically informed investigation (see Pescador 2007; Price and Whitworth 2004; Shinn 2002), but do not directly connect their findings with research on the social organization of migration.

everyone notices it and migration scholars unfailingly mention the relationship between sports, parks, and networks, but nobody has studied it ethnographically.

Small group ethnographies

In studying this particular social world, I follow a long tradition of ethnographic interest in small groups. The "primary group," in fact, was one of the first concepts introduced to sociological theory in the United States (Cooley 1908), and many classic ethnographies explored "real life" examples of this human tendency to form and interact in small groups. From Thrasher's *The Gang* (1927) through Whyte's *Street Corner Society* (1943) to Duneier's *Sidewalk* (1999), some of contemporary sociology's most memorable texts have been ethnographies of small groups.

Small groups provide a range of social needs and desires, often left unfulfilled elsewhere. This includes the comfort of familiarity and security and the satisfaction of sociability and status typically found in small groups (see also Anderson 1978; Desmond 2007; Duneier 1992; Fine 1987; Jerolmack 2013; Liebow 1967; May 2001; Roy 1959; Wacquant 2006; Whyte 1943). As ethnographers show, it is in these settings that members gain indispensable feelings of self, communion, and respectability, in ways that frequently offset their suppression or inversion in other settings. Small groups are consistently shown to provide essential opportunities to "be somebody" and share in collective "we-ness" (Cooley 1908), although competition and conflict typically undergird these interactions (Anderson 1978; Jerolmack 2009).

While sometimes portrayed as building blocks or microcosms of society (Fine 2012), ethnographers generally present small groups as windows into more specified social phenomena. Specifically, they are offered as intimate and detailed portraits of particular times, places, and social processes. In many cases, small group ethnographies subvert popular stereotypes and

misconceptions about people, places, and practices (Duneier 1999; Liebow 1967). Small group ethnographies also respond to readers' receptiveness to storytelling and the human dimensions of social life, which may explain their remarkable appeal and endurance (Abbott 1997; Grasmuck 2005).

In this small group ethnography, I similarly examine how group life is organized and maintained and explore what the men construct and derive from these recurrent interactions. In particular, I focus on the dynamic making and sustaining of social ties in and through group life at the park. As in studies on the formation of group culture (Fine 1987), for example, long-term ethnographic engagement allowed me to examine the development and maintenance of personal relationships up close and in real time. This research agenda was motivated by the lack of specification for how migrants form and sustain social ties in new places over time, as previously discussed.

Along with drawing special attention to the overlooked relationship between soccer, parks, and network formation, the study also uses my participation in park life as a unique window into the men's everyday lives and daily concerns, a substantial but largely hidden population in Los Angeles. Small group analysis, focused on the active negotiation and texture of social life, provides data on migrant incorporation not capturable by "assimilation outcomes" or demographic techniques. By bringing a relatively new population and social practice to this rich genre of investigation, I continue to show how small groups represent important and compelling sites of interaction and meaning but in ways that shed light on the particular challenges and opportunities immigrants currently face in settling into new places.

Strategies to improve small group ethnographies

In recent years, Gary Fine and his colleagues have advocated for greater attention to small groups in sociological research. In a series of programmatic statements, they attempt to remedy this neglect by emphasizing the centrality of small groups as fundamental units of social life and microfoundations of social structure (Fine and Harrington 2004; Fine 2003, 2012; Harrington and Fine 2000, 2006; Stolte, Fine, and Cook 2001). My dissertation offers two less ambitious strategies for advancing ethnographic research of small groups. In contrast to more rigid and static conceptions of small groups, I suggest greater attention to their extensions across space and time.

Small groups typically meet at regular times and in regular places. Predictably, ethnographers conduct the vast majority of their research in a generally fixed site, be it a streetcorner, medical school, or bar. While this affords the types of sustained *in situ* observations that distinguish small group studies, it can result in incomplete and misleading findings. In contrast, it is only by studying the members away from the central site of interaction that the full meaning and consequence of the small group can surface. Not only does this reveal the situational and contingent nature of small group interactions but it also develops specific conclusions about the small group under study. For example, to argue that a small group is therapeutic or integrative, only makes sense in relation to members' experiences away from the group. As several examples show (see, especially, Duneier 1999; but also Desmond 2007; Halle 1984; Jerolmack 2013; Kornblum 1975), "following the people" helps ethnographers better capture the transcendent dimensions of small group life.

Ethnographers, of course, must make decisions about where to invest their time and energy, not to mention the challenge of convincing research subjects to tolerate their sustained

presence across social settings. In large part this explains why so few ethnographers have fully explored the potential of "extended place ethnography" (Duneier 1999). While I also faced challenges and limitations, I purposefully shadowed the men in a variety of settings and situations away from the park.

Most notably, I observed a subset of the men at work in private homes. It was at work, which involved a range of home improvement jobs with primarily white upper-class clients, that I gained a greater appreciation for what the men were doing and accomplishing together at the park, especially in relation to network formation and resource exchange. In particular, I was able to better grasp what was at stake in park interactions in regards to trust and opportunity. Without this comparative context, I would have registered an incomplete analysis of group life at the park. Observing the men in other social settings, such as at the beach or in bars, as well as when driving around the city, also allowed me to further contextualize park life. In contrast, my inability to substantially observe family relations and residential life—relying rather on interviews and glimpses from the park—certainly limited the findings. Unlike the park, and to a lesser extent at work and on the road, it was harder to explain away my presence at home or around the neighborhood.

Small group ethnographies would also benefit from a greater appreciation for the biographies of individual members, and how they intersect with the formation and maintenance of group life. Like a more expansive conception of the research site, situating participation in small groups within evolving histories also guards against mistaken or misleading conclusions. As Jack Katz argues, social life, "while always situated, is always transcended by temporal orientations to past and future situations" (2009:1). In this study, I investigate members' prior experiences, including the developments that brought them to the park, and explore how this

union fits into their life trajectories. I also explore how individual and group histories are brought to bear on park interactions in ways that infuse them with order and meaning.

As I show in the upcoming chapters, studies of small groups would profit from drawing deeper connections between what their research subjects do—their "moments"—with their histories, biographies, and shared experiences.[4] A strict interactionist approach, focusing solely on *in situ* back-and-forth, here-and-now exchanges, fails to see, for example, how the men creatively use and play with individual and group biographies when they socialize and play soccer in the park. The men do not interact as empty vessels but as people with distinct and shared histories, real and imagined.

In ways that took me years to appreciate, the long-running and sociable nature of park life provides the wealth of local knowledge that helps create and sustain meaningful interactions at the park. Contra Goffman, situations are often not sufficient without shared pasts and prospective futures (Fine 2012). Through methods I now discuss, it was only through long-term ethnographic engagement with these men, including extended life-history interviews, that I was able to understand the role and import of biography and shared experiences at the park.

Research methods

I actively studied park life for five and half years, from January 2008 to July 2013. While time in the park fluctuated, I was never away for more than the three weeks during this period. As in most ethnographic projects, I arrived with broad questions, in my case, about the role and meaning of soccer and public parks in the lives of immigrant men. I stumbled upon the Mar Vista Recreation Center after hearing about local opposition to an artificial turf soccer field. I expected to focus primarily on this neighborhood controversy—a more traditional topic in urban

[4] See Matthew Desmond (2007) and Colin Jerolmack (2013) on the potential of greater incorporation of personal biography in the ethnographic study of small groups.

sociology—but the midday pickup soccer games on the contested field quickly attracted my attention. Through my dual involvement as a researcher and player, I anticipated that the games would provide me exceptional access and a unique window into the men's everyday lives, a group many researchers have difficulty studying with any depth and nuance.

Like many men before and after me, I approached the games as a prospective player. As I detail in chapter two, gaining entry into the games was an uneasy and fluid process. I believe my abilities as a soccer player[5] and Spanish speaker[6] facilitated my entry, although it took months of consistent participation to feel conditionally accepted and welcomed. It was around that time that I introduced myself as a researcher interested in studying the games and participants.

The men had varying relations with and reactions to my research: some were excited, others indifferent, and a few were initially hostile and suspicious of my intentions. Most, however, seemed to agree that park life was a worthy focus of study and welcomed my efforts. As the years progressed, my project became more a source of humor than concern, such as when the men would playfully urge me to "put *that* in your book" or joke about how long it was taking me to finish. While I never hid the fact that I was doing research, and I followed Institutional Review Board protocols, most soon forgot or made light of it. To be fair, it was not only at the park that my fieldwork registered amusement and confusion, as it seemed to consist of playing soccer and drinking beer everyday!

Also, while my research aims were sometimes experienced as vague or suspect, my participation in the games was generally not, even though the majority of players were working-

[5] I played Division I college soccer and continue to play competitively through my early 30s.

[6] I have also spent considerable time in Latin America and predominately Latino immigrant settings in several U.S. cities. Often these interactions were based around a shared interest in soccer. Thus, despite its idiosyncratic qualities, the Mar Vista games represented a familiar cultural and social setting. I believe my personal and professional (Trouille 2008, 2009) comfort with similar gatherings helped ease my integration. My marriage to a woman from Costa Rica, with whom I had two children with during fieldwork, all of whom got to know the men in the park, also seemed to shorten my social and cultural distance from the men.

class Latino immigrant men and I am white, US-born, and, during my fieldwork, a graduate student at a prominent university. In particular, my visible skills and enthusiasm for the game of soccer helped explain my presence in the park, as contrasted by the challenges I faced in observing family, neighborhood, and, to a lesser extent, work life. Moreover, part of the appeal of the park was that it attracted and facilitated the coming together of diverse individuals, the sort of "cosmopolitan canopy" envisioned by Elijah Anderson (2004). Thus, my presence as a player and researcher helped exemplify and validate the men's belief that the games were unique and special. This is not to say that I was innocently part of the group or unobtrusively blended in, but only to shed light on some of the local conditions that shaped this research.

Fieldwork consisted of traditional participant observation (Whyte 1943), getting my hands dirty in the real world! Mostly this involved observing and interacting with the men over a long period of time. What emerges is an account of how these men live their lives with one another in a particular time and place. The emphasis is on what the men do and achieve together in specific situations. Sensitivity to process and variation helped me capture the dynamic unfolding of social life at the park, in its full context and complexity. Privileging the men's concerns and creativity also allowed me to understand the social logic that organized and gave meaning to park interactions from their perspectives.

Constant dealings with the ebb and flow of park life proved to be the single most effective method in conducting this research. I believe it would have been difficult to study this social world without playing soccer and socializing with the men over an extended period of time, despite any limitations or biases my active participation presented. An exclusively interview-based study (see Menjívar 2000 and Hondageneu-Sotelo 2001) would have also yielded very different data. One of the challenges of this research, in fact, was determining the

relation between what the men said and did and "checking" and contextualizing the variety of data I collected (Duneier 1999; Jerolmack 2013; Jerolmack and Khan 2013).

While initially focusing on the soccer games, the least problematic point of entry, I gradually gained access to a variety of social gatherings at the park. Chapter three, for example, focuses on beer drinking sessions that invariably followed the games. Like playing soccer, drinking beer with the men provided its share of pleasures and problems, but was indispensible for establishing rapport and gaining access.

Approximately two years into my fieldwork, I began to shadow a subsection of the men at work. I focused on home improvement jobs, rather than restaurant work—another key source of employment at the park—because I was able to observe and participate firsthand and close up. I would generally help the men with menial tasks, which not only gave me a unique perspective on their work but usually earned me lunch as well. As detailed in chapter four, I followed 18 men in a variety of jobs over a three-year period. In addition to observing the men at work, I also joined them and other men from the park on their daily rounds. "Ride alongs" proved helpful in generating data on how the men experience and navigate the city but also as an occasion to gently ask questions without the distractions and temptations of park and work life (Knowles and Harper 2009; Kusenbach 2003).

Although this study privileges interactions and conversations in their "natural settings," I also formally interviewed 58 of the men.[7] These interviews, including several repeats, lasted one to three hours, most occurring in a more secluded section of the park. The semi-structured interviews were primarily set up to gather biographical information but the men often voiced more subjective interpretations of their experiences living and working in Los Angeles. While

[7] In studying local responses to the park soccer field, I interviewed an additional 28 individuals, including area residents, park activists, and city administrators and politicians.

often contradicting what I observed, the interviews proved helpful in discovering meanings and experiences that were not readily visible in naturally occurring interactions.

Although I almost always tape-recorded the interviews, I did not record park conversations as I found this practice intrusive and distracting. Simply put, the visible tape recorder registered too much notice and commentary, never reaching the point where it blended into the background (Desmond 2009). I did, however, take hundreds of photographs and some video. The photographs, in particular, were helpful for data analysis and presentation, but also served as something to share and discuss at the park.[8] Rather than connecting photographs to passages, I have elected to include an appendix of illuminating and evocative images from the park and beyond. In this way, I hope the reader forms their own impressions of the photographs, another way I try to construct more independent access to the data.

Most of the talk at the park is in Spanish, which I have translated into English, occasionally including Spanish words and phrases when appropriate. The challenges I faced as a non-native Spanish speaker in accurately transcribing all that was said at the park, especially the more colloquial expressions and word plays of this diverse population of men, accounts for why there are not more extensive dialogue passages in the upcoming pages. Double entendres and idiosyncratic references were especially confusing for me, an expressive and creative quality of park life this study unfortunately does not fully capture. Due to my own limitations and capabilities, I in turn focus more of my efforts on vividly describing and detailing everyday interactions at the park, a primary ethnographic practice.

[8] Sensing their interest, I set up a public website to catalogue and display my photographs. The men would often talk about the photographs at the park and many shared with me that family and friends in Los Angeles and elsewhere enjoyed viewing them as well. As one man said to me, "We're famous in Yalapa," the small Mexican fishing village he emigrated from over 20 years ago.

Like some ethnographers (see Duneier 1999), I also came to the conclusion that concealing the name of the park and men primarily protected me. In turn, I decided, with the men's approval, to identify the location and research subjects by first name, usually the nickname the men are known by at the park. After careful reflection, I came to the conclusion that this decision would not create any harms for the men or local residents that did not already exist while forcing me to be more accurate and thoughtful in presenting my findings. The life of the park was also a story the men wanted me to tell, and using their names, even in nickname form, was one way to honor their wish.

Let me conclude by discussing my shifting position and role as a researcher and park player over five years of fieldwork. Simply put, just as my research interests evolved over time, so did my relations with the men. This was due, in part, to a series of turning points during fieldwork, such as my first fist fight or arrest at the park, or personal milestones, like turning 30, getting married, and having children. My commitment to a park-based soccer team, which participated in area soccer leagues and park tournaments, also solidified my social standing amongst the men. I believe my ready willingness to help the men, be it translating a legal document or simply letting them use my cell phone, assisted with my integration as well.

For certain, I was as much a potential resource for the men as they were for me. As in all relations at the park, I also had to establish trust and respectability before I could expect them to thoughtfully participate in my research. How I simultaneously studied and partially constituted the research site was a question I constantly considered, blurred experiences I will occasionally offer as data.

Relations in the field, of course, are always complicated and in process (Brooks 2009). Decisions were certainly made about who and what to observe and include, some of which were

out of my control (see footnote 9). While I can never know what the men really thought about me and my research (Duneier 1999), I hope that the data serves as a small testament to my deep and diverse engagement with this social world. A more distant and detached approach would have led to different results, and the costs of my intense involvement the reader will ultimately have to assess for themselves.

Settings and subjects

The Mar Vista Recreation Center is the primary site of interaction and physical anchor of social relations in this study. Located in West Los Angeles, the park's surrounding neighborhoods are primarily upper-middle-class, white, and residential, although not as exclusive as nearby areas like Brentwood or Beverly Hills. While the Latino and African American populations have considerably declined in certain parts of L.A.'s Westside, particular areas within walking distance of the medium sized park have experienced increases in foreign-born Latino residents, most of whom rent in scattered apartment complexes, including many of the men under study. Employment opportunities on the Westside also bring many of the men to the area, the park representing a requisite stop before, during, or after a day's work. While broadly used by its local residential population, there is no unitary park-guest characteristic, as users appear remarkably diverse across many social dimensions.

While focusing primarily on the life of the group, I certainly explore the ways in which these interactions intersect with the local setting. Most generally, I examine some of the challenges the men face on the historically white and affluent Westside, including the salience of race, poverty, and legal status. More specifically, I show the importance and complications of accessible and attractive public space for the maintenance of the group and tell a story of how these men are received by and respond to city officials and park neighbors. As I detail in chapter

five, their presence in the park has created a range of local responses, including attempts to curtail access and use of the soccer field, an ongoing and contentious debate that opens important windows into contemporary dynamics of reception and newcomer incorporation.

While I pursue this local context in community meetings, park and neighborhood interactions, and interviews, the focus of this study is a group of "108" men[9] who regularly gather in this park to socialize and play soccer. Most of the men are undocumented working-class Latino immigrants in their mid 20s to early 50s, and largely from Mexico and Central America—some are recent arrivals while others migrated as teenagers in the 1980s.

Many of the men crossed the U.S.-Mexico border illegally, most of whom remain undocumented years and decades later. For fear of unintended reprisals, I have elected not to identify the men by name or nickname who entered the country unlawfully. Something is lost, however, in not sharing these harrowing stories and connecting them with the men's current conditions at the park and beyond. Of course, the men's safety and security in increasingly restrictive times trump these academic interests.

The men's histories in the park are also stretched, with some having integrated themselves within the past year and others having called this park "home" for several decades. Approximately two-thirds are fathers and most work construction as small-time contractors and

[9] This number is somewhat arbitrary and does not reflect the number of people who participated in the games and loosely related social interactions in the park during the course of my fieldwork. For example, a simple word count in my fieldnotes registered 238 proper names from just the park. I arrived at 108 when listing all the people I regularly saw in the park who in some form or another identified and interacted collectively for a sustained period of time, whether primarily on and/or off the soccer field. This number was in many ways a product of my own relations and perspectives on the park. For example, there were several men who consistently came to the park but I was unable, for various known and unknown reasons, to observe with any real depth or insight. It is also a fluid numerical representation in the sense that it includes men who stopped visiting the park well before I completed my fieldwork. Another six months of research would have certainly led to new additions to the "group" as well. Indeed, men are constantly coming and going at the park. Finally, this number does not include all the men and women these 108 men interacted with in the park. In turn, 108 does not represent the numerical veracity of group life at the park at any one period of time, which is of course always changing and at times contested, but more a pragmatic reflection of the number of men who figure directly in this study, some more prominently than others.

day laborers or in the restaurant industry as busboys and cooks. Roughly half are married although some relationship statuses changed during my time in the park. Many of the men are struggling to find steady and well-paying employment in difficult and rapidly shifting economic circumstances. A handful of men spent time sleeping in the park when evicted and were unable to find a place to stay.

The upcoming chapters significantly develop this elementary description of the research settings and subjects. In various points, I elaborate on the men's biographies and the evolving history and character of the group, park, and surrounding neighborhoods. To foreshadow and humanize these forthcoming discussions, I present biographical sketches of five consistent participants of park life during my fieldwork. I select these men, although many others would have worked equally well, because they display the range of experiences and backgrounds at the park but also because they personify various themes to be explored and analyzed in the upcoming pages.

Polo

I begin with Polo, short for Apollinaire, as he plays a central role in park life. As detailed in chapter two, he was the principal organizer of the midday soccer matches during my time in the park. Polo, now 44, immigrated to the United States from Veracruz, Mexico in 1988, when he was 19 years old. He came to Los Angeles when one of his closest childhood friends encouraged him to join him. While he had a decent job working for an oil company in Mexico, he wanted to try his luck in the United States, and was impressed by the home his friend had built back in Mexico with his earnings north of the border. Besides his childhood friend, Polo did not know anybody in Los Angeles, and knew of only a few distant relatives in other parts of the country.

Polo shared a room with his friend in a cramped Venice apartment with several other young Mexican immigrants. He found work as a dishwasher on his second day in Los Angeles through his friend and has worked in the restaurant industry ever since. Polo currently works as a line cook at a popular restaurant on Main Street in Santa Monica. He remains in the United States illegally, which has proved a serious liability at times, but has not kept him from making a living. Despite several impounded cars, misdemeanor arrests, and nights in the drunk tank, Polo has not faced deportation or extensive prison time.

Polo returned to visit his family four years into his stay in the United States, but has not returned since. While money and legal concerns play a factor, Polo explains that this is largely because he has grown distant—"alejado" in his words—from his family over the years. During his time in Los Angeles, Polo has had several serious girlfriends, all of which, he claimed, ended when they moved out of the city and he was unwilling to join them. Polo is currently single and has no children, and all members of his immediate family remain in Mexico.

For the past twelve years, Polo has rented a room from an elderly Mexican woman, the mother of someone he met at the park, a man who now lives several hours from the city. Polo pays $900 a month for the room, part of which he says is to help his landlord with her other expenses. Polo likes the arrangement largely because of its practical location, within several miles from his work, the park, and the beach. When I first met Polo he drove a loud Camaro he bought from a park acquaintance but it was seized by the police when he was stopped without a license. For the past several years, Polo has relied on the bus, friends, or his legs for getting around.

Within weeks of arriving in Los Angeles, Polo started playing soccer at the Penmar Recreation Center, a park a few miles from Mar Vista, but closer to where he then lived in

Venice. He was brought there by his friend and was quickly recruited to join a Sunday league team coached by Moncho, who we meet shortly. As Polo likes to claim, he was quite good back then, and had aspirations of playing professionally in Mexico. For various reasons, Polo and other men from Penmar gravitated to Mar Vista in the mid-1990s, many of whom continue to frequent the park.

In my five and half years at the park, it was extremely rare for Polo not to be present at the park for the midweek midday games. His work schedule, Wednesday through Sunday, starting at 3:30 in the afternoon, allows him to be in the park at this time, a deliberate scheduling decision on his part. He also spends most Mondays and Tuesdays, his days off, playing soccer and drinking beer in the park late into the evening. Polo is also infamous for spending his time and money at Zacatecas, a nearby bar that is known for illegal activity, especially prostitution and drug use. While Polo often vents his frustrations with running the games and his distaste for various men at the park, his consistent presence contradicts his outward disdain.

Motor

Motor, who earned this park-based nickname years ago for his relentless soccer play, is one of several coaches or managers at the park. Motor coaches the principal Mar Vista-based soccer team, "equipo de Motor" (Motor's team) as it has been known during his time in charge. A version of the team has existed for approximately 20 years, usually playing in the competitive Centro America Soccer League. As in the past, the team generally draws the best players from the park games who are interested in participating. The makeup of the team, however, remains a constant source of debate and derision, especially amongst the old-timers. Initially recruited by Moncho, the previous coach, I have played on the team throughout my fieldwork, known around the almost exclusively Latino league as "el Guero de Motor" (Motor's fair skinned and light

haired player). Motor, like many old-timers at the park, used to play on or against a predecessor of the team he now coaches.

Motor was born in El Salvador and immigrated to the United States in 1982 when he was 14 years old. Like many Salvadorans I have met in Los Angeles, Motor left his native country to escape the ongoing Civil War. Motor fled to Los Angeles where his father had been living and working for several years. Motor crossed the border with his mother and siblings.

Motor's family initially rented an apartment in the Pico-Union area near downtown Los Angeles, a predominately Central American section of the city. Motor attended Los Angeles High School with several men he continues to hang out with in the park, but never graduated. Motor says he got mixed up with gangs and left home for awhile to live on the streets when he was 16. Motor moved back in with his parents when they secured government-subsidized housing in Venice. He has lived with his parents in the same Section 8 apartment ever since, while his other siblings have all moved out, two as far as Maryland. Motor, now 43, is single and without children.

When not raising ruckus, a young Motor frequently worked with his father, who was a general handyman for a wealthy family in the Pacific Palisades. Learning the trade from his father and others, Motor has primarily worked as a carpenter, although, as I have observed firsthand, he is skilled in various home improvement tasks. Most of Motor's jobs are small and almost always informal or "off the books." As I detail in chapter four, Motor secures work almost exclusively through his social contacts, be it clients or workers, as opposed to via advertisements or "on the corner," whether formal or informal day labor centers. Men from the park, for example, frequently refer him for jobs and he regularly hires men he knows from the park when he needs extra help. Motor stores his tools in his pickup truck or at his sister's place,

who owns a successful Oaxacan restaurant with her husband. Along with several other recurrent clients, Motor regularly does work around their home and restaurant.

Like Polo, Motor came to Mar Vista in the early 1990s through his Penmar connections. As he would be quick to point out, however, he has a longer and more illustrious playing history than Polo. I frequently hear stories about Motor's play, which contradicts his current pot belly and out-of-shape condition, due in part to advancing age but also heavy alcohol and marijuana consumption at the park. When not working or watching soccer at home, Motor is usually at the park, often late into the night. Motor also devotes a lot of his free time to coaching and managing the park-based soccer team, which has had a successful run under his five-year tenure, winning three league championships. Despite the triumphs, Motor frequently threatens to quit, citing all the time, money, and frustrations involved in managing the team.

Moncho

While I interviewed most of the men in the park, I interviewed Moncho in the home he shared with his girlfriend, a spacious and nicely furnished two-bedroom apartment on the corner of Venice Boulevard and Sepulveda Avenue. It was around that time that Moncho, derived from Ramon, was transitioning out of park life. Like Polo and Motor, he spent much of his free time during his 20s through early 40s socializing and playing soccer in the park, first Penmar and then Mar Vista.

In contrast to Polo and Motor, Moncho married young and had three children by the time he was 24 with his now ex-wife, a Guatemalan woman he met in high school. Family commitments, however, did not keep him away from the park. According to Moncho, a cramped apartment and marital problems actually pushed him to the park. During my first few years at Mar Vista, Moncho was a mainstay of group life of the park, sometimes referred to as Garrobo

(iguana), a playful nickname carried over from his youth, which would be funnier if you could see him.

Moncho immigrated legally to the United States with his younger brother and sister in 1982. He was 13 years old. His parents, who were already in the United States, were able to secure them travel visas and the young children flew from San Salvador to Los Angeles. At the time they were living with their aunt but she grew increasingly worried about the brewing Civil War, which threatened to draw in her nephew. In fact, the guerillas used Moncho's school as an operations base and would frequently recruit children for various protest movements, many of which ended in violence. Although long a legal resident and gainfully employed, Moncho has only returned once to El Salvador, in 2000, to clear up family affairs after his cousin's death. Moncho shared with me that he has little interest in visiting or retiring in El Salvador, because of persisting crime and violence in El Salvador and because almost all of his family, including two grandchildren, lives in and around Los Angeles. His children have, however, spent time visiting their mother's family in Guatemala.

As Moncho was proud to tell me, he landed in Venice and went to an area middle school before enrolling at Venice High School. He graduated and played on the soccer team with a handful of teenagers who now socialize as men decades later in the park. Moncho, like Motor, was intermittently involved in gang and criminal activity during his early years, and feels fortunate to have escaped without any serious harm. Sensing my surprise to hear that he used to carry a gun, he reminded me that Venice was a lot more dangerous and racially divided in the 1980s (Umemoto 2006).

As a teenager, Moncho worked alongside his father, a construction worker, before transitioning to a local auto mechanic shop, mainly due to his early love of cars. He eventually

gravitated back to construction work through his father's old contacts, before a chance encounter with a neighbor changed his fortunes. The neighbor, a middle-aged white man, led a crew of set designers for a major movie studio and was short of a carpenter. Learning that he would earn $120 a day, twice as much as he was making at the time, Moncho immediately volunteered and has worked in the set-design business ever since. As he likes to joke, he does the same work as many of the men at the park but what he builds is fake and he earns a lot more money and prestige.

The men are well aware of Moncho's work, which they experience through his stories, memorabilia, and generosity. For example, many men wear "Sons of Anarchy" sweatshirts at the park, a popular television show Moncho worked on for several years. During my time in the park, Moncho also frequently gave small amounts of money to men in need and contributed well over his fair share of beer and food money. He has been less successful in getting men work in the movie industry, despite their repeated inquiries. According to Moncho, legal and language requirements, as well as general responsibility and commitment, have proven big impediments to helping out the men with employment opportunities. Moncho does, however, frequently hire men from the park to help with various personal tasks.

When I first met Moncho, he had just begun dating a Salvadoran woman he met through a friend, having separated from his longtime wife several years before. He would often come to the park with his girlfriend, one of the few women to socialize with the men. As their relationship solidified to the point where they moved in together—a big step for the father of three, who was then living with his sister's family—Moncho's time in the park dramatically declined. By then he had also handed over control of the park-based team he had managed intermittently for almost two decades to Motor, after their co-management proved untenable. I

actually heard a lot about Moncho before I met him due to his coaching, usually stories from the men about their time on or against "Moncho's team." His one major fight at the park was against a group of visiting "cholos" (Latino gang members), another recurrent tale.

For reasons that are not completely clear to me, Moncho now rarely visits the park, only occasionally coming with a case of beer to socialize with old friends. When I ask the men about this change, they almost always claim that his new girlfriend keeps him away. When I directly asked Moncho why he no longer frequented the park during our interview, he looked around his apartment, pausing at his big screen television and nodding to his girlfriend cooking in the kitchen, and responded: "Why would I want to go the park?" While Moncho claimed that his then wife pushed him to the park, current conditions appeared to keep him at home. Before I left, he did however pepper me with questions about the latest gossip from the park.

Chepe

Chepe represents a next generation of "jugadores del parque." Chepe, a nickname for José, was born in the United States in 1984 to Salvadoran parents. For the first four years of his life, he lived in Boyle Heights but the family moved to Culver City, his parents believing that the Westside city would offer greater safety and opportunities for their only child.

Chino, Chepe's father, who worked sporadically at night, would frequently take him to Mar Vista park at a young age, which was within walking distance of their rented apartment. Even before the family moved to the Westside, Chino was familiar with men from the park because he played against many of them in area soccer leagues. As I have reportedly been told by Chino, Chepe, and others, he was an exceptional soccer player during his prime.

Hoping to play the game he loved as he looked after his son, he helped organize a midday soccer game at the park. Other fathers brought their children to the park as well. The youngsters

created their own parallel social world alongside the men, although English dominated their conversations and they had yet to start drinking beer and smoking marijuana. When my son was born, Chino encouraged me to bring him to the park, saying that like Chepe he would then emulate my passion and skill for the game. Chino often spoke warmly and with pride for the time he shared with his son in the park.

Chepe also has a lot of fond childhood memories of the park. He especially enjoyed watching his father excel in the games, although he would become frightened when he got into fights or drank too much. For this reason, Chepe's mother continues to detest the pull of the park, as both her husband and son have shared with me. At around 12 years old, Chepe graduated from the kid's soccer game and started playing with the men. His father, since debilitated by age and a partial stroke, was still a strong player at that time and would actively encourage and instruct him on the field. Chepe attributes his soccer talents to his father and these early experiences playing with the men at the park. While he concedes that it was his time on an elite club team that most helped him earn a Division I college scholarship, he feels very indebted to what he learned in the park, especially from his father.

When I arrived at the park I heard a lot about Chepe, or Chino Chepe, as sometimes referred to in honor of his father. He was then living in Northern California, trying to make it in professional indoor soccer after graduating from college. Chepe's success was a tremendous source of pride for Chino and men who witnessed his maturation from young boy to soccer star. His story was often provided as an example of the good that has come out of the park. As they put it to me, Chepe "creció" (developed) in the park and everyone played their part. Chepe's achievements were especially flattering for his father, which helped offset some of his more unpleasant behavior, especially when drinking.

At 27 Chepe returned to Los Angeles, moving back in with his parents. He soon found work as a guidance counselor at a local high school, having received his master's degree in social work. Sensing that his professional soccer dreams were coming to an end, he joined Motor's amateur men's team, a decision that was met with a lot of enthusiasm at the park. For Chepe, returning to the park and captaining the team to several league championships was a source of pride and vindication.

Like his father before him, Chepe spends a lot of his free time now hanging out at the park. Along with playing soccer, this typically involves drinking beer and smoking marijuana with friends his age, some of whom also grew up in the park, but also with men who years ago looked after him as a boy and teenager as well. Chino, having long retired as a player, remains a fixture at the park, often refereeing the midday games before he starts his evening shift cleaning a nearby fitness center. Chepe joked with me that his mother was now distressed over losing her son to the park as well her husband. He responded that he and his father do their best to spend time with her on Saturdays, often taking her to area swap meets and seafood restaurants.

Senegal

Senegal constitutes part of the sizeable minority of non-Latino participants of the midday soccer games. Senegal was born in 1978 in Dakar, the capital of his park-based nickname. He came to the United States on a student visa in 1999, after gaining acceptance to Los Angeles City College. He applied primarily to Los Angeles area schools because his older sister was living in the city.

Unable to secure legal employment on a student visa, Senegal found "off the books" work selling Jamaican-themed trinkets on the Venice boardwalk through a family connection. He also invested money in various import-export schemes sending goods between Senegal and the

United States, using his contacts in both countries to mobilize business. This informal work helped him initially make ends meet when on a student visa. Eventually he found work as a security guard at a hospital, which he says he was able to secure through a clerical error on his social security card given to him for a work-study job at school.

After earning his associate's degree, he enrolled at Cal State University, Northridge, ultimately receiving a bachelor's degree in business. Several years ago he met his now wife, an African American woman from Los Angeles. He was able to acquire permanent residency through his wife and hopes to soon naturalize. They recently had a baby girl together, who is cared for during the day by his mother-in-law.

Strong and fast, even at 34, it is not surprising that the then 21 year-old was approached about playing on the Los Angeles City College soccer team. After a successful stint with the junior college team, Senegal was recruited by several Division I schools, including the University of Vermont, but declined the invitations. With some regret, he explained to me that he was more focused on making money and meeting girls at the time. After graduation, he started a car service company, after learning the trade from a Moroccan immigrant he knew from school. With financial help from his father, who earned a good salary in Senegal, he bought two luxury town cars and paid the licensing fees to legally operate a livery service. While he still dabbles in smaller entrepreneurial projects, most of his earnings come from his car service company.

Senegal arrived at the park several months after me in the Spring of 2008. He had recently moved in with his then girlfriend, a Japanese woman, who lived several blocks from the park. After noticing the games when driving by, he returned several days later in hopes of playing. His work provided him free time during the day so he was excited about finding the game, especially on such a nice field and one so close to home.

As I witnessed firsthand, Senegal's incorporation was tense and uneasy. Sensitive to any sign of disrespect, Senegal did not take kindly to the initial treatment he received. As I detail in chapter two, newcomers face unequal access to the games, and Senegal was no different. This led to several confrontations, including a literal tug-of-war over a jersey his first day at the park. With time, the men warmed to Senegal, who also gained a greater appreciation for the challenges Polo and other regulars faced in managing the popular field and games.

Senegal has an outsized personality and enjoys showing off the few Spanish phrases he has picked up over the years in Los Angeles. For example, he likes telling Spanish speakers to "toma leche" (drink milk) when he pushes them over on the field. The men certainly dish it back, often invoking his native Africa or largeness to generate laughs. Some men refer to him as Modi, short for Mohammad, but most greet him as Senegal or Africa.

While evermore friendly and intimate with the men, Senegal rarely socializes with them before or after the games, especially the beer drinking sessions that regularly follow. This is partly because he does not drink alcohol and often has family and work obligations to attend to, but also indicative of the reasons why he comes to the park, which for him, are to exercise and play soccer. The park, however, has provided unexpected benefits beyond the games. For example, when Senegal and his wife bought a new condo, he hired someone from the park to help him with a range of household needs. He continues to hire this individual for the various tasks that emerge over the life of a home.

Chapter outline

These men—their histories, experiences, and concerns—and those of many others from the park are developed in the forthcoming chapters. Like a cubist painting (Auyero & Swistun 2009:12-13), the chapters offer different slices and perspectives on park life and beyond.

Together, they paint a portrait of how group life at the park is made meaningful and transcendent in ways that affect the men's personal relationships and life chances. Along the way, the project aims to better specify how migrants form and sustain new ties in new places, paying special attention to the meaning and organization of sports and public parks in generating social connections and resource exchanges over time.

Chapter one focuses on the actual playing and watching of park soccer games, as well as lively discussions about them. **Chapter two** examines the everyday organization of the midday soccer games on the attractive public field, including the collective strategies and multiple challenges that simultaneously uphold and threaten regulars' control of the field and games. **Chapter three** looks at routine beer drinking sessions, exploring how and why the men drink in the park when it is the source of so many problems, internal and external to the group.

Taken together, these chapters show how park activities provide a focus and context for being together. They also show how the men transform a world of fun and play into a place where social ties are mobilized and resources are exchanged. While it is the soccer, beer drinking, and public setting that make being together possible and, more importantly, compelling and revealing, this byproduct of social interaction addresses a question I argue is often overlooked in the migration literature: how migrants make and sustain social ties.

Chapter four, examining a subsection of the men's work experiences, reveals the fluid significance of social ties and resource exchanges in meeting the exigencies of their employment. The focus on work further contextualizes the park's use and meaning for the men as well. **Chapter five** investigates park life from the perspective of local residents and city officials, in particular, mixed concerns over the implications of the field's use and users. While contact between the men and park neighbors was generally indirect and imagined, this added layer of

context shows how the men's search for pleasure and comfort at the park also forces them to come to terms with what is possible in their new home. Collectively these two chapters show how the creation of a familiar and fruitful environment at the park reflects the opportunities and constraints of the settlement process for these men. In the **conclusion**, I draw out potential extensions and implications of this case study, especially as they relate to immigration, network formation, sports, public parks, and the study of social interaction.

Chapter One
Men at play

Since the 1970s, men have played informal soccer matches at the Mar Vista Recreation Center. Current "pickup" games, played Monday through Friday from approximately 11:30 to 1:30, are rooted in this history. This historical connection is based on the old-timers that remain and the common knowledge that these games have existed for years. The games are informal in that no formal organization administers them, nor is the playing space officially reserved. As detailed in the next chapter, participants work together to establish the rules and order of the game on the public field.

For years the game was played in an open grass area on the west-end of the park. The space was not officially designated for soccer. The men used garbage cans for goals and the playing space varied according to the number of participants, which ranged from five to well over 20 players per team. The shape and size of the game changed over roughly two hours of continuous play, as men arrived and departed.

In 2005, a synthetic turf soccer field was installed in this space, which radically changed playing conditions. The publically financed project included field markings, permanent goals, bleachers, and fencing. While benefiting from its construction, none of the players were directly involved in the process that brought the field to the 18-acre park.[10] The midday games continued in this renovated space, but required a new playing order, due in large part to the new players the quality field attracted.

On most days, there are too many players to comfortably play on the fixed playing space. In contrast to the pre-turf field arrangement, teams are generally limited to 11 players and games

[10] The $850,000 field was funded as a specified Proposition K project, a 30-year $776 million tax measure to improve the city's parks and recreational facilities, which Los Angeles voters narrowly approved in 1996 (Wolch et al. 2005).

last 15 to 20 minutes. An appointed referee keeps time and administers the games. At the conclusion of each match, a waiting team takes the place of the losing team. If the game ends in a tie, both teams exit the field. On most days, at least two full teams anxiously wait to play. The men purchased four sets of jerseys to differentiate the teams and better organize the playing queue.

Distinguishing characteristics of the pickup soccer games

The games are distinguished by several noteworthy characteristics. For example, I quickly learned of their history and continuity. Even before I revealed myself as a researcher, participants informed me of this history and introduced me to men who had played in the park for decades. Most newcomers are given this lesson, specifically, that these games have existed for years, and well before the installation of the turf field. This longevity was transmitted to me in more indirect ways as I overheard the men discuss past games and players and draw comparisons with the current versions in their everyday conversations.

I was also impressed by the organization of the games. I was initially unsure of whether the games were in fact "pickup," a source of uncertainty expressed to me by many newcomers. Due to the jerseys, referee, and crowd, the games can appear as formally organized, or at least closed to outsiders. Although newcomers discover that the men do not possess any official claims on the field, most participants adhere to a relatively rigid and sometimes unequal game order because it provides a satisfying playing experience. Newcomers also confront regulars who actively enforce the local playing order.

The games are also unique in that they continually attract new players. This is due to the quality of the games and field, an unusually accessible playing space in Los Angeles. The organized games and public field bring together unfamiliar people united by a shared interest in

playing and watching soccer. Many participants have known each other for years but new players constantly arrive. This is not a closed gathering, even if newcomers are compelled to follow local rules and regulations, some responding more deferentially than others.

The games are also characterized by a tremendous mix of playing abilities. There are a handful of men that I believe could have played professionally while just as many never played soccer before arriving at the park. The majority of participants fall between these two extremes, most of whom grew up playing soccer. This diversity is also reflected in the men's physical conditions, which range from out-of to tip-top shape. Playing ability does not, however, always correspond to physical appearance. Questions about who is "good" and "bad" are a key source of debate at the park, and often play out in unexpected and controversial ways. On the field and in the flow of the game, shouts of "sabe" (he knows) and "no sabe" (he does not know) are used to distinguish unfamiliar players.

Ages also vary, most of the men are in their 20s, 30s, and 40s, although the games attract teenagers and men in their 50s and 60s as well. The games include men nearing, in, or past their relative playing prime, although what this means and who these categories refer to is also very much debated. Six father-son combinations played together during my time at the park as well, younger sons presumably to follow in the future. Several women also occasionally participate.

In addition, while most participants are working-class Latino immigrant men from Mexico and Central America, they are internally differentiated by national background, migration histories, family and living arrangements, and occupational and legal status, to name only a few dimensions of difference. Approximately 20 percent of the participants are an assortment of US and foreign-born whites, blacks, and Asians of varying class backgrounds. As in Senegal's case, player diversity is source of pride, fun, and contention at the park.

Most of the men's relationships were developed in the park. That is, the men did not know each other before meeting in the park. Some men came to the park on their own, others through a pre-existing connection, be it a family, work, school, or neighborhood tie. Most relationships, however, were created and sustained in the park. While some men work together and socialize away from the park, the majority interact exclusively in the park.

The games are also distinguished by the presence of spectators. While numbers fluctuate with the weather and calendar, on most days there are 20 to 40 men around the field, many sitting on bleachers at each side of midfield, others assembling in small circles around the enclosed field. Most of the men actively watch and comment on the games, amongst themselves and to players on the field. A quality play or mishap will usually elicit cheers and jeers from the men watching the games. Of the "spectators," roughly three-fourths are there to play, a fourth coming to the park to solely watch the games and socialize with friends. Many of these men used to play soccer in the park or for various reasons are uninterested in playing that day, be it due to injury or a conflicting engagement. Intensions also frequently shift, usually in response to the tone and tenor of the games and crowd. For example, some men decide to play when intending only to watch, others electing to simply watch the games, despite initial expectations of playing.

The games are also unique in their connection to two park-based teams that compete in area soccer leagues and a series of unsanctioned tournaments held at the park on major holidays. These longstanding teams and tournaments are frequent topics of conversation and debate during the games. The games also represent key sites to recruit players and evaluate talent. One team participates in the competitive Centro American Soccer League, the other team plays in a more recreational West Los Angeles league, made up primarily of players over the age of 30. At the park, they are known as "los viejitos" (the old-timers), while the younger, more competitive team

is known as “equipo de Motor” or “Motor’s team,” in reference to their manager, a park veteran. Both teams have existed in connection with the park for over 20 years, although their lineups and managers have changed over time. Several sons, for example, have replaced their fathers on what is now referred to as “Motor’s team.”

The six annual holiday tournaments attract four to eight teams, roughly half of which are composed of park-based players and managers. Each team pays an entrance fee, the winning team collecting approximately $800. The competitive games, ongoing since 1995, are watched by one to two hundred spectators lining the field. I have played for both club teams and in many holiday tournaments at the park.

Meaning making in pickup soccer

The forthcoming analysis is motivated by two primary questions: What is going on here and what explains the apparent appeal of the games? The first question addresses a substantial gap in sociological knowledge about pickup sports, especially at the level of interaction and practice. The second question is more locally inspired, specifically by the difficulties participants have in explaining to me why they enjoy the games and newcomers’ confusion over what they experience as an overly charged and serious game.

Together these questions pursue a central sociological concern: How is group activity, in this case soccer, made socially meaningful? More specifically, what are the men invoking and mobilizing to make the games so compelling and entertaining? By focusing on the actual games and social interactions that accompany them, I hope to shed light on a ubiquitous but largely overlooked leisure activity in the contemporary city.

The findings also connect to the larger dissertation project, which shows how park life becomes the backbone for practical activity, in particular, the creation of social ties and exchange

of resources. As in upcoming chapters on the organization of soccer matches, beer drinking, and work relations, this chapter examines how playing, watching, and commenting on the park soccer games provides the men a shared context to be and do things together. Soccer-based activities create a common culture and morally acceptable ways of interacting. Soccer, like drinking, works effectively as a focus of interaction because it is fun and entertaining but also compelling and revealing. The action, following Erving Goffman (1967), is in the soccer because it puts character on display.

This chapter shows two ways that park life is made richly meaningful through soccer. One, the games provide players and spectators transcendent moments of greatness and immortality. Two, soccer-oriented discussions serve as reflections of the self and group as the men move through the life cycle. Reputations are made, lost, and challenged, on and off the field. Repeated social interactions around soccer in turn create a backdrop and resources for doing lots of things together, from networking to thinking about the aging process. To see how soccer is used as a meaningful activity, this chapter takes the reader inside the games and social interactions that surround them.

Experiencing greatness and immortality

Once teams are set, players take positions on the field. Players generally spread themselves out on their own, but there is sometimes discussion and debate about who will play where. A recurrent problem is that not enough players are positioned in defense or on the sides, most congregating up front and in the middle of the field. In addition to the customary 11 players in uniform, each team generally has one to two "extras," usually older men, women, and the occasional child. Who counts as an "extra" is sometimes a focus of debate. The acting referee generally has final word on the makeup of the teams before commencing the game.

The ball is kicked and headed around the field as each team tries to score more goals than the other. Game play is not evenly distributed as some players see the ball and cover more ground than others. Everyone, however, gets a chance to participate over the course of a 15 to 20 minute game. Most players are more or less familiar to one another, but relative strangers are usually present as well. Goals are scored through teamwork and individual talent, luck and mistakes also coming into play. Some games are more even and hotly contested than others, the occasional verbal spat or fist fight breaking out as well. There are usually five to six matches per day, Monday through Friday.

Bursts of joy and excitement

Most games are punctuated by bursts of joy and excitement. These moments are marked by enthusiastic reactions and commentary by players and spectators, which momentarily interrupt the normal flow of the game. The cause of collective animation and recognition varies and reflects the circumstances of the moment and biographies of those involved. In almost all cases, celebratory moments are marked by a temporary halt in game play, wherein play between and amongst players and spectators takes momentary precedence.

A spectacular play will generally elicit collective celebration, regardless of the player's history or relationship to others at the park. An extraordinary goal or impressive pass, dribble, or tackle often produces festive praise. The following examples concern players who infrequently attend the games and rarely socialize with others at the park:

Standing roughly 20 yards away from the opponent's goal, Oleg met the delivered ball in midair with his right foot, smashing it into the goal. Two of his teammates rushed over to help him up and exchange celebratory high-fives. The 15 or so men standing on the bleachers applauded in approval, one yelling out "golazo!" to celebrate the quality goal. Another spectator added in English, "That's how you do it," as he pointed to his friend Eric, whose team had given up the goal. Polo, who was standing along the sidelines, pivoted towards the men on the bleachers, claiming that the skillful newcomer was "mi jugador" (my player).

Sud Africa[11] *receives the ball at midfield and is met by two opposing players eager to steal the ball from the skillful newcomer. Sud Africa deliberately steps over the ball to make it appear as if he was moving to his left. His opponents take the bait, only to lose him as he races by them in the other direction. Chino, who was acting as referee, yelled out "Olé" in appreciation of the move. Motor, who was watching from the sidelines, clapped in approval, as did several men sitting on the bleachers. One man added, "Like Neymar," drawing comparisons to the latest Brazilian soccer star. As Sud Africa approached the next opponent, another spectator requested more entertainment: "Más! Más!"*

These responses are connected to the quality of the play, as Oleg and Sud Africa are largely unknown to the men. Moreover, neither player actively encouraged a crowd response, their action on the field serving as an independent resource for the spectators to play with. Anyone can generate applause and animation for their play, important as the quality matches and field consistently attract new players, some of whom are very skillful.

The intensity and meaning of excitement, however, changes for participants with greater park histories and park-based ties. Responses to their achievements tend to be deeper and more personalized and creative. These moments are also characterized by greater interaction between players and spectators. Known players, for example, are much more exuberant and effusive in celebrating their achievements and playing to the crowd. The following fieldnotes describe reactions and responses to goals by Caballo and Polo, two park veterans, both of which resembled Oleg's in their degree of difficulty.

The aptly nicknamed Caballo (Horse) races past three defenders on his way to the goal. He fakes a shot and the goalie dives to block the phantom strike. Caballo dribbles past the deceived goalie and calmly passes the ball into the empty goal. The ball safely in the net, Caballo circles around to celebrate, mimicking an in-flight airplane, arms extended swaying side-to-side. A teammate embraces him and the grown men momentarily jump up and down in each other's arms. Caballo then vividly points to the applauding men in the bleachers, many of whom are stomping their feet on the metal steps. Once past midfield, Caballo dramatically bows to the spectators on each side of the field. The men whistle in appreciation, one adding: "Eso (that's it) Catracho (nickname for Hondurans), eso es futbol (that's soccer)!"

[11] Approximately three-fourths of participants are known by a nickname at the park, rather than their given name. Participants' nationality, physical appearance, playing ability, and biography are common bases for nicknames. In most cases, nicknames do not travel beyond the park.

Polo receives the ball 40 yards from goal. An opposing player inches back, almost begging him to shoot. Having seen him spectacularly miss such shots before, players and spectators urged Polo to take his chances. True to form, Polo stepped back and ripped a shot on goal. To everyone's amazement, the ball sped past the stunned goalie into the upper corner of the goal. Polo instantly runs toward the packed bleachers, pushing teammates and opponents out of his way, screaming "golazo," adding, "hijos de puta" (sons of bitches), for his many detractors. Polo stops 10 feet from the bleachers and triumphantly raises his arms above his head. He concludes his celebration by urging everyone in attendance to "compra mi video" (buy my video), in reference to the alleged videos documenting his earlier days as a "professional" soccer player in his native Mexico. The men laugh and continue to applaud the remarkable and unexpected "golazo," the talk of the park for the remainder of the day.

While it is rare for a spectacular play to go unacknowledged, responses tend to intensify when executed by a less skillful or able-bodied participant. This is especially the case for older and out-of-shape participants who are well liked and have long histories in the park. Reactions to their achievements tend to be more dramatic and extensive than when pulled off by a more fit and skillful player, even if the play is less impressive. The following examples reveal the different form and tenor responses can take for particular game characters:

The men sitting on the bleachers erupt in extended cries of "golazo" in honor of Isaías's goal. It is rare that the 69 year-old scores, which was reflected in the jubilant applause. The goal was quite fortuitous and ordinary, but that didn't take away from the collective excitement. It seemed that everyone assembled in and around the field was celebrating, either clapping, whistling, or shouting a range of comments, most in reference to his advanced age, such as "Es todo viejo!" (that's all old man). Polo urged Isaías's teammate and 23 year-old son, one of the better players to currently participate in the games, to learn from his father: "Aprenda Ivan!" Exchanging high-fives with players from both teams, a smiling Isaías ran back to his side of the field, waving to the cheering men.

The ball is kicked high in the air in Chaparo's direction. In his late twenties, Chaparo is one of the weaker players to consistently participate in the games. His small stature and lighthearted personality does not help his play, although it made him a crowd favorite. As the ball rapidly descended, several men in the bleachers urged Chaparo to trap the ball, rather than let it bounce: "Vamos Chaparo" (let's go), "Es tuya" (it's yours), "Con la pansa" (with your belly). Miraculously sticking to his foot, Chaparo controlled the ball in midair, a difficult feat for any player. Like a conquering hero, Chaparo put his foot on top of the ball, placed his hands on his hips, and proudly stuck out his chest. The men along the sidelines erupted in applause, none of whom expected Chaparo to so effortlessly control the ball. Someone shouted out, "Eso Chihuahua," in reference to his height, another spectator compared him to a famous soccer player: "Puro (like) Messi." A nearby opponent slowed down, giving Chaparo the time and

space to enjoy the moment, the competitive game framework momentarily overtaken by the sideline reactions.

Christian passes the ball to a wide open Kathy, one of the few women to consistently participate in the games. Christian's decision to pass her the ball, rather than shoot on goal himself, was unexpected, as she is usually bypassed and overlooked. To everyone's amazement, Kathy traps the ball and kicks it into the empty net. Kathy instantly raises her arms in celebration. Christian yells out to her: "I made you famous!" The men along the sidelines whistle and clap their hands in approval, several urging her to "enseñalos" (teach them), another adding, "aprenda (learn) Polo," who was playing for the opposing team.

Applause and commentary also intensify when an inferior player confronts and beats out a superior participant. This difference is generally attributed to a combination of skill, physical condition, and age. The greater the perceived gap, the greater the excitement. The following examples concern players who are separated by considerable disparities in overall ability, at least at this point in history.

Oscar is a diminutive 52 year-old from El Salvador. He walks with a slight limp from years of playing soccer and restaurant work. As he would admit, the extra pounds he has packed around his midsection, earning him the occasional park nickname "Gordo" (fat), does not help with his movement on the field. Oscar is well liked at the park and renowned for his signature yell ("yaaahhh") when he does something notable on the field. Thus, it was not surprising that the men exploded in applause when he stole the ball from the younger and more talented Tulio. Oscar stuck out his foot at just the right time to win the ball from his unsuspecting opponent. With the ball at his feat, the victorious Oscar belted out his signature yell. It seemed that everyone paying attention responded with the same "yaaahhh!" Tulio laughed and appeared to let Oscar dribble freely away from him, rather than fighting to recapture the ball.

Locksmith controls the ball and is instantly pressured by Lebo. Most would agree that Lebo is currently the better player. Locksmith, however, still considers himself one of the best players at the park and is always trying to prove this point, on and off the field. He is usually unsuccessful, but today he got the better of Lebo, skillfully dribbling the ball through his legs. In addition to advancing past the opponent, a "tunnel" or "nutmeg" has the added bonus of embarrassing the opponent, which was reflected in the roar of approval from players and spectators. Lebo's teammate yells out "Que verguenza!" (how embarrassing), another added that he had to buy Locksmith a 12 pack of beer for the dishonor. Locksmith relished the moment, which became ever more apparent when he repeatedly brought up the achievement when socializing with the men after the games. As he stated in English, "I still got it!"

Pikachu and Tico race to the open ball. The 6 foot, 4 inch Tico towers over the 5 foot, 2 inch Pikachu. Tico is also known for his combative and physical play, while Pikachu is more likely to be drinking beer and cracking jokes along the sidelines than playing seriously on the field. When

it became clear that both players would compete for the ball, anticipation escalated. Someone shouted out "ya viene la migra" (here comes immigration enforcement) to playfully encourage Pikachu to run faster, another adding "vamos boracho" (let's go drunk) and "mátalo" (kill him). Pikachu somehow managed to not only win the ball but push the larger Tico to the ground. Laughter ensued and the proverbial park advice to "toma leche" (drink milk) was given to the defeated Tico. The men praised Pikachu, many adding "eso enano boracho" (that's it drunk midget). Laughter and applause reached a fever pitch when Pikachu mimicked lightning bolts with his arms, a Mexican soccer star's signature goal celebration. For the following weeks, almost every time Tico received the ball, someone would playfully warn him: "Here comes Pikachu," whether or not he was actually present.

A bad or humorous play can also elicit collective recognition and focused commentary. The more egregious or entertaining the mistake or miscue, the more extended the abuse and amusement. Some players tend to generate more insults and comedy than others for their field blunders. Also, the more known the player, the more personalized the verbal abuse. That is, spectators have more to play with and draw from in elevating meaning than when responding to lesser known or charismatic participants.

In most cases, these exchanges are more rooted in a history of interactions, than in direct response to action on the field. In fact, while newcomers are generally applauded for their achievements, it takes much longer for them to receive playful criticism of their slip-ups. In some instances, a bad or humorous play can result in angry confrontations between players, but the following examples focus on more good-humored and communal responses to mistakes and miscues during the games.

Titi receives the ball a few yards from the opponent's goal. To the astonishment of those watching, he skies the ball over the wide open goal. An avalanche of insults pours in from players and spectators: "Viejito" (old timer), "basura" (garbage), "estúpido" (stupid), "malo" (bad), "maleta[12]" (suitcase), "serote[13]" (little shit), and "jugador del parque" (park player). Chango adds a more personalized attack for the periodically employed painter: "Va pintar toilets" (go paint toilets). Maradona also draws from Titi's biography for laughs: "Va cuidar

[12] At the park, maleta (suitcase) is frequently used to describe bad players. As many of the men have explained to me, this insult implies that they are as useless as a suitcase on the field. I believe the comparison to an inanimate object finds parallels in the insult: "dumb as a rock."
[13] "Serote" is idiosyncratic slur for natives of El Salvador, meaning little shits.

sus niños" (go take care of your children). Titi, a father of three, pulls his shirt over his face in shame and pretends to walk off the field.

Rather than passing the ball to an open teammate, Mago tries to dribble past two opponents. He is resoundingly stuffed and loses the ball. The other team ends up scoring, a goal attributed to Mago's mistake. Mago is berated by his teammates, who urge him to "pass the ball." Someone sitting on the bleachers yells out: "Jugador de Motor," in reference to Mago's association with the park-based team managed by Motor. America, a Mexican national, adds, "That's why Guatemala never makes it to the World Cup," Mago's country of birth.

Colibri receives the ball near the midfield bleachers with considerable space and time. As he surveys his options, the men urge him on with a range of contradictory advice, most demanding that he hurry up. Sensing Colibri's anxiety, the men increased the intensity of their hostile suggestions. "Rápido estupido" (hurry up stupid) shouted one spectator, another adding: "No sabes" (you don't know [how to play]), a cutting soccer insult at the park. Colibri turns to the men and yells out: "Cállense viejos malos!" (shut up bad old players), and then adds the proverbial park insult: "Busquen trabajo" (look for work). With his attention on the men, Colibri loses the ball. In anger, he jumps up and down like an enraged toddler, blaming the men for his mistake: "Déjenme jugar!" (let me play). Amused by his antics, the men playfully yell back a series of taunts and insults. "Por eso es malo" (that's why you're bad) shouts out one spectator, many also calling him "niña" (little girl) for his childish outburst.

Araña and Pasmado battle for the open ball. Spectators urge them on as they jostle for position. Their legs tangle and the two large men in their early 40s fall over. Pasmado lands awkwardly on top of Araña. The men erupt in laughter and whistles, especially when Pasmado pretends to lean in for a kiss. Roberto yells out: "Get a hotel room," another advises them to "use condoms." Someone plays on Araña's friendship with Ali, their relationship the source of many homosexual jokes: "Va llorar Ali" (Ali's going to cry). Araña humorously pushes Pasmado off of him as they get up from the ground. Bringing it back to soccer, Barba jokes to Araña: "Por eso los viejitos no te quieren" (that's why the old-timers don't want you [on their team])."

Polo receives the ball at midfield. Playing to the crowd, he executes a series of flamboyant moves, even though there is no defender nearby. Polo tries one more phantom move only to trip over his own feet, knocking the ball out of bounds. Players and spectators wildly hoot and holler, someone adding, "Mejor ve calentar la sopa," (better you go heat the soup), in reference to his work as a cook. Another man urges the 44 year old Polo to "retire." Ñano takes it a step further by alluding to the romantic battle he allegedly lost to Abel in pursuit of Guera, a Honduran woman who occasionally sells food in the park: "That's why Guera is with Abel!" Another player yells out: "Here comes Gambino," a participant he had physically fought several years beforehand, a fight he is generally believed to have lost. Polo brushes off the insults and historical references, yelling back: "Soy el mejor!" (I'm the best).

Every game players are playfully criticized and insulted for their field mishaps. This can be in reaction to an egregious error or a humorous incident. As with "spectacular" plays, these

moments are characterized by festive responses from players and spectators. These creative outbursts, occurring roughly five to ten times a day, create and contribute to the fun and excitement of collectively watching and playing in the games. They make the games enjoyable for players and spectators alike, even for the recipients of catcalls and insults. In fact, they signal greater acceptance and incorporation as it takes time for newcomers to generate playful reactions for their game blunders. They also live on in park lore as the men recount their favorite game incidents in everyday conversations, especially when drinking beer after the games.

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Regular eruptions of excitement are intimately connected to the games, players, and setting. The presence of an active and attentive crowd is crucial in elevating festivities, a feature most likely to distinguish this pickup game from other versions. In most cases, the larger the crowd, the greater the reaction. Players play their part in dishing out praise and ridicule on the field, but it is the interaction between those on the field and along the sidelines and in the bleachers that lends a special intensity to these moments.

The games provide spectators a way to play and participate in the games. Cheers and jeers from the crowd remind players that they are being watched and evaluated. The crowd also provides the men a witness and platform to direct and perform their celebrations, which tends to amplify crowd responses. Game action and crowd reactions work dialectically, mutually reinforcing the other.

In most cases, it is the specifics of the play or personalities involved that generates exuberant responses from players and spectators, irrespective of the score. The competitive nature of the games, however, can also contribute to the meaning and intensity of these exchanges. Winning matters primarily because a long wait usually looms for the losing team. For

example, a crowd of spectators, especially waiting players, will aggressively chastise a player for missing an easy goal that would have tied the game, thereby removing both teams.[14] For similar reasons, a well-timed goal, regardless of its quality, will generate loud applause and commentary. If the games were open to all participants, regardless of numbers, as they were before the new field was installed, they would not possess this level of intrigue and suspense. In fact, the final game, in which the outcome does not affect the playing queue, tends to generate less enthusiasm, for players and spectators alike.

A range of playing abilities also creates opportunities for fun and exciting interactions. As is often the case, teams are composed of good, bad, young, old, in-shape, and out-of-shape participants. This diversity leads to a variety of confrontations on the field, some more evenly matched than others, and produces a range of noteworthy incidents during the games, from the spectacular and ordinary, to the serious and humorous. The rate and array of celebrated moments would presumably decline if the players were more similar and evenly matched, even if potentially leading to "better" games. The arrival of a talented newcomer or controversial outsider can also generate excitement as regulars confront the newest challenge.

As the examples shows, these games generate festive and entertaining moments in part because of the range of soccer players it attracts. These shared moments also serve to celebrate player diversity and reaffirm the democracy of the game. By recognizing the good and bad, the serious and funny, the young and old, the men honor the group, in all its variety and transformations.

The games are also unique in that they provide opportunities for onlookers to play and participate. Spectators are generally not engaged in the nitty-gritty of play, the mundane aspects

[14] If the game ends in a tie, both teams exit the field. On the rare occasion that only one team is waiting to play, a coin is flipped to determine which of the two tying teams remains on the field to play the next game.

of the games that interest players. Spectators are looking for something with a special kind of tension that they can identify and respond to, be it a good goal, funny play, or unexpected outcome. The players on the field pick up on this and elaborate the themes at play. That is, they honor the significance that the sideline has pulled out, be it by bowing or yelling to the crowd or pulling their shirt over their head. Tellingly, these moments often overtake the competitive nature of the game, exemplified in their temporary halt—delays players and spectators honor and expect.

In contrast, play that fails to register a response appear to elicit less meaning for their creator. For example, when I congratulated Locksmith for what I saw as a spectacular goal, he shrugged his shoulders, adding: "nobody saw it." Often, in fact, I observe players on the field urge spectators on when they sense their play has been insufficiently praised. In one example, Polo yelled a group of otherwise engaged men on the bleachers to "applaud me" when he scored a deft goal. In the other direction, men who are felt to celebrate in unwarranted and gratuitous ways draw censure and ridicule from those watching. For example, when Carwash screamed and pumped his fist after scoring an easy goal, he was instantly heckled by men along the sidelines, who reminded him that his team was losing 4-0.

In most cases, celebratory responses are based on the personalities involved, well beyond the particulars of the play. What the men know about each other serves an important role in creating and sustaining festive and meaningful exchanges. This knowledge is the result of years, even decades, of playing soccer and socializing together in the park. This game has a long-running history and many participants socialize before, during, and after the games, some of whom work together as well.

The men's relationships, biographies, and shared experiences are brought to bear on the games, adding an additional layer of fun and intrigue. The men creatively use and play with this history when interacting with players and commenting on the games. With more history to draw on, players and spectators become more creative in the ways they revel in the glory of their play and the play of others. This is seen by the players, who invokes their biography to bask in the reaction of others, but also in how spectators are drawn in. By drawing on their history, they anticipate that the players will respond to them in funny and interesting ways. For example, Polo exaggerates his achievements by running to the crowd because he anticipates that they did not expect him to score. Ñano, in turn, references Polo's failed romance because he knows it will elicit a reaction from Polo and others.

This added context would not be possible if participants were relative strangers, as is the case in more short-lived or impromptu pickup games. Much of the humor and excitement is, in fact, lost on newcomers as they are unaware of the historical and biographical backdrop. Moreover, responses to their play is more about the regulars, as seen when Polo claimed a newcomer as "mi jugador" (my player). The self is always at play when the men publically comment on others, be it as reflections of their soccer knowledge, park histories, or interpersonal relationships, a central aspect of park life I expand on shortly.

A narrow focus on *in situ* interactions would miss the role of history and biography in generating celebratory moments during the games. For example, Locksmith beating Lebo takes on greater meaning in relation to Locksmith's strident attempts to maintain his status as a top player at the park. Taunts of "viejito" (old-timer) to Isaías are tempered by the respect the men have for his longevity. Shouts of "la migra" to Pikachu play on a past many of the undocumented men can relate to, while mention of Ali when criticizing Aranya draws laughs from a favorite

local drama. Finally, Mago's failure is provided greater context in reference to his controversial inclusion on Motor's club team, the often maligned park "estrellas" (stars).

Most of the examples presented are more a reflection of the players' biographies and the men's shared history at the park than about the specifics of the play. For this reason, newcomers are often confused, surprised, and annoyed by game interruptions, whether in the form of praise or criticism, because they do not possess this local knowledge. As one newcomer succinctly put it to me, "I don't get it." In ways that took me years to appreciate, the long-running and sociable nature of these games provides the wealth of local knowledge that helps create and sustain bursts of joy and excitement.

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Moments of celebration and ridicule do more than make the games fun and entertaining to play and watch. They also provide participants a special form of attention and sense of self. When I ask the men what they enjoy about the games, they invariably describe them as a "time out." This is typically expressed in relation to the troubles and stresses they face away from the park. Indeed, many of these undocumented working-class men live and labor under difficult circumstances. While certainly part of the appeal, the games do more than provide the men a space to forget and unwind. They also offer the men bursts of recognition and celebration they rarely, if ever, receive in other settings.

The men do not wildly rejoice nor are they exuberantly cheered when they finish a job or assist a family member. In contrast to most settings, the games are full of festive and playful responses to the men's successes and failures. Moreover, all participants receive this attention over time, regardless of playing ability, and many join in from the sidelines. Attention is sparked by a variety of incidents and personalities, which reflects and reveres the diversity of participants

and game meanings. The men's awareness of potential recognition is made clear as they repeatedly promise to make each other "famous."

In these moments, the men experience an exaggerated sense of greatness. Simply put, there is something great about an old man waving his arms to a crowd of applauding spectators, most of whom have first or second-hand knowledge of his substantial playing history in the park. Cheers and jeers cast a momentary spotlight on the individual and group that uproots them from the mundane. As detailed in the following section, these incidents can also live on for weeks, even years, in the men's discussions about the games.

Weddings, birthdays, and other ritual celebrations provide similar recognition and transcendence, but they are less frequent and more obvious in their intent. Flashes of greatness and experiences of community happen all the time during the games and emerge more organically. The games, through their history, composition, and competitive and festive atmosphere, provide participants the opportunity to be momentarily great and communally recognized. Along with generating a lively atmosphere on and off the field, these moments shed light on the qualities and appeal of this particular game and pickup sports more generally.

The self and group at play in player evaluations

The meaning and significance of the games are also apparent in everyday conversations at the park. Many of the men come to the park not only to play or watch soccer, but to socialize with friends and pass the time. Groups of men congregate for hours after the games, most heading home or elsewhere by nightfall. During these gatherings, which often include beer and marijuana, the games and players are a recurrent focus of discussion and debate that can sustain and enliven park talk for hours. In particular, the men spend a lot of time and energy evaluating talent, debating player histories, and reflecting on the aging process. This is certainly not all the

men talk about—work, sex, and current events among many other topics that get bandied about at the park—but the frequency and manner in which the men talk about the games and players is noteworthy and illuminating. These animated exchanges about the past, present, and future provide greater meaning and context to the games and shed additional light on their role and significance in the men's unfolding lives.

The men, especially those that consistently participate in the games, constantly judge players and debate these judgments. They do this as they watch and play in the games, but also when socializing before and after. Some debates are more contentious than others, but it is rare to sit with the men for an extended period of time and not hear them evaluate and debate the games and players. These discussions focus on the young and old, the latter usually referencing a time when they were at their perceived best, be it 5, 10, or 20 years ago. Always relative and relational concepts, youth and old age get worked out as the men evaluate themselves and others as soccer players, fathers, and men.

A more playful and festive version of player evaluations was presented in the previous section. As described, the men frequently dish out praise and criticism of player achievements as they watch and play in the games. These moments are often intensified by references to player histories and biographies. This section focuses on more "serious" and everyday discussions of the players, which often occur away from the games and in absence of the evaluated. The first examples showcase discussions about participants entering or in their perceived prime as soccer players, which generally stretches from late teenage to early 30s. These debates revolve around several key questions: who is good, who is bad, who has potential, and who is past their prime?

Barba and Motor sit together watching a game on the field. A recent addition to the games attracts their attention. Barba asks Motor what he thinks of the 20 year-old Latino. Barba rated him highly, but Motor expressed only mild enthusiasm: "He's okay, but has a lot to learn." Barba continued, saying he thought he would be a good addition to the team he helped Motor

coach. "Look at how he controls the ball and keeps his head up." Roberto, who was sitting nearby, joined the conversation: "He's bad (malo). He's beating a bunch of old guys (viejitos)." Roberto concluded with a recognized park insult for Barba: "You don't know anything about soccer." The men continued back and forth, an undeterred Barba trying his best to convince Motor and Roberto of the player's talent.

Polo embarked on one of his legendary post-game rants about the declining quality of the players in the park. The 20 or so men listening groaned as he made his well-known points. Emboldened by the attention, Polo ripped into several players that were generally considered amongst the best at the park. According to Polo, they were all "basura" (garbage) and nothing more than "jugadores del parque" (park players). He then pulled up his shorts and slapped his bare thighs: "None of them have legs like me!" Once the hoots and hollers subsided, Chango challenged Polo: "Who then is good?" "Nobody," retorted Polo. Chango continued: "Seriously, Christian, Ivan, Chepe, Tulio, nobody?" "They're all bad (todos malos)," Polo repeated, despite the general agreement that these players were quite good. Inspired by Polo and Chango's exchange, several of the men engaged in a lively debate over who was the best player to currently play at the park. A handful of names were presented and little consensus was reached.

Ever since he started playing in the midday games, Oscar has generated a lot of debate amongst the regulars. Only 19, Oscar impressed the men with his physicality and athleticism, even though his soccer skills were raw and undeveloped. Oscar had only just started seriously playing soccer, after spending most of his youth on the basketball courts. While excited about his size and speed, the men disagreed about his potential as a soccer player. Polo was most adamant about Oscar's promise, saying that with his help he could be one of the best players in the park. In fact, Polo spent a lot of time during the games coaching and encouraging Oscar. Others disagreed, mocking Oscar as "hijo de Polo" (Polo's son) every time he messed up on the field. In making their case, the men often compared Oscar to players who had either surpassed or failed to reach their potential at the park, all of whom started playing in the park at a young age. The "unsuccessful" cases were all attributed to a lack of training and commitment—girls, drugs, and videogames primary culprits.

A group of men debated potential players for a team Tico was organizing for an upcoming holiday tournament. I recommended Peru de Oaxaca, who I found, despite being in his early 40s, to be both skillful and aggressive. The men instantly dismissed him as a candidate and berated me for making the suggestion. According to several of the men, he was well past his prime and could no longer compete with the best players. The men listed several other older men who, like Peru de Oaxaca, were "viejitos" (old timers) to help make their point. To the amusement of everyone, the list included several men gathered around the picnic table.

The men also spend a lot of time and energy talking about the play of past participants. These discussions focus on older men still playing in the park and those long retired, including some men who have not visited the park in years. Player histories are frequently brought up and questioned during the midday games and the social gatherings that precede and follow them.

Often this is done in a way that either contradicts or confirms impressions of their current form and draws comparisons between the past and present. These discussions include those with first-hand knowledge and those speculating about a participant's soccer past.

Abel misses an audacious attempt on goal. Two younger participants watching on the bleachers laugh, one adding in English "no way" as the ball soared high and wide over the goal. Sitting nearby, Barba interjects himself in their conversation: "Ten years ago he would have made that." Sensing their surprise, Barba continues: "Oh yeah, Abel used to score golazos all the time." One of the younger participants responds, "But not anymore." Barba relented: "He's old now!" Seemingly annoyed by the youngsters, Black Mike jumped in, speaking English: "We'll see you guys at his age, you barely run now!" One kid responded in English: "I'll quit before I'm as bad as you," in reference to Mike, and presumably Abel as well.

Gary beats a player with a tricky dribble, only to lose the ball when he attempts to take on a second defender. While many of those watching ridiculed Gary, most referencing his old age, Ivan and Tulio openly speculated about his playing past. "I wish I could have seen Gary when he was younger, I bet he was good." Ivan responded: "I know, you can still see it, he's just too old and slow now."

Dressed in full soccer attire, Zapata jogs around the field. When Zapata passed the packed bleachers, men playfully heckle him but also encourage him to play. One man adds, "Give them [the players] classes." Zapata brushes off the comments and responds "I'm warming up, I'm 50 years old!" Having seen this routine before, a younger participant asks: "Why doesn't he play? All show this guy." Eric replies: "Sometimes he does, but he's old now. But before, shit could he play. We used to play every day and hard, not like you sissies (culeros). Ask Moncho and Motor," pointing so two longtime park players sitting nearby.

Martín skillfully dribbles past me and delivers a pinpoint cross for an easy score. I turn to Martín, shaking my head in disbelief. He responds: "Not bad for a 49 year old!" Surprised by his age, I responded, "You're almost 50!" "Oh yeah, I'm old (vijieto). You think you'll be playing like this at my age?" "I hope so," I reply. Martín smiles and says: "We'll see."

Player histories also live on in the men's everyday conversations at the park. The men spend a lot of time socializing in the park and, along with other topics—including evaluating current and future players—the men talk about past participants, whether present or absent. The following examples reveal the range of ways that the past is brought up and kept alive in the men's everyday discussions and interactions at the park. As in the previous cases, the men

resurrect and honor player histories through comparisons between an imagined past and disputed present.

Motor walks over to a group of men sitting together on a picnic table. He is triumphantly carrying a trophy the team he manages recently won. The men congratulate Motor but all seem to agree that the league used to be better, back when many of them played. This instigated a long discussion about the various teams the men had played for in the league. Battles between Olympia and Real España, two park-based teams, sparked considerable excitement and nostalgia. Top players from this period were also referenced, some of whom still played in the midday games. Several men who no longer play at the park were also discussed, including David's brother, who many considered to be one of the best to ever play at the park. The men agreed that Cejas, another legendary park player, was his closest rival. More importantly, none of the current players came close in comparison.

Asprilla walks over to a group of men drinking beer on the picnic tables. Moncho yells out: "Mi Negra!" (My black woman), adding, "Where have you been?" Asprilla laughed and responded, "you know, wife, kids, work!" Asprilla salutes the men, hugging many of them. Titi introduces me to Asprilla, adding: "He used to be one of the best out here, before he gained all this weight," patting his protruding belly. "See what happens when you stop playing!" I was later informed that he was nicknamed Asprilla after the Colombian soccer star of the 1990s because of their shared goal scoring prowess. Asprilla asks about the games, which had just finished. Roberto responded: "The same, only bad players (puro malos)." Asprilla laughs and inquires about several of his old friends. The men answered with what they knew, most of the men he listed still frequenting the park. Asprilla stuck around for a few hours. His presence sparked the lively retelling of old stories, many of which centered on memorable games and players. A renowned goal Asprilla scored from midfield during a holiday tournament generating the most excitement, a comical fight with Darwin over 10 years ago the most laughter.

As usual, many of the "old-timers" reassembled in the park after their Sunday game at a nearby middle school. Beer flowing, Zurdo challenged Locksmith for his apparently poor display in the morning match. According to Zurdo, "You always talk about how good you are but you did nothing today." Locksmith agreed that he was old and out-of-shape but was adamant about being, at the very least, better than Zurdo. Zurdo was unconvinced and pointed to his own playing past to make his point: "I've played with all these guys, you just got here. I'm old now but I played with Cejas in Simon Bolivar, ask him," referring to a top area league and one of the better old-timers at the park. "You didn't play anywhere, nobody knows you." "That's not my problem," responded Locksmith: "I played all over Los Angeles and second division in El Salvador." Zurdo, and others listening in, laughed at this final claim, none believing that Locksmith played professionally in El Salvador. Sensing an increasingly hostile tone, Roberto told them to relax, reminding them: "We're all bad now."

Araña asks Robert why he did not play that day. They were sitting together with several other men, most of whom had played in the midday games. Robert, 23 years old, responded that he was tired. Araña, in his mid-40s, shook his head in disbelief: "When I was your age, I would play all day." Motor supported the claim, adding that "we used to play two games on Sunday."

Moreover, "players were a lot tougher back then, referees let you play." Araña jumped back in: "You're wasting your talents, all you guys do is just drink beer and hang out." Robert, who initially ignored Araña's criticisms, snapped back in English: "Look at you!" Like Robert, Araña had also not played and had a beer in his hand. Araña responded to Robert's charge of hypocrisy: "I'm old but I played." To substantiate his playing credentials, he added: "This guy used to pay me and Zapata to play in tournaments. Once we went to Arizona. Ask him." Christian, a favorite recipient of old-timer criticisms, entered the conversation: "I'm sick of these stories, these fantasies, you're bad now, and probably bad then, just like Polo," another old-timer known to castigate the current crop of players while talking up his illustrious past. "You going to tell me Pasmado was good too," pointing to an older player of limited ability sitting nearby, exemplified by the park nickname (stupid) he received for his play.

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When the men evaluate players they apply varying standards for what constitutes a good, bad, promising, or washed up participant. Player evaluations are inherently subjective and generate a lot of disagreement. For example, the men will disagree over what makes a good or bad player and whether a particular player meets these criteria. Discussions of the past are especially controversial as memories and park histories differ. Like myths, there is no way to know whether or not they are true. In turn, they revolve much more on speculation and imagination, which tends to prolong and intensify deliberations about the past.

While the men also debate the qualities of professional players, the local, long running, and seemingly low-stake park games provide the context and ingredients for endless debate. In both cases, it is the arguing, rather than the futile search for agreement, that is fun and entertaining. Comparisons between the past and present are especially volatile as it is impossible to know whether someone was better or worse than a player now. Hours of conversation at the park are instigated, sustained, and enlivened when evaluating players—past, present, and future.

These debates, however, do more than provide the men something to talk about while at the park. They are also about presenting and defending a certain image of the self to others. Player evaluations serve as projects of self-presentation. How the men see themselves gets

communicated and represented by the players they praise and criticize. In some cases, this includes self-evaluations, but almost always of a distant past. These debates are about the evaluators and provide the men opportunities to say something about themselves and others.

Most of the men tend to prefer certain types of players over others, whether speaking of the past or present. For example, some men consistently praise flashy and flamboyant players, while others favor tough and determined participants. When I ask the men why they like particular players, they often claim that they currently play or used to play like them. These judgments tend to correspond to how they see themselves as players and men, at least publically and in interviews.

For example, Martín appreciates players with technical ability. As he put it to me, "I like players who know the game and keep it simple. That's how I try to play, not like these brutes (brutos)." Locksmith, renowned for his physical play on and off the field, celebrates players with "spirit" (ganas) and "balls" (huevos), and frequently criticizes players he considers "weak" (culeros, maricas). David tends to promote players who pull off spectacular plays, even if they are not the most well-rounded participants. His appreciation for the spectacular is connected to his own playing history: "I wasn't one of the best, but ask anyone about my bicycle [overhead] kick goals. I scored some golazos in this park." Cejas champions players who involve their teammates and regularly chastised a group of players he considered "selfish" (egoísta). In his mid-40s, Cejas was renowned for his exquisite passes, something he shared with me: "I like passing the ball, I always have." Brazil, on the other hand, was often frustrated with players who were more interested in getting their teammates involved than scoring goals. As he put it to me, soccer "is about scoring goals, that's why I shoot the ball, and I don't care what people say." Finally, Maradona shared with me that he favored players who liked a challenge, exemplified by

their choice of teammates: “I like players who don’t care who’s on their team,” which compared to his approach: “I always played with weaker players,” adding, “I liked the challenge of beating the best.”

Preferences can be more idiosyncratic, and less result oriented. Many of the men have their personal favorites who they repeatedly champion when debating players. Often, as they would even agree, these players are not amongst the best, but there is something about them that they like. In many cases, this involves players of limited physical and technical ability and those who have shown considerable improvement.

For example, Abel considers Chaparo one of the best players because he “competes,” despite his small stature and slight frame. Polo told me he preferred players like Hernan who “just plays” and “doesn’t argue all the time,” as opposed to admittedly better players who “are always causing problems.” Henry likes players who are out there to “have a good time,” mentioning known “payasos” (clowns) who lighten the mood, often through their comical play. America is admiring of players who have considerably improved since coming to the park. In our interview, America shared that he was not very good when he arrived at the park, which earned him a lot of abuse.

The men regularly create a special kinship with these players, referring to them as “mi jugador” (my player), “mi hijo” (my son), or “mi marido” (my husband). Some even take personal responsibility for their improvement, claiming to have coached and mentored them. In contrast, stronger players who apparently have not reached their potential garner a lot of criticism. It seems that each of the men have their favorite park disappointment to ruthlessly attack. In some instances, older participants express sadness over a players’ apparent failure, having witnessed them grow from boys to men in the park.

These debates, however, often center more on the evaluators than the evaluated. As the examples reveal, the men frequently criticize each other for their evaluations. For example, the comment, "you don't know anything about soccer" is repeatedly used to dismiss player evaluations.

Rebuttals often move well beyond apparent soccer knowledge. For example, Polo's aggressive critiques of younger players in the park, who he feels have not reached their potential, are often countered with claims that he is bitter because he never amounted to anything as a soccer player. Some take it a step further, arguing that his disappointment is due to having never fathered a child. In another case, Taco's defense of a player for playing without "balls" (huevos)—celebrating his cerebral play instead—was dismissed by Roberto, who argued that Taco also played without "balls" (huevos). Again moving beyond soccer, some men joke that Taco's wife controls him for similar reasons. Finally, Araña's praise of Ali was rejected because it was well known that Ali frequently shared beer and marijuana with Araña. Their relationship, as previously mentioned, was also the source of homosexual innuendo and intrigue. Just as the men vigorously defend player evaluations as reflections of their character, they attack the evaluations of others as evidence of their faults.

The special attention given to the sons of longtime participants is revealing of the relationship between soccer and character. During my time in the park, I have observed six father-son combinations play and watch the games together. Now in their late teens and twenties, the sons all accompanied their fathers as young boys and gradually joined the games as full participants. The men spend a lot of time celebrating their histories in the park and evaluating them as soccer players. Talk also includes several sons who previously participated but for various reasons no longer join their fathers at the park. Often the men claim, with pride, that a

boy “nació en el parque” (was born in the park), taking personal responsibility for their development.

In addition to being viewed as products of the park games, sons are seen as reflections of their fathers. For example, Chepe’s success, which included a Division I college soccer scholarship, is attributed to his father, both for bringing him to the park and in the skills he passed down to him. In contrast, Luis’s apparent failure to reach his potential is blamed on his father, in this case, for not pushing him and setting a good example on and off the field. To this day, when Luis messes up on the field, the men shout out: “like your father,” while Chepe’s goals regularly draw comparisons to his father’s past exploits.

Younger sons also generate a lot of talk and speculation, from newborns to boys just starting to play with the men. Their perceived potential is almost always connected to their fathers’ qualities and achievements, as soccer players and men. The absence of sons is also a point of contention and commentary, for fathers and observers alike. How talk about sons is talk about fathers became much clearer to me when my now two-year old son became a topic in ongoing discussions about the “nueva generación” (new generation).

The self is also at stake in conversations about the “old generation.” Older participants spend a lot of time and energy attempting to resurrect the past, their own and others. This is often done by comparing previous games and players to the current versions, the argument generally being that the past was better than the present. This is communicated through stories about mythical games and players and in endless comparisons between the past and present.

For example, it is rare that a current player or team is celebrated without mention of prior versions. Also, the steady stream of returning old-timers almost always instigates lively discussions about shared soccer memories. Nicknames also help to keep history alive, many of

which refer to player histories. For example, Motor received his nickname because he used to race around the field, surprising to many considering his out-of-shape condition and infrequent participation in the midday games. Also beyond his prime, Maradona references his park nickname—in honor of one of the greatest soccer players of all time—to remind the men of his illustrious past.

As with evaluations of current and future players, assessments of the past generate considerable critique and disbelief. Someone's claim of being a good player 15 years ago is more likely to receive censure than approval. Past glories are frequently trashed at the park, especially by the younger generation. The past is rewritten, but not always in ways the men want.

Player evaluations generate spirited conversations and provide opportunities to project a particular image of the self, as soccer players, men, and fathers. This is not all the men talk about and there is certainly more going on when the men praise and criticize players. The frequency and passion with which the men debate players—past, present, and future—is nonetheless striking and revealing of the meaning and appeal of the regular soccer games.

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As with moments of celebration and ridicule during the games, player evaluations are shaped and influenced by the setting and situation. In particular, the steady arrival of new players, the presence of old-timers and park-based teams and tournaments, and a vibrant social life alongside the games sustains and intensifies the meaning and significance of player evaluations. These aspects of the games and park life provide greater context to what the men are doing when they assess each other.

The games attract new participants, some of whom become new characters in the men's endless debates about who is good, bad, and promising. The men certainly argue over players

with long histories at the park, but new players tend to invigorate these debates. For example, a particularly good, bad, or controversial participant will sustain park talk for days and weeks. Younger players are particularly conducive to endless deliberation because so much of the talk is speculative. Their progress also becomes the focus of attention and debate, especially between their unofficial sponsors and detractors. It is in these debates that the men put their characters and reputations on the line, which helps explain why they so forcefully defend their evaluations and reject those of others. Player evaluations represent both their soccer knowledge and how they see themselves as men.

The presence of several park-based teams and tournaments also contributes to the meaning and significance of player evaluations. These teams, whether those participating in area leagues or park tournaments, generate a lot of interest and discussion. Who plays on the teams is of great concern, especially as players are generally drawn from the midday pickup games. The tournament teams, in particular, lead to hours of debate because their makeup tends to change from holiday to holiday. Thus, the arrival of a quality newcomer generates buzz and excitement, especially if they seem willing to join one of the teams. More generally, park-based teams instigate longstanding debates about whether a participant is a "jugador del parque" (park player) or someone who can play at a more competitive level, such as in the leagues and tournaments.

These debates are less abstract than others because they require concrete decisions: should the player be asked to join a team or not. Sometimes they are uninterested in joining, but the presence of park-based teams raises the stakes and urgency of player evaluations. As the decision is ultimately up to the team's managers, park-based teams also provide an additional object of judgment. In fact, the men spend as much time criticizing the managers, especially over their roster and lineup decisions, as they do the players.

Of course, a team's success reflects well on the manager—managing serving as another way to gain status and respect at the park. Tellingly, tournament teams are almost always identified by the name of their manager (ie: "Motor's team"), rather than some other identifier (ie: "Oaxaca" or "Galaxy"). Even more, the ability or inability to successfully organize and bring a team to a park tournament significantly shapes social standing at the park. For example, Martín is respectfully referred to as "papa de los torneos" for repeatedly bringing quality teams to the tournaments, having won many over the years as well. As a result, Martín is known as someone at the park who can get things done. In contrast, teams that fare poorly, or even worse, fail to show up, reflect negatively on their managers. I frequently hear the term "falta organización" (lacks organization) to explain the men's failures. Also, men who are viewed as generally irresponsible and unorganized are usually rebuffed when they offer to bring a team to a tournament. The tournaments, organized by the men, in turn offer a concrete and symbolic space to build and lose reputation.

These debates are also influenced by the ongoing participation of so many "old timers," especially those with long playing histories in the park. History is very alive in park discussions, and provides another focus of discussion. The past is expressed primarily through stories and comparisons to current games and players. These stories also remind the men, especially newcomers, that they are just one piece of any single game, and that a single game is just one piece of an extensive history and series of games. Thus, even in this informal context, the men carry that tradition with them.

As they are about a distant past not all participants are aware of, its representation also tends to generate more disagreement and disbelief than those concerning current players. Unlike current players who can let their play speak for itself, older participants must put forward an

image that is no longer present or heavily distorted by time. These men, in turn, attempt to transcend their current circumstances with reference to the past.

The presence of older players brings the aging process front and center at the park. The men, of all ages, spend a lot of time talking and thinking about being and getting "old" and constantly gauge themselves and others according to age. Aging is a human concern that the men mobilize and invoke to create little dramas at the park. Everyone has to deal with the passage of time. Aging, in turn, becomes another way that the games are given transcendent meaning.

The games affect the aging process in paradoxical ways. For players past their playing prime, the games provide opportunities to feel young *and* old. Young in the sense that they are still playing, and in some cases well. Old in the sense that they can no longer compete like they used to, especially against ever younger talent. Older participants experience pride and frustration when playing, the physicality of the game making them especially conscious of their advancing age. The social and jovial nature of park life amplifies this dilemma by honoring and ridiculing old age, exemplified in the shifting meanings of "viejito" (old-timer). Yet deteriorated as they may be, playing on the field and participating from the sidelines keeps their past alive in vivid and prolific ways.

Youth can also operate in conflicting ways. Younger participants are praised for their potential and criticized for their failures. Moreover, older participants frequently disparage their play in reference to their age, arguing that they should do more on the field because they are young. They are constantly informing younger players about what they allegedly did at their age, embodied in the recurrent phrase, "When I was your age…" In contrast, older participants use their advanced age to celebrate and excuse their current form. Older participants also openly speculate about the future of younger participants. For example, when Ivan criticized Abel for

missing a chance on goal, Abel responded: “We’ll see what you’re doing at my age!” Like Ivan, many younger participants hope to continue playing at Abel’s age, even as they mock and criticize his fading play.

Player evaluations and the games operate dialectically. The games provide the materials for debate, the debates attaching greater meaning to the games. The men play to talk and talk to play. The variety of players and debates (i.e. who’s good, bad, promising, washed up) also allows the men to assess themselves in relation to others as they move through the life cycle. The physicality of the game is certainly difficult to ignore while the men’s imagined pasts present what they perceive as their best selves. Moreover, everyone can participate, whether on the field, along the sidelines, or in the lively discussions that occur before and after the games. Through these conversations about the past, present, and future, the men create a meaningful game.

These stories, by bringing the past back to life in the present, also represent another way that the men achieve immortality at the park. Spectacular game moments and player biographies are talked about for years. These stories reflect not only their histories as park soccer players, but as men. Moreover, for many of these men, these discussions recover a past that is harder for them to memorialize. They have to live on in oral history, rather than concrete certification, be it a degree, title, or written account. As working-class men, there is little institutional memory in their occupations. Even more, many are literally living and working without documentation. For these men, soccer becomes an obvious way to keep the past alive in the present. The game’s seduction is in gaining a place in the collective memory of the community they have created in ways they cannot elsewhere, be it during the games or the lively discussions that follow.

Conclusion

This chapter examines a familiar social scene that occurs throughout the world in different forms and under varying circumstances. Focusing on one longstanding pickup soccer game in a West Los Angeles public park, the chapter asks two primary questions: What are the men creating when they come together to play, watch, and comment on the games and how do these games and discussions matter in the context of their unfolding lives?

Through soccer, the men create a meaningful and vibrant social world. Bursts of joy and recognition during the games and lively discussions about the games and players represent two key ways meaning and enthusiasm are created. Human concerns over aging and memory are invoked and mobilized to create drama and intrigue that transcends the here-and-now of pickup soccer and park life. Neither primary or secondary, the games and conversations about the games operate dialectically, each raising the stakes and infusing the other with meaning and longevity. At a more general level, soccer is made social through the engagements it helps sustain.

While other informal sports gatherings may share similar characteristics, these outcomes are significantly shaped by the setting and situation. These distinguishing factors include the game's history, the continued participation of old-timers, the steady arrival of new players, a distinct social order, a mix of ages, backgrounds, and playing abilities, the active presence of spectators, the association of park-based club teams and tournaments, and a lively park social life accompanying the games. These aspects of the games and park influence and provide greater context to what the men are doing when they play soccer and assess the games and players.

At one level, the games and soccer-oriented discussions provide the men something fun and entertaining to do together. The hours and years many of the men spend together in the park is a testament to the appeal of the long-running soccer matches. The data passages hopefully also

convey the joy and creativity involved in playing, watching, and talking about soccer at the park. It is the consequence of "having fun" together that is likely of greater sociological interest to the reader.

Soccer-based activities provide the base and impetus for a series of practical moves. While playing soccer and socializing in the park, the men develop relationships, network, exchange resources, and cope with everyday challenges—marginality, stigma, and advancing age of pressing concern for many of the men. For example, the men constantly refer each other for jobs, share tools, money, and information, and discuss the difficulties of living, working, and growing old in Los Angeles.

As most of these relationships and exchanges are based on reciprocity, trust and reputation is of fundamental importance. How the men perform on the field and who the men praise and criticize, for example, is revealing of character and intimately tied to their park histories and personal biographies, real and imagined. The action is here, to again paraphrase Goffman, because character is on display. For that reason, the men are very insistent on presenting and protecting a particular image of themselves and others when playing and commenting on the games and players. Soccer puts reputations on the line and becomes another way the men express themselves, learn about each other, and develop trust. The history of the game and group also becomes an important resource for crafting a sense of self and belonging, especially vis-à-vis newcomers or a time in their life when they were not as socially connected.

At an even more basic level, the men require opportunities to interact. Soccer provides the men something to do and talk about. In fact, much of the practical resources that emerge are more a byproduct of being together, than the result of calculated behavior or strategic tests of character. For example, someone may learn about a job opening after a line cook is playfully

urged to “go wash dishes” during the games. As in this case and others, opportunities to network and exchange repeatedly emerge at the park through a shared focus of activity and common culture of interaction.

Soccer is effective in generating interaction and creating social ties for reasons that bear expanding. Soccer is fun and entertaining, as revealed when the men play, watch, and comment on the games. The role of fun and creativity should not be overlooked as a source of interaction and communion in favor of more “serious” explanations or background variables. Soccer also serves as a common denominator—albeit, in this case, a primarily masculine one—bringing together a variety of participants and broadening the men’s social circles.

What the men create through soccer is also compelling and revealing. This is seen when they dramatically cheer and jeer accomplishments on the field and forcefully evaluate themselves as soccer players, fathers, and men in off-field discussions. Through these interactions, the men learn about each other and develop trust and social standing. This knowledge and confidence becomes the foundation and springboard for a series of practical moves, namely networking and exchanging resources, two primary ways the men make ends meet.

The games also help the men deal with private concerns, especially the marginality they face in other settings and their fears and frustrations over getting old. Bursts of joy and collective recognition renew the men’s sense of self and belonging by showering them with greatness and immortality. Discussions about the aging process, intensified by the diversity of participants and physicality of the game, help the men make sense of their own mortality. These findings speak not only to the particulars of this game but the appeal of pickup sports more generally. I imagine most informal amateur games provide participants opportunities to learn about themselves and others in emotionally intense and paradoxical ways.

Chapter Two
Neighborhood outsiders, field insiders

While the previous chapter focused on how play is made meaningful and compelling by the men, it took for granted the existence of an organized and sustainable game. That is, it assumed that a stage was in place for the men to perform, watch, and discuss. This chapter, in contrast, directly explores all the work and cooperation involved in organizing and sustaining regular games on the public soccer field.

This coordination adds another dimension to what the men do and accomplish together at the park. An overlooked value of public parks is that they set up such opportunities for people to collaborate around shared interests. That said, the unique and generic challenges these men face in unconditionally controlling the open field—threats surfacing from within and outside the games—also tells a story about their precarious use of public space in early twenty-first century Los Angeles. Having fun in public is a significant accomplishment, but not a process the men fully control.

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The popular soccer-specific facility at the Mar Vista Recreation Center is officially open and free of charge to anyone during these unreserved hours. The regular use of the field by the men is the result of their own organization. Primarily working-class immigrants from Mexico and Central America, the players control a field in an area where they are ethnic and class outsiders.

Regular participants face a series of challenges for sustaining their play in the park, most of which center on how authority is contested, negotiated, and established on the open facility. While the games stretch back several decades, most of these challenges are catalyzed by current

dynamics, including the steady arrival of newcomers and at times hostile interventions from local residents, which emerged with the installation of an attractive synthetic turf soccer field that replaced an inferior "dirt" playing surface. By studying how social organization is repeatedly challenged and reconstructed on the improved field, this chapter sheds new light on how informal claims on public space are made and remade in the contemporary city.

The organization and vulnerability of group claims on public space was made apparent on my first visit to the local social world that is midday "pickup" soccer[15] at this particular park:

> I arrived at 11:15 and observed approximately 15 guys casually warming up on the field. Over the next 15 minutes, about 25 more guys appeared. Some of them joined the others on the field, while the rest socialized in small groupings around the facility; not everyone seemed "dressed to play." Most of the men appeared working-class Latino, and Spanish was the primary spoken language, which contrasted with the seemingly upscale and predominantly white neighborhood.
>
> At around 11:30, a man arrived carrying a large bag of jerseys. As he stepped up on the bleachers to the empty top row, prospective players made their way toward the structure. Most of them seemed to know each other and I felt largely ignored by the group despite my "soccer getup." After shaking hands and speaking with a few of them, the apparent leader [Polo] opened the bag and distributed jerseys for two teams, deliberately bestowing some and bypassing others.
>
> Of the four sets in his bag, he allocated red and green jerseys, the sleeve-less mesh variety often used in training sessions. A few guys extended their arms and verbally pleading their case, but most maintained eye contact and more confidently waited their turn. A few rebuffed participants expressed mild anger and frustration to no apparent avail or local support. Several guys showed up during this process and were given jerseys despite the previously waiting players.

This excerpt illustrates both the structure of the "right to use" on this open field and the sources of potential conflict. At this public facility, neither fees nor membership restrictions limit the number or type of users. As entry is open to all and no system formally allocates use of the space, random use, debilitating conflict, and chaos are all possibilities. Instead, soccer playing

[15] In contrast to formal matches with set rosters and institutional backing, by pickup soccer I refer to sporting contests structured by informal participation and on-the-ground organization (see DeLand 2012; Jimerson 1999). That said, there is no universal understanding or operation of "pickup" soccer, and as this study shows, its meaning and practice are susceptible to contrasting and conflicting interpretations and expectations.

takes an organized, highly patterned form that continues on a sustained basis, day after day after day. However, demands for inclusion by potential players exceed the number that teams can accommodate and there is vigorous opposition to the games by some nearby residents in the largely white, upper-middle-class neighborhood that surrounds the field. Thus, organized play, characterized by differential treatment and access to the games and challenged by neighborhood residents, is neither monopolistic nor egalitarian, but a negotiated product of local conditions.

While sociologists have long studied interactions in public space (Anderson 1990; Goffman 1963; Lofland 1973), the actual processes through which open territories are claimed, controlled, and contested have received inadequate attention. As I will show in this chapter, understanding how, why, and with what limitations, these Latino soccer players manage use of this field sheds new light on both the mechanisms by which public space is claimed and the conflicts triggered by those claims. That this research uncovers social order in public space is not surprising; rather it is the underappreciated relationship between social and spatial practices in the ever-tenuous control of public space that this paper seeks to emphasize.

In the pages that follow, I examine three general ways in which use is differentiated and controlled on the open playing field through sometimes contentious and unresolved negotiations. I show how distinctions are drawn between "regulars" and "newcomers," power relations are made and enforced, and assumptions about local apprehension are managed and manipulated. All parties, however, face significant obstacles in claiming the open facility and controlling its use, even though power is not equally shared. For example, categories of insider and outsider require constant renegotiation by regulars who feel powerful on the field yet marginal in the predominately white residential setting. In fact, attempts at exercising and maintaining control often result in aggravated and unintended problems in and around the field. The multiple layers

and domains of conflict and resolution spotlight the particular place of Latino immigrant men in contemporary Los Angeles and the more “universal” roots of these recurrent struggles over urban public space.

The neglected role of social boundaries in territorial studies

This chapter builds on a longstanding sociological interest in territorial behavior. Territoriality, or the attempt to "affect, influence, or control" space (Lyman and Scott 1967; Sack 1986:1), was introduced in early ecological studies of neighborhood change (Park 1925; Zorbaugh 1929) and advanced in more ethnographic examinations of urban life (Anderson 1990; Duneier 1999; Suttles 1968). In these studies, contestations over space frequently surface in “public” areas, such as sidewalks, street corners, and parks, where claims and counterclaims to access and control are especially volatile and susceptible to complex processes of negotiation, manipulation, and adaptation. That is, while public and private spaces are customarily distinguished according to legal access, the line between the two is often fluid and contextual.

Presenting a more nuanced and differentiated social geography, scholars have examined the numerous ways in which ostensibly public space is appropriated and transformed into types of private or semiprivate places, such as "home territories," which Lofland (1973:119) usefully describes as "a relatively small piece of public which is taken over—either by individuals acting independently or by an already formed group acting in concert—and turned into ‘a home away from home’" (see also Cavan 1963; Lyman and Scott 1967). In fact, urban ethnographies are replete with examples of individuals and groups claiming public space as their own, and often at the expense or displeasure of others.

Most notably, urban ethnographers show how only a small number of members are needed to wrest control of a neighborhood's public spaces (Anderson 1999; Bourgois 1995;

Deener 2010; Suttles 1968). Not limited to the threat of violence, public space is seized through a range of social and spatial practices. As two everyday examples, the familiar rituals of beach going, such as spreading out a towel, help establish private territories in public beaches (Edgerton 1979) and in a less material sense, the "social membrane" of interacting groups can function as psychological barriers to intrusion, such as when individuals cluster in social gatherings (Goffman 1963). How pet dogs facilitate interaction and create divisions in urban space has also been well demonstrated (Tissot 2011; Robins, Sanders, and Cahill 1991). More sensationally, the presence and activity of "undesirables" in public settings are shown to repel and upset those within different categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality (Anderson 1990; Duneier 1999; Gardner 1995; Mitchell 1995; Pattillo 2007).

Often taken for granted in research on territoriality, us/them distinctions are not necessarily obvious or acceptable to the involved parties. Instead, they result from insiders' simultaneous attempts to construct and impose social and symbolic boundaries that designate them as "local" (Horowitz 1983; Suttles 1968) or "regular" (Anderson 1978; Duneier 1992) and separate them from outsiders. For that reason, the articulation and defense of *social boundaries* defining the in-group are as important as the delineation and enforcement of *physical borders* needed to establish and maintain territory in public space. Hence, who and what "belongs" in a given area needs to be effectively implemented and imposed in claiming public territory.

As the substantial literature on the formation and dissolution of ethnic groups and status hierarchies demonstrates, boundary formation is a social, dynamic, and interactional process with varying degrees and forms of closure and boundedness (Brubaker 2004). Following this lead, this study provides an ideal setting to study group boundaries as emergent and in dialectical relationship with territorial claims making. Specifically, in the face of competing interests and

uncertain authority, maintaining distinct boundaries between privileged and underprivileged participants in this public setting—as opposed to local bars, “ethnic” neighborhoods, or gang-affiliated street corners—is less formally manageable and requires everyday negotiation. In other words, the more informal and unrecognized the social gathering, the more invisible or disputed the social boundaries and behavioral norms to outsiders (Collins 2000). In turn, territorial claims are contingent upon creating and sustaining collective unity, a source of difference that is not always self-evident or acceptable to outsiders, especially for those interested in using the space.

In public parks, which often draw from beyond the immediate neighborhood and are formally established for open use and leisure purposes, "belonging" emerges as particularly uncertain and contested for users and local residents. What is made of public park space is largely the product of privately organized responses to their possibilities. As a result, the “open condition” of public parks makes them especially vulnerable to conversion into or out of recognized home territories, a tension not fully appreciated by the usual focus on the background differences and inter-group hostilities typically assumed to promote conflict (see Anderson 1990, 1998; Suttles 1968).

While the relative accessibility and openness of public spaces provide the conditions for inter-group conflict to unfold, the degree and intensity of conflict over territory certainly varies. For example, in this study, as most parties agree that the field should be used for soccer—an accomplishment in its own right—it is not so much territorial control that is at stake but who can join and under what terms. This case differs from people controlling a neighborhood space that leads to murders and muggings, the actions of a Business Improvement District restricting public behaviors, or police officers identifying certain practices as suspect. Recognizing the range and variety of territorial practices, this chapter argues that claiming space is best understood as a

process whereby a group defines itself, and is recognized by others, as the established proprietors of that space. How and to what extent particular boundaries and group dynamics become the taken-for-granted way to work out conflicts among users, potential users, and more distant observers is the subject of this study.

The soccer field

First-rate and public, the Mar Vista field is heavily used, highly desired, and difficult to reserve. Referred to by many participants as "soccer heaven," the current field arrangement is certainly unusual in a region where such public options are rare (Garcia, Flores, and Pine 2002). Most agree that the new field has attracted a greater amount of players, spectators, and local attention than its prior use as a dirt field.

As previously discussed, approximately 80 percent of the participants of the pickup game are Latino men, with the remaining 20 percent an assortment of foreign and U.S.-born blacks, whites, and Asians of mixed class backgrounds. This demographic breakdown is roughly the same for longtime participants and relative newcomers, meaning that the bulk of new arrivals are also Latino immigrant men. Although attendance varies with the weather and calendar, out of a regular population of approximately 100 members, there are typically 30 to 60 participants, players and spectators on any given weekday. Most of the men are young adults, in their 20s and 30s, although there is a contingent of talented teenagers and venerable veterans in their 40s and 50s. In addition, several women intermittently participate in this largely male-dominated space.

The participants' residences also vary and some live close enough to walk. Though many work nearby, most drive or bus in from a range of distances. None of the regular participants live in the single-family homes directly adjacent to the park, which is where most field critics reside.

The majority of players and spectators attribute their initial arrival to word of mouth and prior connections or to having seen the visible field and games in passing.

While attentive to individual backgrounds and motivations, interaction and the "contours of situations" are at the center of analysis (Collins 2008:1). Specifically, in order to focus closely on the micro-dynamics of controlling public space, it is necessary in this chapter to bracket the meaning and import of the games and park for players and area residents. Nevertheless, part of the meaning of public parks is that control is contingent, and needs to be worked out by the users on a daily basis. What emerges is one of several alternative uses and social meanings that are built into park space.

The soccer games

The weekday soccer games are played from approximately 11:30 to 1:30 in the early afternoon. The men do not formally reserve the field as it is generally available for free and open use at this time of day. Schools, clubs, and leagues often rent the facility in the later afternoons and weekends by purchasing a field permit from the park office, which starts at $30 per hour but increases substantially in cost and paperwork for adult and for-profit organizations.

Games are approximately 15 minutes long with the winning team staying on to compete against a waiting team. If the game is tied, both teams exit the field. There are usually enough players on the sidelines to form two to three additional teams, although Polo only provides jerseys for four teams. Those without typically try to secure a jersey from Polo or a departing player, although as I discuss, securing entry into the games is a consistent point of tension and confusion. In fact, controlling who plays during this two-hour period is the primary problem regulars face in managing the games and maintaining favorable playing conditions on the public field.

Players' work schedules facilitate participation at this unusual time and help organize and structure their days. For example, many work primarily evenings and weekends, others are self-employed, and an increasing number are struggling to find steady employment in the current economic downturn. Many men with steady daytime work also come during their lunch break. While there are usually more than enough players to field two teams for the first game, players come and go over the course of the two hours. In addition, a sizeable minority of participants come to the field to watch the games and socialize with friends; and for many, the park, as an exemplary "third place" (Oldenburg 1989), represents the “thick of their social life,” including the actual games and the interactions that accompany them (Anderson 1978:35).

Individuals and leagues have played soccer in this space for decades, including many veterans of the current pickup game, which has its roots in the mid 1980s. Most of these original players were recent immigrants who gravitated to the park to play a favorite pastime. Many lived in the general area and worked sporadically as day laborers or evenings as dishwashers, busboys, and cooks in nearby restaurants. Now old-timers, this steady group of participants played alongside and eventually replaced an earlier group of South Americans who had organized informal games at the park since the early 1970s. Throughout its history, this pickup game has had a small number of primary organizers: Polo the current incumbent. As mentioned, one of the major reasons why Polo holds this demanding position is because he is available at this time—he works evenings as a line cook and is single and without children.

Most participants agree that circumstances have changed with the advent of the new field. While play is much improved, this unusually accessible and attractive facility has drawn a continued flow of newcomers and nonregulars, many of whom are unaware or unsympathetic to the regulars’ historical claims on the field. In turn, newcomers threaten the order and stability of

the soccer games, which for many regulars, provide a cherished respite from family and work life. Most concretely, newcomers take valuable playing time away from regulars, although more subjective concerns over respect and deference also motivate objections. The greater presence and visibility of play and players, both of which are perceived as foreign by some local residents, has also sparked considerable protest from adjacent neighbors, including attempts to restrict access and use. Consequently, this is largely a story of how longtime users respond to micro-level challenges brought about by a macro-level change to a park they have called home for so many years.

The remaining sections of this chapter will show (1) how newcomers come to recognize the presence of "regulars" and the operation of an organized game as taken-for-granted features of the park, (2) the processes and resources by which authority is sustained on the open playing field, and (3) the mechanisms by which challenges are experienced and resolutions achieved within a predominately immigrant Latino but diverse playing population, on a field that is contested by neighbors in ways that raise ethnic and class tensions. Whereas the analysis begins by detailing the processes through which regular participants attempt to control the field and game activity, by no means are their efforts conclusive or uncontested, which becomes most evident in the concluding analytic section on the tenuousness of this social order.

Differentiating between regulars and newcomers on the open field

One way that differentiated use is established is through the sorting out of participants into regulars and newcomers. Newcomers come to appreciate the presence of “regulars” and their operation of an organized game as taken-for-granted features of the open and attractive field through a series of dynamics social processes and collective performances.

To begin with, while the first-rate facility and soccer activity certainly attract newcomers, the daily and dense presence of players and spectators, most of whom appear Latino, represents a preliminary boundary that newcomers must traverse to enter the games. In addition to an average of 40 distinguishable soccer players, there are usually a dozen or so "spectators" in street clothes around the field, most congregating on the bleachers. The use and visibility of jerseys, however, accomplishes the most in signaling organization from afar, a key mechanism I return to in greater detail.

While these externally visible features, such as the jerseys and participants, may deter prospective players, not to mention those interested in using the soccer field for other purposes, they begin the work of establishing authority over the public field. Before the games commence, "waiting" players signal the advent of routine activity, and during the games, the density of players and spectators in and around the field proclaims a recurrent focused gathering. In fact, like the invisible boundary surrounding the body (Goffman 1963), newcomers often ascribe their initial hesitancy to join the games to their perceived organization and formality. However, because this group of regulars sets up the game, rather than it being part of a public league officiated by the city, newcomers are forced to interact with them if they wish to participate. I now turn to the successive ways in which control is signaled to newcomers who do cross this initial boundary and attempt to join the games.

As with my first encounter, newcomers need to initiate incorporation and are not actively or enthusiastically welcomed by regular participants. When newcomers ask a player about joining a game, regulars invariably point to Polo,[16] providing little helpful information, let alone

[16] Following a long tradition of primary informants in ethnographic studies [i.e. Doc (Whyte 1943)], much of the forthcoming analysis centers on Polo. While Polo plays a crucial role in park interactions as the de facto leader, he is significantly supported by fellow regulars, who are pleased that someone respectable has taken on the demanding

friendly introductions. Newcomers thus face a limited space of entry when approaching the games and confront them in a position of strangeness and vulnerability. This is in stark contrast to how other players receive one another in this atmosphere of "competitive sociability" (Anderson 1978; Jerolmack 2009): an extended and playful ritual of first-name greetings, distinctive handshakes, and backstage behavior (Goffman 1959), which becomes especially pronounced when old-timers or absent regulars return to the park. Predictably, embellished park memories and past participants are a central feature of field discourse, a reservoir of public stories that affixes a meaningful and sustained history and identity to the current pickup games.

The following field note is indicative of the significance placed on greeting distinctions in constructing and communicating recognition and status at the park:

> A recent arrival steps onto the bleachers to no outward acknowledgement from the regulars already seated. Actually, his seating is accompanied with the awkward silence of interrupted conversations. Several minutes later, Caballo, a longtime participant, arrives and is enthusiastically greeted. He appears to knowingly bypass the newcomer as he traded barbs and shook hands with his fellows. After one of the men asked Caballo where had been for the past month, Abel joked that he had been in hiding ever since Honduras lost a crucial World Cup qualifying match.

First experienced at a distance, it is through these deliberate exchanges that newcomers come to further appreciate the presence of "regulars" and history at this particular field, as opposed to an unorganized collection of individuals who just happen to be playing soccer at the particular moment. These differences in greeting, experienced upon initial entry into the more immediate space of the pickup games, provide the first signals of a broader, segmented environment characterized by familiarity among regulars and frigidity towards newcomers. Such distinctions continue to play out through such practices as segregated seating arrangements,

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position of gatekeeper. That said, the following analysis is admittedly "Polo-centric," as he represents the central authority figure and object of newcomer dissatisfaction.

affectionate and malevolent nicknames, biased referee decisions, differentiated crowd reactions, uneven banter and insults, exclusive treating of beverages and snacks, and restricted invitations for post-game activities. As one newcomer, a 24 year-old Mexican American, put it to me, "I felt like an outsider right away, people barely said hello."

The prevalence of inside jokes and local sayings are particularly powerful in creating feelings of difference and strangeness. For example, a white newcomer asked me why the guys yelled "jugador (player) de Santa Monica" whenever he messed up on the field, especially as he did not live in the neighboring city. I explained that the men often associated someone's play with "their" team, be it the professional one they support or the one they play for in the city's many recreational leagues. Although his biography was unknown, this referred to the perceived whiteness of Santa Monica and the new participant. In another case, an African American newcomer expressed confusion when someone urged him to "buy Polo's video" after he failed to score an easy goal. Having only played a few times at the park, he was unaware of the local intrigue surrounding the alleged videotapes documenting Polo's younger playing days.

For many newcomers, feelings of ostracism and estrangement are compounded by the dominance of Spanish at the field, a language some are unable (or unwilling) to speak or understand. While often a vehicle for humor and friendly interaction, "linguistic collusion" can also represent a source of difference and suspicion for all involved parties (Lyman and Scott 1967). Indeed, access to Spanish is another way that differentiated use of the field is sorted out, although Spanish-speaking newcomers face similar barriers of coldness and indifference. In fact, as most newcomers generally resemble the regulars, newcomer status typically supersedes perceived commonalities, such as Latino, Spanish, immigrant, or working class.

As with any rite of entrance, meanings reside beyond apparent forms and carry wide-ranging implications, which are intimately connected to the social hierarchy at the park—an evolving pecking order based on several variable and contingent factors including a player's park history, skill level, sociability, resources, and relationship with core participants. As power is a social relation, not a personal characteristic (Emerson 1962), it is through these interactions that newcomers come to experience a power differential at the park vis-à-vis "regulars."

This is not to imply that there are no differences amongst the regulars, or that the line between regulars and newcomers is clear and fixed. Indeed, I have observed several newcomers gradually develop into recognized regulars during my time at the park, often through a combination of steady participation and agreeable behavior. It is only to argue that for newcomers, the notion of "regulars" and the ensuing power relations become socially experienced through these early field interactions.

As hypothesized by Collins (2000:26-27), the more invisible or informal a social gathering—a pickup soccer game in a public park being a good example—"the more effort needs to be put into making them emotionally intense, if they are to be experienced as having much effect upon feelings of social position." In that regard, as us/them distinctions are not necessarily self-evident or acceptable to the involved parties, these subtle and overt interaction rituals help publically distinguish insiders from outsiders. Indeed, an indispensable step in establishing social control is clearly differentiating and confirming the status hierarchy among previously undifferentiated individuals, as soft as the edges may be.

At the field, this tension is recurrent and serious in that the group has no formal, externally supported identity or claims on the open facility. Thus, in the face of competing interests and uncertain authority, maintaining distinct boundaries between deserving and

undeserving participants is both essential and less formally manageable. While dynamic and fluid, the everyday creation and negotiation of social distinctions through these practices communicates the presence of a collective unit and presumptive rights of control to unsuspecting newcomers drawn to the public facility and informal sporting activity.

Creating and enforcing field-based inequalities

The making and enforcement of unequal "player preferences" represents a second way in which use of the public field is differentiated and controlled. Stratified power relations on the open field are most directly expressed to newcomers by the preferential playing queue established through the public distribution of jerseys. As an additional and often unexpected border confronted by newcomers, this process signals a local system of organization and serves as a valuable material and symbolic resource in creating and sustaining the status structure. As there are usually well over ten players waiting to be included in a subsequent team, decisions and debates about the playing queue are frequent and become key “staging areas” to implement and enforce social order and hierarchies on the field (Anderson 1999). Indeed, the “right to use” the public field takes its most pressing form in waiting to play.

At this field, participation is contingent upon receiving a jersey, an incontrovertible object, and inquiring newcomers are often told that they need to “get a jersey” to play. The instruction is clear, providing regulars with a ready response for newcomers and a way to identify themselves as sanctioned participants. But for the newcomer, just how to "get a jersey" is far from self-evident. The regulars' initial unhelpful replies reiterate newcomers’ unfamiliarity with field proceedings and presence on foreign ground, a distinction materially represented by those with and without jerseys.

Because newcomers are initially ignored upon arrival, it requires active work on their part to decipher the system and make themselves known as potential players, an especially unaccommodating and intimidating situation for non-Spanish speakers. Moreover, like the participants' presence in and around the field the jerseys, whether worn or hanging from the fence, independently accomplish important preliminary and anticipatory work in establishing claims on the public facility (Paperman 2003). Operating as a "language of space" (Hall 1959), newcomers read the jerseys, like a draped coat on a "reserved" library seat (Sommer and Becker 1969), to indicate expectations, and understand that they must either fit in or mount a battle to get access to a team through the jerseys. As one newcomer explained to me, "I knew I couldn't go on the field without a jersey but it wasn't really clear how to get one."

While only so many people can play at a time, the partiality of the playing queue also signals a power differential and in-group dynamic. That is, the games do not operate on a strictly first come, first serve basis as regulars are often given preference over newcomers—a violation of a commonplace moral expectation to which I later return. While most players eventually get to play, deliberate rituals of selection help establish and confirm regulars' power and autonomy and newcomers' dependence and subordination (Schwartz 1975). Indeed, the jerseys are powerfully and deliberately yielded and withdrawn to materially and symbolically distinguish insiders from outsiders at the park. In fact, newcomers are often reprimanded for taking or passing out jerseys without consent, as seen in the following data passage:

> A newcomer attempts to gain entry into the games by seizing a lone jersey hanging from the fence. Polo confronts the young Latino male and asks in Spanish: "Where did you get that jersey?" When he replies that he took it from the fence, Polo assertively responds, "You can't just take a jersey!" With a confused look, the newcomer replies back in Spanish, "I thought I could take it," to which another regular retorts in English, "No, you can't just take a jersey here, you have to respect our rules if you want to play here."

Jerseys are also tactically withheld and dispensed to sanction “disobedience” and reinforce social hierarchies. For example, after a newcomer gets into a fight on the field, he is blatantly passed over in a following game. Oftentimes, inequitable distribution of jerseys occurs for less apparent reasons, such as when newcomers fail to actively defer to regulars on or off the field. For example, when I asked Robert to offer his account of why Alex, a new and skillful participant from Brazil, appeared to wait longer for a jersey than others, he replied: “He thinks he’s all that, like he’s better than us,” adding, “he should have to wait.” Reflective of their symbolic power, players often measure their status and incorporation in regards to when and how they receive a jersey.

In addition, while the games generally follow standard soccer rules, which are enforced by a Polo-appointed referee, there are a series of park-specific regulations, such as no offsides, rapid restarts, and punted goal kicks. More generally, the games adhere to a structured system of play, including regulation-size teams—plus the occasional "extra"—the use of yellow and red cards, 15 minute matches, and a transition period in which the winning team remains on the field or both teams exit if there's a tie. The aforementioned "extra" referring to park veterans who bring their own matching uniforms, rather than taking limited spots from more able-bodied players in the competitive contests. Like the jerseys, these strategic rules and routines facilitate a more ordered and satisfying game. For example, running the games without the tricky “offsides call” avoids arguments and delays, permitting nonstandard play, such as rapid restarts, punted goal kicks, and irregular throw-ins; increases action on the field; and the rotation system raises the stakes while providing more opportunities to participate.

According to longtime participants, prior games on the dirt field did not require jerseys, referees, or timed matches because “everyone knew everybody.” Moreover, with far fewer

players and a more informal playing space, there was no waiting period as participants would simply “jump in and play” when they arrived. As a result, some games were played with well over 11 players per team. However, this system became unmanageable and ineffective on the renovated field, and a new social order was required to meet transformed playing conditions and player demands.

In other contexts, banning nonregulars could have provided a means of monopolizing use while a system treating all participants as equal (i.e. first come, first serve) would erase any ambiguity in the playing order. However, given the public nature of this scarce resource and regulars’ commitment to the status hierarchy—including favorable access to the field—a more negotiated order was required (Strauss 1978). Regulars achieve that objective by presenting the games as if they were fixed and intrinsic to this particular field, a constructed reality that newcomers absorb, accepting the jerseys and game regulations as the ticket for entry.

Not only do these particular rules and routines reflect considerable local organization, but they also become additional attributes to assert and defend when challenged by newcomers. For example, frequent complaints about biased decisions or the lack of offsides are abrasively responded to with such comments as “that’s how *we* do it here” and “if you don’t like it *you* don’t have to play here." Even the smallest of suggestions can receive hostility, signaling that this “game” is to be taken “seriously”:

> The team’s goalie, who I did not recognize, started yelling before kickoff that he wanted to change the game ball. He felt that it was lopsided. The referee overheard the request and yelled: “What do you want?” Before the goalie had finished explaining himself, he responded, “Who are you? Keep your mouth shut! If you don’t like it then get out of here!” The newcomer reacted with perplexed silence, until mumbling aloud: “Man these guys take this seriously.”

Even more, unskilled newcomers often face ridicule and criticism for their field mishaps, and their more skillful counterparts receive a period of unfriendly socialization. For example,

when a newcomer, a white male wearing an Italian national team jersey, missed a wide-open goal, several spectators playfully screamed, “Go back to Italy!” whereas a skillful newcomer from Morocco was chastised by his teammate for “not passing the ball,” despite scoring a spectacular goal. Sometimes, Polo will interrupt a live game to castigate a player for "offensive" behavior, such as a “hard” tackle. Certainly, this is not to argue that there is never conflict or disagreement among regulars, as verbal and physical fights are common. However, they do not take on the seemingly arbitrary or unjust nature of adverse regular-newcomer relations.

These excessive outbursts directed at newcomer “violations,” as innocent or inconsequential as the latter may appear, serve important functions in the demarcation and defense of indigenous order and control over the visible and attractive public field. That is, by aggressively disciplining seemingly innocuous and trivial actions, regulars signal to newcomers that they have entered claimed and controlled territory where participation is contingent upon appropriate conduct. Like the preferential playing queue, such symbolic displays of aggression by unfamiliar persons breach newcomers’ expectations of a public park and pickup-sport behavior (Garfinkel 1967).[17]

Most newcomers express a mixture of confusion, surprise, and discomfort toward such interactions with regulars. However, like men who breach norms of civil inattention when interacting with unfamiliar women in public (Duneier and Molotch 1999; Gardner 1995), there is the sense that newcomers “gotta deal with it” if they wish to participate. In fact, many newcomers understand and experience the interaction order as a rite of passage. For example,

[17] The expectation being that if germane social characteristics correspond, prospective players can confidently approach a pickup game in public or quasi-public space (i.e., a private gym) with the anticipation of eventual participation. Certainly, as my study shows, this “general expectation” is often imaginary, and I expect that most pickup games present varying forms and degrees of social closure, not to mention distinct levels and styles of play and interaction. Nonetheless, it remains a powerful and unique motivation in propelling individuals to enter unfamiliar social gatherings in hopes of participating in a shared practice—in this case, soccer.

after being repeatedly passed over in the playing queue Dan, a white male in his late twenties, explained to me, “I get it, you’ve got to put your time in.” Several newcomers have also equated unfavorable treatment to “hazing” rituals.

In her foundational study of “home territory” in public accommodations, Cavan (1963: 27) writes of how members of the “Hangout” define and defend “their” bar by greeting unwelcomed newcomers with a “parody of deference” that breaches the interaction rules and expectations of “polite society,” thereby making their visit startling and unpleasant. In Anderson’s (1978) study, regular patrons of Jelly's tavern receive strangers with an inquisitive mixture of silence and suspicion. In other cases, more physical and violent forms of “turf defense” are employed (Anderson 1999; Horowitz 1983; Suttles 1968).

At the park, expectations of an informal, impartial, and relaxed pickup game are breached by an organized and inequitable system and forceful demands for compliance and deference to an indigenous social order. As I have demonstrated, this is established through initial disregard and subsequent biased treatment and collective reprisals to field “violations." As with the deliberate and calculated behaviors described in these studies, there is nothing effortless or inadvertent about the order of this social world. Indeed, given the competing interests in controlling the sought-after field and the uncertain power of all concerned parties, regulars are pressed to implement and sustain social order through these commanding measures.

However, the many explicit and tacit rules and routines vigorously defined and defended in relation to newcomers are just as easily defied by established regulars. More generally, regulars will make very public showings of displeasure if they feel that they have been unfairly positioned in the playing queue. While similar responses by newcomers are forcefully rejected, some sort of accommodation is reached with regulars, often at the expense of a nonregular. Even

more, the extent to which a participant can challenge or reinterpret park norms without recourse reflects their degree of status at the field and reminds everyone of "who is who" at the games.

Of course, this focus on leadership and conflict overlooks the processes of building collective ties and sustaining group culture, and how the games fit into the men's everyday lives. The fluidity and meaning of group life does not, however, contradict how the men collectively take control of a space that is legally defined as public. Specifically, control over who plays, when they play, and how they get to play represents regulars' most potent resource in exercising power in and around the field. In turn, points of conflict generally center on a more manageable and less threatening debate over the makeup of the teams and organization of the games, rather than over exclusive rights to use the public field.

Exercising authority and managing third parties

A third way in which play is sustained at the park is through the anticipation and management of external challenges (Britton 2008). In addition to managing the steady arrival of newcomers, regulars also imagine and confront local opposition to and bureaucratic threats on their use of the field. Since the new field was installed, an increase in adult play has been met with expressions of local resistance, support, and ambivalence. For some nearby residents, the new field led to "dramatic changes in the nature of the park and our neighborhood," including the correlated increase in noise, traffic, trash, crime, and alcohol and drug use.[18]

While this ongoing debate extends the dilemmas of public park space to the local surroundings (see chapter five), here I am interested in how the players of the midday pickup

[18] This passage comes from the opening line of a flyer inviting local residents to attend a community meeting on the field. At this meeting and many others, local residents and city officials debated how best to mitigate these perceived concerns. After three years of negotiations, the city installed enclosed fencing around the field, which, to the surprise of the players, has had minimal impact on their use of the field during the midday hours, as it generally remains unlocked at this time. I examine these events in chapter five.

game respond to this contentious environment, especially as it is waged primarily away from the field and rarely intrudes on their daily use of the facility. In fact, bureaucratic interventions represent a more immediate external concern. While the field remains generally open during these weekday hours, it is occasionally permitted out to local schools and youth teams, thereby temporarily displacing the informal pickup game. Now an infrequent interruption, there is reasonable apprehension among the players that the field will be increasingly restricted to formal teams.

While primarily concerned with managing newcomers and recalcitrant participants, regulars anticipate being seen by others whom they do not contact directly or regularly, and respond to whatever vague or concrete notions they have about external challenges in a variety of ways. Specifically, game leaders attempt to ingratiate themselves with park officials, community organizations, and local residents by presenting themselves as respectable patrons of the field while simultaneously monitoring and policing objectionable behavior.

Select participants have deliberately interacted with third parties on several occasions. For example, over a dozen regulars attended several of the community meetings about the contested field held in the park gym. As the only Latino men in the audience, they clearly represented the players. At a smaller park meeting, Robert—a respected veteran of the pickup games and, unlike Polo, proficient in English—publicly voiced his frustration with the increase in permitted play: "I've been coming to this park for over 20 years and it's great that we have such a great field but it's hard when it's taken away from us. We're just asking for some leniency, we've been playing here a long time."

As with Robert's utilization of history and seniority to make his case, regulars frequently attempt to construct themselves as legitimate users of the field when interacting with third

parties. For example, in hopes of "getting on the books," Polo presented the park director with a copy of game rules[19] he had briefly printed and distributed on the field. At a Park Advisory Board meeting, several regulars informed the director of their voluntary purchase of nets for the goals and proposed a formal cleanup of the field to the board members, to which they received a grateful and appreciative response. To make sure the board knew of their efforts, they hand-delivered photographs of the event to the park office. More recently, a dozen regulars volunteered at a park festival and proudly wore official festival shirts as they folded tables and chairs. While surely motivated by multiple reasons, Barba's explanation to me was telling: "Now they'll see that we do more than just drink beer and play soccer here."

Players' interactions with third parties have not been limited to formal settings. In one of the most notable examples, after the vandalism of the nearby home of a notorious field opponent, Polo assembled a group of regulars to approach the home and offer to repaint the defaced walls. Although the offer was declined, Polo felt that "it was good that we did so she knows it wasn't us." In a memorable game interruption, several players rushed to the scene of a serious car crash on the street bordering the field to offer their assistance, and many see themselves as unofficial guardians of the park and protectors of park patrons.

Regulars simultaneously interact with third parties when monitoring and policing park behavior. For example, when a player briskly pulls out of the parking lot and squeals his car's tires, Polo confronts him the following day and publicly asserts: "You can't drive off like that. The neighbors see that and they are going to complain about us." Similarly, regulars will

[19] In addition to park-specific game rules, "Rules to Ensure an Enjoyable Time for All" included rules such as: "When there's a tied game, both teams go off if two teams are waiting" and the "Referee gives a yellow card with a three-minute penalty out for dangerous play," "Be a good sport and a good neighbor!" and "Please do not litter the park or its surrounding neighborhoods!"

reprimand players for fighting, littering, openly smoking marijuana and drinking beer, excessive noise, or harassing park visitors (especially women with young children) in and around the field.

In addition to hostile neighbor interventions, Polo and others will also invoke the threat of park or police involvement, and its implications for their continued use of the field, when exercising authority. For example, when Tico attempts to explain his participation in a recent physical altercation, Polo unsympathetically retorts, "I don't care what happened, we can't have them [pointing to the park office] or the police messing with us; you want to keep playing here, right?"

Like the squealing car example, appearance management extends beyond the field to other areas of the park, such as the adjacent picnic tables and parking lot, frequent sites of drinking, smoking, and gambling. In fact, Polo attempts to disassociate the soccer matches from any "objectionable" park behavior, one of the reasons why he prohibits players from wearing game jerseys away from the field. Opposition by neighbors in turn supports Polo's authority in that participants understand that they need someone in control or they may be kicked out.

Polo publicly expressed his appreciation for perceived neighborhood concerns on a large banner he temporarily affixed to the bleachers. The banner read, in Spanish and English: "Help us show a friendly appearance" and "Don't cause problems by offending people and try not to bother the neighbors with a lot of noise and scandal." Similarly, the capitalized line "BE A GOOD SPORT AND GOOD NEIGHBOR" was prominently typed on the list of distributed game rules, also written in both languages. When someone joked that they might want to include the stars and stripes alongside a large Mexican flag because the neighbors would fear that they were "being invaded" during an impromptu holiday tournament, one of the regulars hurried home and returned with a U.S. flag.

On a more everyday basis, players always make room for park users walking or jogging around the field; and, on the rare occasion that a non-participant lingers to watch the games, they typically quiet down and conceal any inappropriate activity. Daily cleanups and material investments, such as purchasing nets and jerseys, further demonstrate regulars' dedication to the field and concern with local appearances. Indeed, as their contested use of the field does not *currently* require official authorization, these efforts are best understood as strategic attempts to publicize and formalize their care and consideration for a neighborhood to which they maintain no formal association.

In addition to maintaining the field and managing player conduct, regulars also celebrate and display the "social good" their presence provides. For example, Polo makes a deliberate point of instantly incorporating the occasional woman or young child in the games because "it looks good if they're out here." Polo was especially proud when he recounted to me that a local resident, a middle-aged white man, had recently inquired about participating in the games. More generally, regulars have argued in community gatherings and daily conversations that the organized games make the park more safe and enjoyable. While hard to verify, regulars even take credit for "keeping the gangs out of the park" through their consistent and vigilant presence, telling of several violent and mythologized confrontations. For certain, their readiness to assist strangers in need, such as the car crash example, has been demonstrated to me several times.

Thus, whereas neighbors claim the park as an extension of their backyards ("our," "local," and "neighborhood" frequent descriptions of the park in circulating fliers and in my interviews with local residents regarding field problems), regulars highlight their "productive" and long-term use of the field in an attempt to legitimate their precarious control. Of course, there is a dialectical tension in the back-and-forth between players and residents: neighborhood

opposition fuels integration and organization on the field, which then increases local anxiety. For example, while jerseys help prevent disorder and conflict on the field, to the apparent benefit of all park users and neighbors, they also make the games more visible, permanent, and potentially threatening to nonparticipants.

Despite the rhetoric, a sizeable minority of regulars, including Polo, threaten the status of the games by regularly partaking in illegal park behavior, such as littering, drinking beer, smoking marijuana, and gambling, and they normalize such conduct as typical of and unavoidable in urban parks. Attempts at concealment and moderation are possibly more motivated by fear of receiving costly alcohol citations than by concern with upsetting the neighbors' moral sensibilities. In fact, many of the players privately express incredulity and resentment toward what is perceived as "excessive" neighborhood objections. Moreover, for many, drinking beer and smoking marijuana is a central appeal of group life at the park. At the same time, neighbors' objections, while triggered by the new field, reflect broader concerns with the changing "nature" of the park and region, which—like the men's physical appearance—is well beyond the players' control.

Also, despite their occasional appearance at community meetings, the men are for the most part not involved in the making and debating of park policy. For example, men from the midday games appeared at only four of the 42 park-related meetings I attended and none served on the various committees established to deal with field issues. According to the men, feelings of discomfort in these settings—which involved primarily upper-class whites from the neighborhood—and a lack of time and interest accounted for their absence. Indeed, many perceived their attendance at community meetings as a "waste of time." Jokes about "la migra" (immigration enforcement) showing up may have also dissuaded those without legal

documentation from participating. Feelings of marginality and vulnerability in turn keep the men from actively intervening in community debates about the field, even as they vigorously attempt to control action on the field.

Nonetheless, their increased involvement with local third parties as respectable field patrons, whether through direct interaction or when policing field behavior, represent additional strategies employed by the regulars to sustain what they recognize as tenuous claims on the contested field. The contradictions between the regulars' control of the game and their need to negotiate relationships beyond the field is also revealing of how categories of insider and outsider operate and change in public life.

Challenges and limitations in controlling public space

During my time in the park, regulars have been remarkably successful in their efforts to claim and control the public field. While this is not to argue that they transform the meaning or function of the space, from preferentially distributing admission onto the field, enforcing park-specific rules and routines, and ingratiating themselves with local third parties, regulars generally control field proceedings during these midday games. The daily organization of play described in the previous sections is certainly a testament to this everyday achievement.

Not all newcomers or outsiders, however, accept the interaction order at the field. In fact, responses vary along a wide continuum from passive compliance to aggressive defiance. During my time in the park, as more and more people come to the new field, the veterans' control over the midday games has been increasingly threatened. For example, newcomers challenge exclusive claims on the field by citing its "public character," as exemplified by such rejoinders as "I pay taxes," "I have equal rights to this field," and "You don't own the park." Others specifically contest the legitimacy of regulars' unsanctioned authority at the public facility,

signaling Polo out with various appellations, such as “dictator” and a “nobody.” Many dispute the hypocrisy of the in-game decisions and criticisms and argue on moral grounds that the regulars should not play favorites in sporting contests.

It is the preferential playing queue, however, that produces the most confusion and contempt. Indeed, it is through dramatic and at times violent conflicts over the playing order that regulars and newcomers most frequently and ardently establish and contest social control and status hierarchies at the park (Simmel 1955). While most newcomers appear to wait their turn as they make themselves known as worthy participants, objections are consistently expressed, and it is in these recurrent troubles that we can better appreciate the uneven stability of social order at the park (Emerson 2009). In fact, just as local rules and routines serve as something to publicly enforce and defend for regulars, they also represent something for newcomers to openly defy and disrespect. The following two examples demonstrate opposite ends of the wide spectrum of protest I have observed at the field over the playing queue, although both are in response to thwarted expectations for open and equitable access to the public facility:

> A newcomer arrives with a female companion. After Polo tells him he’d have to wait, he retreats to the sidelines with his spectator friend. During the changeover for the following game, she pulls on his shirt and quietly asks, “Why aren’t you playing? You got here way before that guy and I know they don’t have a permit.” In response, the newcomer shrugs his shoulders and proceeds to wait his turn.
>
> A heated argument breaks out between two prospective players over who should receive the last jersey. Exchanging tough words, the two of them engage in a literal tug-of-war over the jersey. During the tussle, one, who had begun playing the previous week, pleads, “Come on, I have the right to play, this is not your park,” to which the other, a skillful regular, responds, “You just started playing here, you have to wait your turn.”

In these disputes, the “publicness” of the field serves competing interests and creates opposing contexts of negotiation (Strauss 1978). Indeed, as represented by the legitimacy *and* illegitimacy of claims and counterclaims on the public facility, this everyday dilemma strikes at

the core of the tensions structuring public space. While in the preceding sections it validated "open" use and precluded external interference, for disgruntled participants it represents the illegitimacy of exclusive claims and closed ownership. Indeed, newcomer dissatisfaction is largely in response to regulars' attempts at exclusively claiming and controlling the field. As public space "belongs" to everybody yet nobody, this tension is recurrent and not easily resolved, especially for public facilities like the soccer field that are accessible and in demand. While in-group dynamics are present in any instance of collective association, its interface with the use of a public resource helps explain the particular vulnerability of this small group setting.

While regulars make and enforce claims on the field, newcomers are able to challenge regulars' absolute control over field proceedings. For example, I have witnessed Polo capitulate to a newcomer's objections over a referee's decision or the preferential playing queue. At the same time, skill and physicality, while a source of resentment and recourse, can also represent a powerful challenge to regulars' supremacy; and the "winner-stays" structure allows for newcomers and outsiders to independently affect the playing order once they obtain a jersey. With the high-quality field and organized game attracting more and more talented players, regulars' ability to assert influence on the field is becoming increasingly difficult under current playing conditions, especially for the older participants.

Accordingly, notwithstanding a few mythologized incidents, regulars rarely bar newcomer entrance outright or claim formal rights to the field, and there is a constant renegotiation of what appropriate game behavior is and who is deserving of special treatment. For these reasons, expressions of power and deference should not be regarded as zero-sum interactions at the park, for even when faced with intense discomfort and disrespect, newcomers ultimately receive an opportunity to play and exhibit their own forms of influence on and off the

field. Reflecting the fuzziness and malleability of group boundaries, I have also observed the gradual transformation of several embattled and obstinate newcomers into respected and devoted regulars.

As has become increasingly clear, regulars recognize the limits of their power and the vulnerability of their control over the open facility, an increasingly valued and scarce resource in the region. For example, in discussing the difficulties of incorporating defiant newcomers, Polo disclosed that the regulars want to "fight them but I tell them that we can't risk losing the field if the police are called." In addition, Polo and regulars occasionally demonstrate exasperation and fatigue when responding to and discussing the surveillance and incorporation of newcomers, which they claim was not an issue when the playing surface was dirt. Indeed, these old timers typically point to the arrival of the new field as the principal source of current problems. As Polo has explained to me several times, "I get so tired of organizing the games but somebody has to do it," a sentiment confirmed by many other regulars.

While regulars acquire status and self-worth in controlling the games, negotiating daily insubordination represents a significant cost, as expressed by their reluctance to confront every challenge and periodic frustration with administrating the games. Also, as many participants have made work and family arrangements to play at the park at this irregular time, there is collective pressure to avert or resolve extended disputes that take precious minutes away from their limited leisure hours. However, by not responding forcefully, regulars' authority would be severely threatened. In fact, Polo's position of leadership involves an assumed responsibility that, if left unmet, would weaken his control and open him up to opposition. More problematic, like the dialectical nature of escalating player-neighbor relations, whereas game leaders consider organizational and material improvements as solidifying their authority, for many newcomers,

these measures make the games more predictable and attractive. Regulars' authority is thus simultaneously strengthened *and* weakened by their organization of good games on the first-rate facility.

While the regulars continue to control the daily games through the processes described in this paper, the inability and unwillingness to completely regulate the entrance and behavior of all newcomers or manage external perceptions of all participants reveals the limitations and liabilities of unsanctioned claims on public space. Indeed, the field's open condition and social location accounts for the volatile potential for order and disorder during the games.

Conclusion

Studies of territoriality are frequently set in public places, and for good reason, as the "publicness" of these spaces produces an interaction of competing claims and conflicting interests. As studies show, the "public" in public space is a highly contested category, which is why saying that a space belongs to the people does not really tell us who uses it and under what conditions. Certainly, previous research has effectively demonstrated the independent force and vitality of territorial behavior and spatial practices in dynamically reordering the use and operation of public space.

In fact, while authorities and their supporters have tried to organize how parks are used through how they are designed and operated, park patrons have historically used and appropriated them in entirely different and insurgent ways (Mitchell 1995; Rosenzweig 1983). Thus, while power is not equally shared, the public character of parks can serve different and contradictory purposes when invoked by competing groups, and provides openings and obstacles for the most powerful and powerless of groups. Indeed, who and what belongs in public parks is often a matter of dispute and negotiation.

Building on this important work, this chapter examines how a particular group of individuals claim and control a sought-after and contested public soccer field. However, in contrast to previous studies that took the stability, viability, and visibility of groups and their claims as given, this study examines how multiple group boundaries and behavioral norms become constructed and taken-for-granted in working out the use and control of public space. In fact, as most parties agree that the field should be used for soccer, it is not so much territorial control that is at stake but who can join and under what terms. This study in turn shows the need for more nuanced considerations of the degrees and intensity of territorial practices and, in particular, the underappreciated relationship between group dynamics and the ever-tenuous control of public space.

Focusing primarily on a longstanding group of soccer players at a city park, this chapter argues that claims on public space involves not only the delineation of borders and management of intrusion but the intertwined construction and maintenance of group boundaries and local order. Control is premised on creating and sustaining meaningful distinctions between insiders and outsiders—boundaries that are far from self-evident in informal gatherings—and enforcing informal authority, which is inherently uncertain in public space, especially for stigmatized groups with no formal association to the area. For certain, the vulnerabilities of the setting and the men's marginalized standing demand such strategic and deliberate action.

By clarifying how public space is claimed in one social setting, this study attempts to offer the conceptual framework for a revamped analysis of territoriality across a wider realm. For example, a similar approach could be applied to the time-honored study of "hangouts" and protest movements in public places and burgeoning research on day laborer sites and homeless camps. In addition, as what may be taken for granted in one group may appear strange and out of

place in the other, comparing ways of controlling public space across social groups and settings could also prove worthwhile. That the "foreignness" of the players and social location of the field likely makes the game more vulnerable than others certainly supports the need for comparative research, including attention to the fluidity and flexibility of insider/outsider relationships. Moreover, this study shows the need for greater consideration of how macro-level changes to the physical landscape create the conditions for micro-level challenges and everyday negotiations.

As Latino soccer populations outgrow and out-sustain other park-user populations, the potential for conflict promises to remain a pressing issue in urban parks. Indeed, public parks represent grounds for testing whether and how societies can work out relations across divides routinely managed smoothly, without apparent tension, through the geographic segregation that private property rights make possible. By focusing on techniques of sustaining presumptive use, and not as a study of the problems of immigrants and immigration, this paper reverses, in part, the standard story of minorities and the undocumented as subjugated and powerless. More generally, by showing the conflict among middle-class white homeowners and Latino soccer players that we may expect, as well as intra-ethnic tensions on the field itself, this study reveals the more generic basis of conflict in and over public space.

Thus, rather than “pathological” and particular, we should explore the more “universal” and everyday roots of these recurrent conflicts. Indeed, a city defines itself in how it works out these conflicts and multiplicities of social meanings, not by whether it has them or not. Of course, by focusing on Latino immigrant men, who have been generally overlooked in research on territoriality, this study sheds important light on their public place and practices in contemporary Los Angeles. The fact that Latinos, a recent immigrant group, make claims over

this space is revealing, and may signal a changing tide of informal power dynamics and contestations of ethnic identification in public parks.

In the face of uncertain expectations and competing interests—including those of newcomers, agitated neighbors, and land-hungry teams—it remains unclear how long this particular group of men will retain midday control of the field. Indeed, the multiple challenges faced by the regulars demonstrate how the very accessibility of public parks engenders competing claims and conflicting interests and expectations. This developing story thus reflects the inherent challenges and opportunities in claiming park space and demonstrates how public territories are continually in a process of contestation and transformation in the contemporary city.

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The men's routine beer drinking in the public park presents similar possibilities and constraints. Specifically, it provides the men something compelling to do together, serving as a catalyst of interaction and network formation, but also creates a series of problems, internal and external to the group. In the next chapter the focus shifts from soccer to another central aspect of group life at the park: the communal drinking of beer. By detailing how the men drink beer in the park, the chapter uncovers the material and subjective reasons for why they do so, as opposed to lawfully at home or in bars.

Chapter Three
Drinking beer in the park

An afternoon drinking beer in the park

As is customary at this time of day, a small group of men are sitting at the picnic tables. The men were recounting the day's soccer matches in Spanish when Zapata walked over and, feigning confusion, asked: "Where are the beers?" He then quickly pulled out money from his pocket and proclaimed: "Here are my two dollars (dos pesitos)!" The guys laughed, Polo mocking Zapata for his paltry contribution, but slowly funds were unveiled for beers and given to Roberto, the de facto treasurer of many such gatherings.

Cejas and Polo also provided three dollars, and Raul was praised for his 5-dollar contribution. Three dollars short for an 18 pack of Modelo, the beer of choice at the park, Polo pressured Pasmado to contribute, who as usual sat quietly during collection time. When Pasmado, a periodically employed house painter, claimed insolvency, a frustrated Polo berated him for never having money, adding the proverbial park insult to "busca trabajo" (look for work). Roberto told Polo to calm down as their problems appeared to be solved: "Look, here comes Taco," who typically arrived around this time after his morning shift as an orderly at a nearby hospital.

Of benefit to the group, Taco was usually looking for an after-work beer and would normally contribute a few dollars to the cause. Roberto waved the handful of bills in his direction and, as expected, Taco provided the remaining three dollars. Mi Chavo, who had now joined the growing circle of anxious drinkers, was dispensed to buy the beer, biking the well travelled six blocks to the supermarket, a trek that usually earned him a beer or two.

When Mi Chavo returned, he placed the cold beers in an adjacent garbage can, which was where the men usually stored their illegal stash. Under Polo's control, the beers were distributed, including to several who had not contributed financially, like Mi Chavo. Also, two men who had earlier told me that they did not wish to drink, one because he was hung over, the other because he had wanted to look for work, accepted Polo's offer.

Polo eventually acknowledged Pasmado and grudgingly tossed him a beer, although not without again defaming his character. Asprilla, who had just joined the circle, and had also not put in any money, shouted over to Polo: "give me a beer my love (mi amor)." The guys whistled in appreciation as Polo pointed to the garbage can. Whereas Zapata expressed confusion upon joining the group, Asprilla entered seamlessly into a scene he had witnessed many times before.

Drinks in hand, the tempo and tenor of talk markedly intensified, especially when contrasted to earlier gaps in conversation. It was now difficult to be heard above the growing chatter as the men drank. A range of topics were discussed and stories retold, most centered on park life, some causing more disagreement and comedy than others. Who had made a bigger fool of themselves when celebrating Muneco's 42nd birthday a few nights before generated the most debate, Polo's fictitious sexual relationship with the burly Filimon the most laughs.

Polo kept the remaining beers "hidden," as did most of the others as they drank, be it by concealing the can under a shirt or transferring the beer into a plastic bottle. Most quickly drank from the can, crushing the empties and tossing the evidence to Roberto, also the day's designated recycler. A few of the guys made little attempt to conceal the can or their drinking, especially the more they consumed.

As soon as the beer arrived, Enrique quietly removed himself from the group. The previous week he was issued a drinking ticket by a police officer, even though he was not

drinking. With his pool cleaning route reduced to a half dozen homes, he could not afford another $185 drinking citation.

As the men debated the qualities of Chicarito, the latest Mexican soccer star, Motor, who was sitting on a picnic table a good 100 feet away, screamed out: "La jura, la chota!" The guys scrambled to hide the beer, and several darted away from the group. Sure enough, a police car appeared and entered the park.

There was dead silence as the men feigned innocence and pretended to ignore the passing cruiser, several of whom had full beers under their shirts. A few also had marijuana on them and it was well known that Morgan and Henry were on probation. Several of the men did not possess valid identification and there was no way to know how the police would respond if they interrogated them. There was also the threat that a known or forgotten offense would emerge when checking their records. To the men's relief, these questions would for the time being go unanswered as the cruiser drove slowly by without stopping.

Despite the scare and lingering threat, Polo distributed the remaining beers. In addition to those who directly requested a beer, Polo offered to those who did not ask but had made themselves a part of the group, which had grown to twelve, despite four who had left. As I had witnessed many times before, Polo and others made a point of offering to those who had a history of contributing money, especially after a few beers.

Asprilla, for example, was a known sponsor of the men's drinking, which helps explain his well received claim on a beer when he first arrived. Like other reliable benefactors, he regularly put in more than he took out, in this case, drinking one beer and handing over five dollars. In contrast, men like Pasmado rarely contributed financially but could usually rely on drinking at least a few beers at the park, if not many more. Also predictably, two men who had

earlier told me that they did not wish to drink, one because he was "crudo," or hung over, the other because he had wanted to look for work, spent the afternoon drinking in the park. Tio eventually left to pick up his daughter from school, but only after drinking two beers and providing the humor and hullabaloo Roberto and others expected.

As Polo opened his third beer, Martín urged him to slow down as his evening restaurant shift was approaching. Polo brushed off the advice reminding Martín that he always drank before work. He then added that he would discreetly chew some fresh ginger if the manager approached. I asked him why he did this and he explained that it masked the smell of alcohol. Roberto teasingly added: “And it sobers him up!”

Puma, a relative newcomer to the group, asked Polo where he worked. When Polo gave the name of a popular Santa Monica restaurant, Puma asked if he knew of any job openings. Polo said he would look into it. The following week Puma was hired as a lunchtime dishwasher, and made sure to publically thank Polo with a 12 pack of beer.

Conversation shifted to rounding up funds for the next purchase. Several newcomers, including Asprilla and another individual offered a "free" beer by Polo, put in money. Still short, Roberto looked around the park, until he noticed several dependable sources. He yelled over to Tico and made the park sign for drinking—the thumb and pinkly extended in a chugging motion. Tico enthusiastically mimicked the signal and walked over with a few dollars.

Polo pressured Martín to contribute, even though he was a well-known abstainer. Martín replied that he had to go home, and the usual jokes about his wife controlling him ensued. Titi stood up to leave, knowing he would soon be asked for money, claiming he had to finish a painting job. As he walked away, one of the guys yelled: "va pintar toilets," or go paint toilets, in

a mocking fashion, to which Titi predictably responded: "busca trabajo boracho (look for work drunk)."

Funds were eventually assembled for the next 18 pack. As with the first case, there was not a direct correlation between the dollar amount contributed and the amount of beer consumed, as some drank well below and over what was financially owed to them. The talk, laughter, and horseplay that accompanied the first case of beer also continued, despite well-known threats and potentially more pressing responsibilities.

Park beer drinking

Along with playing soccer, drinking beer is a central and unifying aspect of group life at the park. All of the men describe drinking alcohol as a culturally familiar practice rooted in past experiences, though some express private dislike of this traditional pastime. In talking about the towns and villages they left, the men frequently and fondly describe a setting, usually a central plaza, park, or field, that resembles what they have created in this West Los Angeles public park. Collective drinking, along with playing soccer, is a primary point of comparison.

David Halle's (1984) distinction between alcoholics and heavy drinkers, whereby the latter fulfill family and work responsibilities, loosely pertains to how the men differentiate drinking behaviors, although the analytic category "social drinker," referencing those who drink in moderate levels to participate in group life, also applies. Abstainers almost always point to prior problems with alcohol to explain their current sobriety, rather than a moral aversion.

Drinking sessions take many forms but are almost always social, whether it's between two men or twenty. Moreover, consumption can be confined to one beer or well over ten. Certainly, there is considerable diversity in the men's drinking practices and beliefs. The

centrality of beer drinking at the park, whatever the shape and size, however, makes it difficult for any of the men affiliated with the group to avoid or ignore.

While beer is the mood-altering substance of choice, the men drink other types of alcohol, such as wine and tequila, and many smoke marijuana at the park, a few using harder drugs, mostly cocaine, as well. I focus primarily on beer because of its prominence and because I am able to participate firsthand as a fellow drinker, whereas my knowledge of other substances is more secondhand. As with soccer, I have found that the experience of drinking cannot be adequately captured in interviews, it needs to be observed from up close and personal. Also similar to soccer, sharing a beer with the guys was initially a way to integrate myself but soon became a research focus in itself. The prominence of beer drinking was certainly difficult to ignore.

Migration scholars, such as Robert Smith (2006), have written about shared drinking as a mode of entry and trust with Latino men, but have yet to directly investigate the topic in the lives of their research subjects. Alcohol consumption, in fact, comes up repeatedly in research on Latino immigration—often presented as problematic—but usually referenced in passing and without special attention. In contrast to the considerable notice given to previous arrivals' drinking practices (Duis 1999; Kingsdale 1973; Powers 1998; Rosenzweig 1983), the drinking behaviors and beliefs of today's newcomers have received insufficient consideration, a gap in the migration literature this chapter hopes to address. While useful for understanding the particulars of the men's experiences in contemporary Los Angeles, this chapter also sheds light on the more universal relationship between beer drinking and the structure and requirements of social interaction.

The dilemmas and contradictions of park drinking

As suggested in the opening passage, alcohol can operate in conflicting ways at the park (Room 1984). Beer drinking brings the men together to socialize, build relationships, and exchange resources but also creates a series of problems. The troubles and obstacles the men create and face by drinking beer in a public park in fact intersect with the qualities and characteristics that render it an attractive and appealing place for them to collectively drink. For example, routine drinking may lubricate interactions, cement relations, and facilitate resource exchange, but can also lead to fights, police citations, and neglect of family and work obligations. Park drinking is risky and respectable.

In this chapter I attempt to explain the men's mixed experiences drinking in a public park within the context of their unfolding lives. In particular, it explores how drinking is socially organized, the material and symbolic role of beer in group interactions, and the meaning and significance of the park as a drinking site. By examining how and why the men consume at the park, this talk uncovers the practical demands and collective routines that help explain this seemingly paradoxical outcome, that is, why the men drink in the park when it is the source of so many problems. Along with this striking puzzle, I consider two additional questions in this chapter: Why do the men need to put themselves at risk to be together and what practical problems are they trying to solve by drinking beer in the park?

Problems brought about by park drinking

The police

Most notably, it is illegal to drink alcohol in Los Angeles public parks. Thus, when the men drink in the park they commit a crime, as opposed to drinking at home or in a bar. As people in public, they are vulnerable to arrest because what they do occurs in plain sight.

While the law against park drinking applies equally to everyone, I find that the men are subject to disproportionate police surveillance because of who they are and where they are drinking. Although hard to verify, I believe this is the result of two interrelated factors: the historical frequency of their drinking in this park makes it a well known "problem" for the police and other park users and the men's marked and stigmatized presence renders their drinking especially visible and problematic. Reticent police officers have informed me that they survey the park on periodic patrols—alcohol representing one of several concerns—and in response to direct calls from the public about men drinking in the park. A member of the park staff told me that they usually get one to two complaints a week from park users about alcohol consumption, which they relay to the police. In addition, the men have been cited for drinking by police officers, including those arriving undercover, initially brought to the park because of gangs and drugs, intermittent issues at the park.

Whatever the cause or form, the men are subject to periodic police patrols, including those that specifically target their drinking. In fact, it is rare to spend an entire day at the park without a police car slowly driving through the park, as described in the opening passage. In response, the men scramble to conceal the evidence and appear lawful. For example, the men will encourage fearful companions to stay put and keep talking or a soccer ball will be spontaneously kicked around. Unopened beers are also stashed in a nearby garbage can or in the trunk of a car.

In some instances, police officers get out of their car and interrogate the men. The officers will proceed to ask the men if they are drinking, claiming to have seen the men consuming or to having received complaints from the public. In almost all cases, at least one individual is cited for drinking, sometimes several more, and those that make a compelling case

are let go, but only after being cleared of any outstanding warrants and ordered to leave the park. The police demand identification from everyone suspected of drinking, which becomes an effective way to check backgrounds and instill fear.

As the men usually have time to discard the beer before the police arrive, and rarely admit to drinking, they are charged via reasonable cause or circumstantial evidence, such as a public complaint, nearby beer cans, drunken appearance, or officer claims of having seen the men drinking. Cited or not, all the men are subjected to tough talk and moral sermons about public drinking, whether expressed in English or Spanish by the officers, which, in addition to identity checks, can be terrifying and humiliating.

The presumption of drinking apparently provides warrant for the police to interrogate the men at any time, and I have observed this transpire many times when not a single person was drinking. Police interrogations, which sometimes include several patrol units, signal to other park users that the men are up to no good, regardless of their guilt or innocence. Over the course of my research, 42 men claim to have received at least one drinking ticket at this park, some several more, and one individual told me he has collected eight citations over a 25-year period. A long running joke at the park is that full group membership is not achieved until one receives a drinking ticket, a changed reception I can attest to after earning one myself.

The men of course recognize that drinking is illegal and, more importantly, a consistent cause of legal problems. In turn, this threat hovers over their drinking, be it when recalling memorable arrests or concealing beer cans and staying vigilant. Alertness is a communal activity at the park. As with Motor's warnings in the opening passage, I have heard men shout from the soccer field or call from cell phones to warn of police presence.

While arrest memories and group surveillance adds a degree of excitement and solidarity to the drinking, it also creates stress and discomfort. For certain, the men know the consequences of getting caught by the police, who can strike at any moment and entrap even the most lawful and vigilant. Most immediately, detainment leads to police harassment and a $185 misdemeanor citation, which presents its own financial and legal burdens. As a result of the cost or because of their unfamiliarity with the legal system, some of the men do not pay the bill, which leads to greater problems, including late fees and a warrant for their arrest. For example, I have witnessed two men brought into the station for outstanding payments for tickets received at the park. Another individual ended up paying close to $1,000 in late fees and court costs for a single drinking ticket. As such, the men generally encourage others to pay the ticket, whether or not they have grounds to contest it. For example, eight men have paid what they claim to be unwarranted drinking tickets.

Suspected alcohol consumption, which can ensnarl anyone deemed to be involved in the alleged crime, can lead to much more serious legal problems. Some of the men have a range of prior offenses, paid and unpaid, that can escalate the charges well beyond a $185 drinking citation. Morgan, for example, was sent back to jail for six months for violating his parole by drinking in the park. As with Morgan, there are several individuals with records that would create problems if detailed for drinking, whether it is unpaid child support or being suspected in a crime.

Sometimes records come as a surprise to the men, as in Valderama's case, who unexpectedly owed $500 in unpaid traffic tickets, which earned him a night in jail. In turn, there is the fear that something known or unknown may "pop up" when run through the system, which only intensifies the threat of being detained, which parallels Alice Goffman's (2009) recent work

on the experiences African American men have with the police but here in the added context of immigration.

In addition to the past, the police also find things in the course of the interrogation. For example, I have seen several men temporarily jailed for having small amounts of marijuana on them, when originally apprehended for drinking beer. I have also witnessed four men without proper identification brought into the police station for fingerprinting, although all were very intoxicated at the time of arrest.

While I do not know of anybody who has been deported after being detained at the park—most of the undocumented men are not taken to the station for identification—it is a possibility, especially if they were somehow implicated in a more serious crime or if the political climate were to change in Los Angeles, as we saw in Arizona and other states. Some men have expressed concern to me that drinking tickets may disrupt legalization proceedings.

That many of the men are in the United States illegally certainly complicates the proceedings, although most are able to establish their identities without being brought in for further questioning, whether or not they have a valid form of identification, such as a *matrícula consular*. My understanding is that the police are unwilling and unable to fully process the thousands of undocumented individuals they encounter committing relatively minor offenses. That said, the threat of deportation is always there, especially if a more serious crime were to be committed or suspected, or if they ran across an particularly obstinate police officer. As I show, fear and vigilance of the police plays an exciting and excruciating role in park drinking.

In one of the more gruesome events at the park, Caballo, an aptly nicknamed Honduran, was physically beaten by two police officers, who felt he was "disobeying orders." While the charges were eventually dropped, a severely bruised Caballo spent three nights in jail, missing

work and leaving his family worried and upset. Whereas Caballo has the legal right to live and work in the United States, if he did not and the charges stuck, which came to include assaulting a police officer, he may have been deported.

As in Caballo's case, drinking citations are sometimes issued to those who were not drinking, at least at the time of arrest. As the police usually arrive after the beers are stashed away there is rarely direct evidence of who was or was not drinking. Thus, police officers generally assume that those in proximity of the suspected drinking scene are guilty and issue tickets accordingly, although some men are able to talk their way out of a ticket. As a result, some men who were not drinking yet unable to move away in time or convince the officers of their innocence, are issued drinking tickets. That I have been able to talk myself out of a disproportionate amount of drinking tickets than darker skinned men with limited English, if not altogether ignored by the police, is revealing of how they construct guilt and innocence at the park.

While most drink without being cited, incorrect and biased citations are a known and infuriating outcome. The men's responses can sometimes lead to greater problems with the police, who appear unable or unwilling to draw distinctions amongst the Latino men they generalize as lawbreakers. The threat of the police in turn raises the stakes of socializing with those drinking, thereby making the park a legal risk for drinkers and non-drinkers alike.

Locals

Drinking in the park also opens the men up to public scrutiny, which can have more subtle consequences. To put it simply, Latino men drinking beer in this park is a stigmatized practice, which feeds into local fears about park life and broader demographic changes. As I detail in chapter five, the opening of a new soccer field precipitated a range of reactions and

responses, including attempts to curtail access and use. Local homeowners expressed concern over the changing nature of the park, including repeated reference to men drinking beer in and around the field. The men's drinking, along with other objections, was used to characterize and explain the park's descent into alleged disorder. Photographs of empty beer bottles in the park were especially common in circulating reports about field-related problems. By drinking in the park the men contribute to these concerns.

While they do their best to conceal their consumption and assuage anxieties, their marked visibility in the park makes this difficult. The men are visible both in the general sense that they are out in the open—as opposed to in a bar or at home—and the more specific sense that as recognizably working-class Latino men they embody the stigmatized outsider disparaged in community meetings and broader immigration debates. Outsider interpretations are also grounded in impressions taken from a distance as I rarely observed direct interaction between the men and other park users, especially whites.

Not only does this threaten their continued use of the park, but furthers the negative stereotypes that constrain relations between immigrants and established residents at this park and beyond. The park represents a powerful site and symbol wherein "native" residents confront and negotiate demographic and cultural changes. By exploring the material and subjective reasons for why the men drink in this public park, this chapter exposes an untold yet explosive dimension of newcomer settlement and reception experiences.

Intimates

Problems associated with drinking in the park are not limited to external threats. Drinking, especially in excessive quantities, is more likely to create problems internal to the group. Most notably, the men are much more prone to argue and disagree when drinking. While

a source of fun and excitement, it can also lead to trouble, be it hurt feelings, personal grudges, or violent altercations. Time and the cover of alcohol usually mends ruptured relationships, but not always. Moreover, a bloodied face or bruised hand can result in shame, medical costs, lost work, and frightened and enraged family members.

Many express regret over past fights, most claiming that they cannot control themselves when they drink. In fact, most have difficulty explaining what the fight was even about. Furthermore, like their dealings with the police, drunken brawls are well noticed by other park users and presumably foster negative views. Of course, it is these very consequences that make fights a source of entertainment and memories to be recounted and debated for many years. As Locksmith explained, a frequent park brawler introduced in the opening passage, fights are "part of the show." The men's tendency to argue and fight when drinking again shows the paradoxical potential of consuming alcohol at the park.

Park drinking, whether self-funded or facilitated by others, can result in additional health problems. At one extreme, there are a handful of men who are frequently intoxicated at the park. While these men would presumably find their fix elsewhere, "free" drinking at the park, which I explain shortly, certainly enables this addiction. Many problem drinkers have confided to me that they need to cut ties with the park if they ever hope to control their drinking. Others similarly explain that these men must leave the park to get clean, and for those that do leave, such as Mario who returned to Honduras or Tio who moved to Maryland, drinking is usually part of the explanation for their departure. Many of course doubted that they would leave as both seemed so dependent on the ready supply of alcohol and drugs at the park.

Most of the men appear to handle their consumption but can fall prey to its harmful effects. For certain, I have observed a lot of bad things happen at the park because of excessive

drinking, be it arrests, fights, lost money, accidents, missed appointments, or a horrible hangover. For some, drinking pushes them to use harder drugs, such as cocaine, which tends to compound problems. Visible drunks, be it through their comportment or appearance, also exacerbate local concerns about park disorder. Tension and fear is especially noticeable when the men stumble around the parking lot as patrons drive in and out of parking spaces.

The plethora of "beer guts" also shows the physical damage of consistent consumption. The men certainly recognize the health consequences of drinking, which becomes most evident when they mock a failed soccer play with "boracho" or "marijuanero," here in reference to known drinkers and marijuana smokers. It is also revealing that the men will frame their drinking in opposition to playing soccer or exercising. For example, the phrase "sacando las chelas," which roughly translates to sweating out beer, is often used to explain physical activity at the park. Of course, drinking a few beers after playing is also a favorite and respectable pastime at the park, which again shows the contradictory meaning and potential of soccer and drinking in the men's lives.

The ill effects of drinking sometimes extend beyond the park. For example, I know of four individuals who have received costly DUI tickets when returning home from the park, one person getting into an accident that could have killed him or someone else. Of course, men constantly drive over the legal limit from the park without incident, yet this does not negate the threat of arrest or accident. Whether by foot or in car, others have told stories of leaving the park drunk and getting mugged, beat up, or arrested. A favorite tale at the park is the story of Colichini, who needed two weeks to locate his truck he stationed near the park before an afternoon of heavy drinking. Jokes aside, Colichini lost work and faced an angry wife over this drunken mishap, not to mention several parking tickets.

I have also observed many men drinking in the park when they admit they could or should be working or looking for work. Being "crudo" (hung over) or "pedo" (drunk) can also be the cause of neglected work obligations. In fact, while the men frequently express love for the park, they also detest its unhealthy pull that purportedly keeps them from accomplishing other goals, usually work related. Exemplified by the persistent park insult: "busca trabajo," or look for work, the men recognize that spending hours in the park is not always the most productive way to spend their time. For example, when observing the men at work, they often speak dismissively of those that would prefer to spend their days drinking in the park.

At the same time, the men cherish a few beers after a well deserved day off or hard day's labor. In fact, the counter jab to someone leaving, as when telling Titi to "go paint toilets" or for Polo, a line cook, to "go heat up the soup" shows how drinking is sometimes favored over working. Indeed, many men are bid farewell or urged to leave by playfully demeaning their occupation. Moreover, the men are just as likely to crave a park beer when talking with them at work as they are to criticize the activity. For certain, park drinking can serve very different meanings for the men. That said, as a recognized space for social drinking it often pulls in those that have little reason to celebrate.

Park drinking can also create problems with family members. In fact, most of the men claim that their spouses detest the park and try to keep them away from it. As I suspect, they recognize the problematic potential of park drinking, which they experience through the men's absence or when stumbling home, wasting pay checks, getting arrested, or beat up. In fact, to the great amusement of others, some spouses come to collect their husbands at the park, whether by subtly parking their car at a distance or publically confronting them. Although such direct

contact in this male space is rare, I often see the men negotiating extended time over their cell phones and they frequently share with me the challenge of managing park life with their families.

While each relationship is unique, it is noteworthy that most speak of it as problematic when it comes to park drinking. In addition to spouses, the men often explain to me that a brother or cousin does not visit the park because of the drinking and drug use, usually adding that they are religious. That is, the park as a site for drinking is a well established fact in the men's social circles. On the other hand, family obligations can be an easy excuse to abstain from drinking or leave the park and source of differentiation from the men who are unattached. During my time in the park I witnessed several men grow to reject park drinking in favor of consuming at home. As in Moncho's case, this usually results from a nicer place and improved family dynamics.

The men also claim to avoid legal consumption in nearby "cantinas" in favor of illegal park drinking because of the problems encountered in such bars. In fact, "cantinas" are viewed by many of the men as disrespectable places because of backstage activity, such as drug dealing, gambling, and prostitution. More pressing, the mix of anonymous patrons, including those drawn for illegal interests, makes fights more likely and dangerous, according to the men. When I ask the men why they do not go to bars, they often describe a frightening confrontation with a stranger who brandished a knife or gun over a disagreement that quickly got out of hand.

While some men do frequent "cantinas," more for the music, privacy, and women not found at the park, most of the men prefer the park as a drinking site and view it as a safer and more respectable alternative. "Casitas," or underground bars known for prostitution and shady characters, are seen as especially dangerous, and disastrous tales of the few men who visit these establishments are bandied about as further evidence of the park's relative safety. It is also safe

to presume that the wives and girlfriends would prefer the men to drink in the park, despite the problems, than in “cantinas” and “casitas” where the threats are greater, especially infidelity.

That the men do not visit "mainstream" bars suggests that they consider their presence there as problematic as well, although for different reasons, namely financial and comfort wise. The men also do not consider drinking at home as a viable option, whether they are the principle resident or a boarder. The park in turn emerges as the most respectable and pleasing place to drink, a paradoxical and problematic outcome as neither the police nor neighbors see it this way, both wondering why the men do not drink legally in bars or at home.

While some men have chosen to altogether avoid the park because of the drinking, most are more strategic in circumventing potential problems, especially those that enjoy other aspects of the park, such as playing soccer or seeing friends. Thus, they may sit with a few guys casually drinking, even having one themselves, but leave once the crowd and noise grows. Moreover, many have spoken of avoiding known troublemakers. Some men also take a more active role in correcting problematic behavior or looking out for people who have over consumed. That said, full avoidance is the most effective strategy as the most well intentioned individuals have received drinking citations or become embroiled in a drunken conflict. The pull and appeal of the park, however, is very strong, which helps explain the consistent and sometimes problematic drinking.

Why then drink in the park?

Material reasons

Part of the explanation for why the men drink in the park is found in their material circumstances. Most significantly, the public park provides a free and appealing site to drink beer with others. While bars can present a similar appeal, the practice of collecting funds for store

bought beer makes it far more affordable.[20] Moreover, token participation can result in drinking well beyond one's exact financial contribution, and some consume without putting in any money.

At one level, the uneven relationship between what is put in and taken out is built on the norm of reciprocity that structures most resource exchanges, a practice well documented in low income and immigrant communities (Menjívar 2000; Stack 1974). At the park, this generally means that someone gives someone else a beer regardless of immediate financial compensation in the expectation that this "gift" will be repaid in time.

Most of the working-class men anticipate that at some point they will be on the other side of the exchange and expect to be reimbursed at their moment of need. While sometimes the repayments are direct, the treating of beer is usually inexact and more collectively oriented. There is a certain moral economy in the men's drinking in which who treats and is treated is bound more by group membership and social standing than precise monetary calculations. Thus, a public show of generosity can pay dividends at a later point, which gives men an incentive to publicize, if not exaggerate, their largesse and treat the right people.

The men's trust in future recompense is built upon years of interaction at the park, although the long-term equality in exchanges is far from certain and an occasional source of contention. For example, when Darwin repeatedly disclosed that he had contributed $50 to help pay for food and beer one Sunday afternoon, an exasperated Motor responded: “You should have put in $100 for all the times you drank and eat for free!”

As historians show (Duis 1999; Powers 1998), this treating tradition has a long and venerable lineage, although unlike bar studies, park drinking does not have the same round-buying dynamic. In fact, most men only frequent bars when they have money to participate

[20] For example, a 12 pack of Modelo, the beer of choice at the park, costs roughly $14 at a convenience store while one Modelo costs around $5 at the "cantinas" the men occasionally frequent. Moreover, they do not have to contend with potential threats from bar staff or other patrons in the conditional freedom, safety, and control of "their" park.

equally in treating exchanges, while at the park, lack of funds is not necessarily a deterrent. Indeed, unlike a commercial establishment, one can be at the park without consuming or with no disposable funds.

In addition, as most of the men live in crowded apartments with little outdoor space, the park provides a more practical and pleasing venue to socially drink than their places of residence, especially given the park's well-kept grounds and Southern California's agreeable climate. Furthermore, while family members may appreciate having their husbands, fathers, and brothers in sight, especially when drinking, fieldwork shows that neither side wants numerous drinkers in their place of residence. Most of the men also attempt to conceal their drinking from family members, as the latter generally find it problematic. For the bachelors amongst the group, many of whom share a small room with up to three other men, the park provides a similar draw.

As discussed, the park is also seen as a safer and more respectable place to drink than “cantinas” or “casitas,” even for those that could afford to drink there. Leaving aside the illegality of the practice for now, the intended purpose of parks also provides cover for what could be described as loitering or suspect in others settings, such as a shopping mall or parking lot. Even more, the challenges the men face in the park from the police and neighbors contributes to the relative security and decency of the park. A park with less police surveillance and concerned residents would presumably offer more freedom but potentially greater threats from other park users, a process of local abandonment in city parks that particularly troubled Jane Jacobs (1961). While always in flux and under threat, the balance between freedom and control at the park is generally manageable.

For these reasons, few of the men claim to drink in their place of residence, bars, or other public settings and point to the expectation of encountering drinking partners as a key appeal of

the park. Many of the men, in fact, tell me that they only drink in the park. A pleasant, publically accessible, and historical gathering spot, the park provides the men an appealing, convenient, and reliable place to drink. It is in *how* the men collectively drink, however, that we gain a fuller understanding of *why* they regularly drink in this public park.

Social reasons

Drinking is central to social life at the park, and far more than strategic maneuverings for "free" beers or purchased company. In fact, these outcomes are more the byproduct of the social significance of drinking at the park.

Most immediately, drinking beer, like playing soccer, serves as something to do at the park. The men spend hours and hours in the park, whether on a day off from work or over a long stretch of unemployment. As many of the men explain, if they are not working, they are usually in the park, rather than at their place of residence, although most return home by nightfall. Thus, they are faced with the challenge of staying entertained and engaged over extended periods of time, boredom and inaction being pressing threats. For certain, I have observed the men's frustration of languishing in a dull park, which often turns to anger over the limited work opportunities or unappealing home environments they feel consigns them to the park.

To put it simply, the men drink to be together, and drinking's social significance lies in the form of association that is achieved. Drinking beer, like playing soccer, serves as something to do at the park. Regardless of the circumstances that put them in the park, the men recognize that "doing something" and "being together" must be worked at and cannot be taken for granted. While the men occupy themselves through a range of activities, from sleeping to playing soccer, drinking beer is a favored and prominent leisure activity at the park, especially as it tends to enhance other pastimes, in particular, park banter.

The men appear to prefer drinking over other activities because of its physical and social effects. Most notably, drinking beer generally produces and sustains the sociable interactions the men seek. For certain, the tenor of talk and forms of sociability distinctly change as the men consume, and drinking instigates a series of scripts and dramas that can sustain beer-induced banter for hours, such as who's the best fighter or soccer player at the park, or most likely to be a "puto" (homosexual) or "hijo de Obama," meaning welfare recipient.

Moreover, most circulating park stories, such as a memorable fight, party, mishap, or arrest involved substantial drinking, and it is the unpredictable and eventful nature of alcohol consumption that explains its appeal. "Things happen" when the guys drink, it's newsmaking, even if these outcomes are sometimes disastrous. In fact, the shadow of the law and disapproving neighbors lends a special sense of excitement and solidarity to the proceedings. Doing deviant and risky things together binds the group and provides opportunities to test the limits of their new home, something the men can't necessarily do in other settings, such as at work or at home. Indeed, drinking in the park creates community by virtue of common vulnerability and the bonds that emerge from illegal practices.

Beer drinking also represents a straightforward and accessible way to participate in group life. As the men explain to me, they drink "para convivir," meaning that that they drink to partake in social interactions. Drinking thus orients the group around a common and accessible practice. Everyone, for the most part, can drink, while not everyone can play soccer or dance salsa. For those searching for affiliation and interaction, the park, through this drinking, offers relatively immediate contact and companionship, especially if they arrive with surplus beer and cash. In fact, many of the men have shared with me that before their introduction to the park, they had few friends in Los Angeles.

Like soccer, a shared interest in drinking beer can quickly transcend unfamiliarity or social awkwardness. For example, "do you want a beer" is an established gesture of goodwill and form of reception, as opposed to "do you want to talk," even though sharing a beer is more about facilitating relaxed conversation. Beer and invitations to drink serve as a convenient and recognizable way to welcome others into the group at the park.

That is, drinking sets up the interaction through which intimacy can follow. It frames and defines the situation in a way that makes sense to them, massaging or concealing concerns or emotions that may threaten or delay interaction. While maybe a superficial basis to meet and coexist, and certainly problematic, collective drinking goes a long way in connecting people and sustaining interactions at the park, whether between longtime friends or relative strangers. For example, I always felt more comfortable around the men during my first months at the park when beer was present as it helped explain my presence, which was presumably unclear or under suspicion.

The preference for drinking socially is made clear in the general disdain for consuming "alone," a practice the men describe as deviant and anti-social. For example, the epithet "*toma solo*" is expressed disparagingly to those that drink unaccompanied from a private stash at the park. Few men enjoy drinking alone, which in part explains why they come to the park and pressure others to participate, even if this means awarding "free" beer for continued companionship. While the men do not always encounter preferred drinking partners, there is usually someone willing to share an offered beer, and second-hand fieldwork has revealed a similar relationship between marijuana smokers. Individuals with limited leisure time, be it because of work schedules or family commitments, are especially likely to trade beer for friendship, and any loosely identified group member will generally suffice.

This is especially pronounced when the men have reason to "celebrate," be it a birthday, lucrative day at work, or simply a nice goal during the midday soccer games. For certain, the men's lives provide a variety of reasons to celebrate, even if commemorating the end of a particularly difficult day, and twenty or so dollars for beer represents a reasonable price for company and recognition.

In fact, there is tremendous disappointment when the desire to celebrate, backed up with a few twelve packs, does not materialize. For the most part, there are usually men willing and able to celebrate one's accomplishments and milestones, especially if beer is provided. With scores of affiliated men, it is rare for a week or two to go by without some sort of party at the park. Through these beer-infused celebrations, individual biographies are transformed into a moment of communal life and become tellable stories for the group, such as when the men recounted Muneco's 42nd birthday in the opening passage. My son, in fact, was born the day after a group of guys from the park organized a baby shower for my wife, a source of conversation for whenever I brought him to the park.

Drinking and getting drunk also offers opportunities to express one's "real self." By putting character at risk, it can reveal things about the self that usually are hidden, creating special knowledge that is only known to the group. A willingness to get drunk in the company of the men shows trust in oneself and the group in the most vulnerable of conditions. A reluctance to go under the effects of alcohol is sometimes read as suspect and can impede full integration.

As proven time and again, the men become much more affectionate and effusive when drinking, especially the more they consume. While this sometimes leads to tiresome exchanges, heated arguments, and violent confrontations, drunkenness usually results in good-humored banter and playful jostling. Through this play, the men express feelings for other men I rarely

hear or see when sober, although almost always qualified with a lighthearted insult. For example, when drinking, the men are more likely to refer to each other as "mi hermano," "mi hijo," or "mi chavo," only to modify these terms of kinship and friendship with good-natured insults, like “cabron,” “huevon,” or “puto.”

The effects of alcohol are also seen in the distinctive ways the men present themselves when drinking. Generally speaking, the men become much more boisterous, boastful, and revealing, although the forms this takes considerably varies. For example, the types of claims the men make, information they share, and insecurities they divulge are markedly different than when sober. As one illustration, it is very common to hear an older participant struggle to convince others, especially the younger generation, that he, despite current appearances, used to be a star soccer player. In contrast, those facing well-known personal troubles, such as unemployment or divorce, are more likely to address these setbacks, often in ways that explain or excuse them, when drinking. More generally, I observe a greater tendency amongst the men to lament failures or exaggerate successes, be it as fathers, lovers, soccer players, fighters, or workers, when under the influence of alcohol.

Much of what the men say is challenged and debated by others, which adds to the fun and excitement of drinking sessions. For example, several longstanding arguments are invariably repeated when the men drink, such as who is or isn't a good soccer player at the park or the respectability of a particular person or action. Furthermore, recurrent promises, be it to sponsor a park team or start a business in places of birth, are both voiced and rejected in drunken discourse. Problem drinking can also be the cause of censure and exclusion, such as from job referrals, showing the fine line the men must navigate to maintain their respectability. The intensification,

inversion, or relaxing of managed fronts in turn explains the significance of exposing oneself under the effects of alcohol.

Relationship and exchange reasons

Beer also represents a distinct material and symbolic resource in diverse exchange relations at the park, the photographs depicting work-related exchanges. For example, beers are often issued as compensation for past assistance or in anticipation of future help. This can be for anything from lending a hand with a stalled car, a job referral, intervention during a physical confrontation, or in anticipation of employment opportunities. The men are constantly exchanging resources at the park—this is the key way they make ends meet—and beer is often provided as payment or as a way to build and maintain productive relations. Sometimes the meaning of the exchange is overt, other times it is more subtle.

The ambiguity of beer exchanges also sets up character revelation, showing what type of person they are, especially important as the men's reputations are on the line when they refer each other for jobs. Many of the men, for example, have told me that they do not recommend Pasmado for painting jobs because he "can't even put in two dollars for beer," as one individual put it to me. Chino Julio, on the other hand, is viewed as a bad boss in part because he does not provide his workers with complementary beers after a day's work. On the other hand, the guys are reluctant to hire Mi Chavo because he's always "drunk" or "looking to get drunk." Through these observations the men make assumptions about each other as potential employees and bosses.

Establishing trust is a pressing concern for these men because, at its most fundamental, networking involves giving tips to people whose actions with others will affect their reputations. The men, however, do not have formal credentials, credit checks, or insurance policies at their

disposal. In place of formal methods, interactions around beer—such as who contributes, repays their debts, or handles their liquor—become local ways to measure and project creditworthiness.

Trading beers does not always carry this utilitarian quality, nor is it the only form of recompense—money sometimes preferred—but its frequent use shows how beer serves as a valued commodity in the broader exchange market at the park. Not only does beer drinking bring the men together to exchange, but as a form of payment collectively consumed, it keeps the men together to exchange again. At an even more basic level, park drinking plays a key function in bringing the men together and developing the types of relationships that lead to these exchanges.

Conclusion

Despite recurring problems, the men continue to drink in the park, often to unhealthy levels. In fact, the park, in contrast to bars or at home, emerges as the most respectable, convenient, and cost-effective place for the men to drink. While group life at the park could presumably function without alcohol, as things stand, drinking remains an essential ingredient narrating and framing group interactions. Even more indicative of beers centrality is its recurrent use as a valued commodity in diverse exchange relations and as a local measure of personal character. Thus, I find that the men drink to sustain group life, which, for better or worse, has provided the men with important friendships and resources.

While sharing important similarities with other drinking scenes, this is different than happy hour or backyard barbeques. Park drinking creates a series of problems for the men, which people drinking in commercial or private settings or less stigmatized people drinking in public spaces, such as students tailgating at a football game, do not face. Local residents and police officers certainly do not see the men's park drinking in these more familiar, socially acceptable forms. The illegality of beer drinking also distinguishes it from soccer. Playing soccer, while

maybe stigmatizing and problematic, does not criminalize the men as does their drinking, which can have serious consequences, problems even abstainers have trouble avoiding.

These findings also speak to the unique challenges these men confront as immigrants and foreigners. Along with the risks and obstacles that come out of the immigrant experience, such as those that put legality, credentials, and dignity under question, this chapter reveals a deeper meaning of what it means to be an immigrant. The men are creating a community in the park that they cannot take for granted. Park drinking, framed as risky and respectable, becomes one way the men create community, establish relationships, and learn about their new home. Only by understanding the rich meaning and organization of this social world, in all its complexity, can we appreciate what the men achieve and overcome when drinking beer in a public park.

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The upcoming chapter shows how relations developed at the park when playing soccer and drinking beer "matter" in a subsection of the men's work experiences. While these concrete outcomes may satisfy traditional sociological concerns, I continue to explore the various ways the men cultivate—or work—their connections, whether at the park or on the job. The chapter, in turn, focuses on the conditions and contingencies of the men's employment ties, paying special attention to how they intersect with park life.

Chapter Four
Working Connections

Work historically carried out by middle and some upper class homeowners, such as mowing the lawn and caring for children, is increasingly purchased (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009). Immigrants commonly do this work and are often employed "off the books." Changing migration patterns and socioeconomic conditions largely account for the seismic growth of paid employment in and around the household, although debate remains over the relative timing and influence of supply and demand pressures (Sassen 2000; Light 2006). The proliferation of employed nannies and gardeners, for example, is attributed to both the rise in dual-wage earning households and the availability and resourcefulness of low-cost immigrant laborers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001).

Whatever the precise cause or sequencing, there today exists a vibrant and competitive market for informal household labor in U.S. cities, positions filled primarily by undocumented Latino immigrants. Homeowners hire informal laborers as a way to keep costs down and because this sector has progressively replaced formal companies and regulated workers as a source of small-scale household labor. That government regulators largely ignore this work, such as via surprise inspections or permit enforcement, also helps it flourish. This shift in household production and consumption is well represented in research on domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Romero 1992). Those who provide other paid services, such as small-time construction, painting, renovation, and gardening jobs, are less understood.

Prospective employers and employees face challenges and opportunities when hiring and working in the informal economy. Homeowners, like any customer, seek to maximize quality and minimize costs, economic and social. Whereas companies in the formal economy, a painting

firm, for instance, are publically accessible and provide institutionalized credibility and legal recourse, they are often much more expensive than informal workers, often because of greater overhead, licensing fees, insurance costs, and mandated wages and benefits.

The anonymous day laborer, while potentially economical, is not only unknown as a worker beyond physical appearance but presents few safeguards to the client if things go wrong. Moreover, the prospect of selecting workers at a formal or informal hiring center and bringing them in and around one's home can be intimidating for even the most adventurous and confident homeowner. Clients face similar fears and uncertainties as day laborers when interacting with strangers in an unregulated labor market, be it over theft or negligence (Valenzuela 2003).

While formal companies and anonymous day laborers can and do meet homeowner demands, this paper explores a more intermediary position in the labor market. Specifically, workers who neither work in the formal economy nor interact with clients as complete strangers. In turn, they do not carry the heavy costs of a regulated company nor the stigma of anonymity when facing prospective clients. Homeowners increasingly turn to this sector of the labor market when attending to their various home improvement and maintenance needs.

These work arrangements and relationships, however, do not emerge automatically. Much is accomplished and overcome in bringing workers and clients together, groups typically separated by considerable social distance. Clear patterns and trends in the men's job placements are also evident. How men from the park secure "off the books" employment in the homes of middle to upper class clients is the focus of this chapter.

As detailed in the introduction, the answer to this question should be of little surprise to migration and labor scholars. The men obtain work through their social networks (Menjívar 2000; Waldinger and Lichter 2003). Social ties to workers and employers provide job

information and sponsorship, and also limit competition from those outside the network. Reciprocity and the importance of reputation generate trust in these exchanges over time. It is who the men know that helps them secure employment. This familiar network effect (Granovetter 1995), however, tells only part of the story.

In their devotion to studying the consequences of social ties—in this case employment—many researchers have taken for granted the active and contingent processes from which ties arise. Migrant networks remain essential but they emerge under changing and dynamic conditions (Mahler 1995). Social ties are not innocently "there" or passively reproduced but actively created and maintained by people who are well aware of the benefits that inhere in social relationships. Social networks, however, are not created equally or effortlessly. People face constraints and opportunities in forming social ties. Understanding people's connections—and how they generate advantages or disadvantages—requires understanding the contexts in which those connections are embedded and organized (Feld 1981; Small 2009).

In this chapter I examine how a subsection of men from the park cultivate and manage social relationships that lead to home improvement jobs. The men rely on interpersonal ties that pre-date their emigration, but also create new relationships as circumstances change and opportunities emerge. The men's employment ties are necessarily multiplex, an intertwined and shifting web of workers and employers.

The park and workplace represent key sites where the men form ties and expand their employment opportunities. The park brings together men who do similar work, the workplace deepening and initiating relations with clients. The exchange of referrals and production of "extras," or tasks added to the original labor agreement, serve as crucial mechanisms and processes structuring network and work outcomes. Referrals and "extras" are actively

constructed and negotiated by the men and their employers, to varying social and material gain. These outcomes help explain why the men take the jobs they do, as low pay and arduous as they initially appear. In many cases, the men create greater demand for their services over the course of a job or relationship, be it with clients or fellow workers. Exploring social and workplace dynamics, this chapter sheds new light on the contingencies of network formation in this burgeoning and precarious sector of the economy.

Settings and subjects

This chapter examines links between what goes on in the park and a subsection of the men's work experiences. Through my park-based relationships, I observed 13 men at work, some over the course of three years, others for a few days. In addition, five men from the park have served intermittently as "ayudantes," or paid helpers, on these jobs. In total, I observed and participated in 32 jobs. In 25 of these hires, a range of new tasks, or "extras," were added to the original labor agreement as the work progressed. Several of these expanded jobs lasted over two months.

While fortunes fluctuate, the men generally struggle to make ends meet in a competitive market for household work and frequently speak of financial hardship. Along with economic recession, the men often point to limits or gaps in their social networks, rather than personal deficiencies, as reason for their under-employment.

While the type of work I observed varied, they share several unifying characteristics. One, the men generally work directly for and are paid by the homeowner, rather than a third party, such as a contractor or decorator. The men describe this more favorable and lucrative job arrangement as "por mi cuenta." Many of the men have experience working for "companies" but prefer being self-employed, even if the work is more sporadic and uncertain. Two, if the job

requires additional workers, the men almost always hire known "ayudantes," often someone they are familiar with from the park, as opposed to anonymous workers encountered on the street. Three, the work is informal in that it is not regulated or reported to the state, although contracts are sometimes produced and wages paid with personal checks. I did not observe a single client openly inquire about the men's legal status when negotiating work and payment. Four, the work involves an overlap of manual labor and service work, in that clients generally spend some time observing and interacting with the men as they work (Clawson 2005). Five, household labor in this study brings together people who occupy distant social positions in physical and at times intimate proximity (Bearman 2005).

I followed the men at work primarily in West Los Angeles, a historically white and affluent part of the city. Occasionally the men serviced homes in the most exclusive sections of the Westside, such as Beverly Hills, Brentwood, and Malibu. More typically, the men worked for middle and upper-middle-class homeowners in and around Santa Monica, Venice, Pacific Palisades, and Culver City. The park is located near many of these job sites and serves as a requisite stopping point before, during, or after a day's labor.

The type of work varied, but generally involved home maintenance and improvement projects, including construction, painting, cleaning, gardening, and renovation jobs. The size and format also varied, be it small-scale, such as fixing a fence; large-scale, such as renovating a kitchen; long-term, such as weekly gardening or pool work; or repeat, such as repainting a bedroom. In many cases, the men have worked for clients over the course of several years, even decades, although I have observed initial and one-time encounters as well. Generally, work begins as small and provisionary, although can quickly develop into something more substantial and long term.

How the men secure work also varied but almost always involved some sort of referral, be it from a fellow worker, client, or a neighbor or passerby who sees them at work. Few of the men actively solicited work from strangers, via business cards or formal advertisements, and the helpers generally worked for someone they knew, rather than seeking work at day laborer centers. How the men cultivate and manage connections that lead to referrals and employment is the key question motivating this research.

Methodology

This chapter is based on three years of participant observation. In many cases, this involved working alongside the men, usually menial tasks I could complete, which helped me better appreciate the logic and challenges of their labor. At other times, I primarily observed the men, especially when interacting with clients. As a white, non-Latino male, my appearance was sometimes startling for clients, wherein I informed them that I was a graduate student studying the men. I also made it clear that I would not reveal their names or the location of their homes. At no point did a client ask me to leave, and several spoke to me, with the guarantee of anonymity, about their hiring practices and motivations. With their agreement, all of the workers are correctly identified, by proper first name or nickname.

In addition to workplace observations, I followed the men in a range of settings that helped shed light on their work experiences. This included riding along with them to and from work, locating and buying tools and supplies, or relaxing before or after a day's work, often at the park. As at work, this afforded me opportunities to casually discuss a range of topics related to their work. I constantly asked the men to discuss their employment, and the men—thanks in part to the monotony of work or traffic—usually indulged my queries. In addition to hours of casual talk on the job, when driving, or at the park, I conducted semi-structured interviews with

all of the men. The interviews have proven helpful in relating the men's work and migration histories with their present circumstances and future prospects. Working alongside and observing the men at work, however, was most useful in understanding their employment experiences. The park, of course, represented an illuminating social setting to observe the men generating work connections.

Findings

The findings are divided into three sections. The first examines how the men secure work, paying special attention to their cultivation and management of referrals. The second section focuses on the consequence of referrals on the job, both in how the men view and execute the work and in how clients attempt to motivate and control their labor. The third section shows how workers and clients negotiate "extra" labor, paid and unpaid, over the course of a job. Taken together, these sections show the active processes and situational contingencies in the men's network formations and employment experiences.

Getting work

The men almost always secure work through referrals. That is, someone or something (e.g., the visibility of their work) refers them to prospective clients. The men do not actively solicit work from strangers, via flyers or online postings, for example, nor do clients hire the men through less interpersonal means, such as the internet or a streetcorner. The ways in which the men are referred to clients, however, varies. In this section I identify three general sources of referral through which the men secure work, although all are rooted in the men's evolving and intertwined web of connections.

Friends, family, and the park

In many cases, the men are referred to clients by friends and family members. Taking the house painter Titi as a typical example, a variety of social ties can generate work opportunities. In one case, his mother-in-law recommended him to paint the inside of a condo she had cleaned for twenty years. In a subsequent job, a soccer teammate from several years back recommended Titi to paint two bedrooms in a home where he had installed several windows. Finally, Motor, a friend from the park, urged his client to hire Titi to paint a kitchen he was in the process of remodeling.

Referrals can be in response to client requests or in anticipation of their service needs. In contrast to Motor's recommendation, workers make suggestions, and subsequent referrals, for work that is less noticeable to the client. For example, Valderama shared that his brother-in-law, a gardener, frequently brings maintenance problems in the homes he services, such as a rotted fence or broken gate, to the attention of his clients. In many cases, Valderama, a carpenter, secures the work through his brother-in-law's referral.

These examples show the significance of possessing ties to people who do house-related work, be it a domestic worker or gardener. Indeed, the more people you know who service homes, the more likely the referrals. Chances for referrals are especially high considering the variety of jobs that unfold in the life of a home. The park becomes an important networking space in part because it brings together many men who work a variety of jobs in the home improvement sector in West Los Angeles.[21]

A referral, of course, does not guarantee employment, and I have observed many men denied work despite a strong recommendation, usually because of price. That said, the referral

[21] Along with home improvement work, many of the men at the park work in the restaurant industry, and many shift back and forth between these two sectors (see Iskander, Riordan, and Lowe 2010).

opens up the possibility for work by bringing the two parties together, and lessens the anonymity and uncertainty that unsettles prospective clients. Not only do clients tend to trust people they know—which is why they ask for recommendations in the first place—they also recognize that the recommender's reputation is on the line, especially important if future work is in question.

This becomes apparent when clients talk fondly of the recommender when negotiating with a new hire, the more subtle message being that their fates are now intertwined. For example, when meeting Titi for the first time, the client gushed about "how much we love Gladys" and "we're happy to help her out," by hiring her son-in-law. In speaking with the men, who regularly recommend individuals in their social circle, they are well aware of the consequences of a bad referral. Not only can this affect job prospects with an unhappy client, but opportunities for making subsequent referrals.

Referrals are rarely issued for strictly benevolent reasons and can take on very utilitarian qualities. The men expect to be compensated, although what that entails varies. In some cases, a cash payment is offered. For example, when Titi helped an acquaintance secure a roofing job, he was given $200 for a job he thinks earned his friend $1,500. The men sometimes follow this practice as well by paying out a small fee for a successful referral. Jose, for example, usually gives the doormen at several Santa Monica apartment complexes $5 to $10 when they refer him to residents in need of a locksmith, which he says has happened over 50 times in the past 10 years.

In another case, Pow-Wow gave Barba $50 for a job he helped him obtain. While Barba and Pow-Wow are close friends from the park, that Barba works in a restaurant probably motivated the cash payment, as Pow-Wow is unlikely to be able to help Barba's employment prospects. That said, because the sociable Barba is known to interact with wealthy diners at the

Santa Monica restaurant he works, it is to Pow-Wow's benefit to compensate him, especially as many would gladly pay Barba for his lucrative leads. When I asked Barba what would happen if Pow-Wow had not paid him he responded, "nothing, I just wouldn't recommend him anymore."

More typically, reciprocity is achieved through subsequent referrals. Indeed, the prospect of future employment motivates the men to refer others. The men are well aware of the many household needs that emerge and hope that a past referral will lead to future assistance in securing these jobs. This form of exchange is most common amongst those who interact on a consistent basis and do work that lends itself to helping the other. For example, Beto, a carpenter, Chicas, an electrician, and Negro, a plumber—all friends from the park—frequently refer each other to clients, either in the course of doing a job or when contacted by a client about needed work. In many cases, there is a double bonus to these exchanges as a referral benefits both their friends and employers, thereby increasing their status with both parties.

These transactions are not always smooth or uncontested. For example, I have heard many of the men speak negatively of someone they feel has not appropriately reciprocated. At the park, Araña is notorious for failing to offer any form of recompense for those who recommend his services. In contrast to my first months in the field, I now rarely observe the men recommend him for tiling jobs. Araña's comportment, due largely to his heavy drinking, may also explain their reluctance to recommend him for jobs, as this would certainly reflect badly on them with clients.

Be it due to skill or comportment, there is a delicate balance between helping out a friend and recommending someone who will do a good job. A bad referral can have disastrous consequences for the client, which is never good for the one making the recommendation. In the best case scenario, the client continues to hire them for work, but no longer considers their

referrals. With fewer opportunities to refer, the worker's social capital decreases because of a bad referral. Thus, it is generally in the men's interests to offer wise referrals to their clients.

Finally, as many of the men are adept at different home improvement tasks, or at least profess to be, there is some trepidation about introducing potential competition to clients. For example, Titi preferred to recommend Motor for carpentry jobs, rather than Valderama, because the latter was also a skilled painter. Titi did not want to bring Valderama on the job, especially because he claimed that Valderama was "cheaper." In contrast, Titi claimed that Chango no longer employed him on his painting jobs because he was worried that Titi would "steal his clients." Chango laughed when I confronted him with this information but did not dispute Titi's assertion. While Chango and Titi remain friends, I know of several broken relationships at the park because of alleged stolen work. I find that the men are very careful about who they refer, both in terms of how well they will do the job and what the exchange will lead to in the future.

The park represents a key social space for the men to sort out many of these concerns. In particular, stories of positive and negative referrals and hiring arrangements are frequently bandied about at the park. These tales can affect the men's decision making, even if they do not have direct evidence of their validity. For example, Colichini is almost never recommended for painting jobs after Barba told everyone at the park that he screwed up a job he had helped him secure. Barba later told me that he was angry with Colichini because this individual, who owns several apartment buildings, no longer asks him to recommend workers, thereby depriving Barba of referral fees. Many men claim not to hire Secada because of a story well known at the park: apparently a client caught him taking a shower in his home. Chango, who had hired Secada, was immediately fired by the client.

Work reputations are an important source of currency at the park, which the men actively project and defend. For example, the men often share stories about successful jobs or wealthy clients when socializing in the park. Phone calls with clients, especially in English, are another way the men communicate productive work lives. I believe one of the reasons the men were willing to take me along with them at work was because they could use me as a relatively objective source of reporting and reputation building. Indeed, the men would constantly engage me in conversation about their work when socializing with other men at the park.

In addition to work stories, park life, centered around playing soccer, drinking beer, and socializing, provides ample opportunities to evaluate and project personality. For example, Hernan felt that he was denied work as an "*ayudante*" because "I get into too many fights at the park." Many men have suggested that they do not associate with Darwin when it comes to work because they have seen him stealing at the park. Several men, like Araña, are excluded from employment deals because of their heavy drinking at the park. In contrast, men who handle themselves well at the park, be it on the soccer field or when drinking, are more likely to be hired or recommended for jobs.

Establishing character is serious business for the men because, at its most fundamental, networking involves giving tips to people whose actions with others will affect their reputations. In place of formal methods, such as institutional credentials or insurance policies, interactions at the park and stories about work exchanges become local ways to measure and project creditworthiness. Not only is the park an important space to build relationships but to measure and establish reputations, of critical importance when making and receiving job referrals.

Clients

Representing different nodes in the men's web of relations, clients also recommend them to prospective clients, such as their friends and neighbors. This is especially useful in providing the men access to individuals who have not employed workers in their social circle. It is also safe to presume that these referrals are helpful for those who wish to service their home but are not directly in contact with people who do this type of work, especially those operating in the informal economy.

Several clients explained to me that their friends are always looking for "good help." In a crowded and largely unregulated labor market, finding "good help" can be difficult, which makes a referral so important. A referral from a friend offers them some assurance that the job will be done well.

This finding is of course not surprising as we are always asking our friends for suggestions about all sorts of things, but the challenge of evaluating and the high stakes involved in hiring informal workers and inviting them into one's home makes referrals especially important. When speaking positively about the men, clients often compare them to bad experiences they have had with prior hires. In several cases, the men were brought in to fix past mistakes, a point the men are quick to exploit in distinguishing themselves as dependable workers.

All eleven of the men claim to have received work through a client's referral, sometimes several jobs. For example, the painting job Titi secured through his mother-in-law resulted in the client referring him to three of her friends, two of whom hired him, and one of whom helped him land another job. This client, in fact, invited her friends over to meet Titi and see him at work. Months later, one shared with me that she was "so happy" to have had this opportunity to meet

Titi because “he’s done such a good job” painting her home. I observed a similar development with Chango. The client invited two of his friends over to meet Chango and inspect the finished job. Chango ended up painting their home, which earned him a substantial paycheck, his social rolodex increasing as well.

Several of the men point to one particular client that has proved especially useful in introducing them to new clients. For example, Chango often discusses a relationship with one longtime client, a woman who owns a paint and tile store, that has led to over a dozen jobs with her contacts. Araña obtains a lot of work through a large family he has worked for over the past 15 years. For example, I observed him tile the kitchen of a man he had known as a teenager, a point the two men commented on throughout the job. In these cases and others, the web of work relations can spread very quickly, especially if the men latch on to a well connected or positioned client.

The men also tell me stories about clients trying to poach them when they are working as “*ayudantes*” in their home. In a sense, the clients refer the men to themselves by trying to pull them away from the “*jefe*,” or boss. For example, the men explain that clients will surreptitiously ask for their phone number and tell them about a future job. The men believe clients do this because they assume that they will be less expensive when the “boss” is cut out, and are confident they will do the job well as they have had the opportunity to observe them at work. In these cases, the men are careful about doing this, as it would undoubtedly severe ties with the boss if discovered. As previously mentioned, job “theft” is a serious concern and factor in the men’s hiring practices.

Clients represent important sources of referrals for two primary reasons. One, having observed the men at work in their homes, they can confidently recommend them to others. Their

homes also serve as concrete evidence of work done well. Two, as typically upper-middle class homeowners, they operate in different social circles than the men. In turn, they have access to prospective clients who are not connected to the men's network of household workers. A referral from a satisfied customer thereby increases the men's employment opportunities and web of connections.

Neighbors

The visibility of the men and their work represents a third source of referrals. Specifically, prospective clients, often neighbors, see the men at work, which permits them to observe the workers and their work and provides opportunities to interact with the men. While these first impressions do not require any relationship with the current employer, they are easily supplemented by speaking with their neighbor.

These insights become very important when considering the costs and uncertainties clients have in approaching firms or workers that are more unknown to them. In contrast, seeing the men at work, evaluating their labor, and interacting with them provides assurance that the job will be done well. Also important, this generally involves limited investment and personal discomfort, as opposed to searching through advertisements or visiting a day laborer center.

In the course of my research I have observed fifteen neighbors approach the men about potential jobs in their home. Sometimes neighbors are less direct and spend a few days talking to the men about their work and background, without making specific reference to a job. Some clients share with me that they had not considered getting started on a job until they saw the men at work. Here I speculate that the prospect of searching for someone to do the job represented a barrier that was overcome by the visibility of the men at work. In some cases, neighbors will walk uninvited into homes to observe the men at work. While motivations vary, some using this

as an occasion to look inside their neighbor's home, the accessible job site provides an opportunity to see the men working.

All of the men I follow have independently secured work with a neighbor or passerby when on a different job. The men have also recommended their friends when they were unable or unwilling to do the job in question, here again showing the constant exchange of referrals within the men's network of household service workers. For example, when packing up his supplies, a neighbor approached Jose, who had just finished installing a lock, and asked him if he did electrical work, as his garage door light was out. Jose replied that he did not but knew someone good that could come by that afternoon, here in reference to Chicas, who he had earlier seen at the park. Chicas secured the work and several weeks later introduced Jose to a client who needed new locks, a job Jose ended up doing.

The men are well aware of the rewards their visibility can bring. As Guero, a gardener, explained, "my work is my best advertisement." This also became clear as Motor spent a disproportionate amount of time and energy perfecting the section of a fence lining the front of a building. While Guero's profession and Motor's job offered easy opportunities to showcase their work, not all workers faced the same openings. Faced with these limits, I have observed the men engaging in strategic forms of visibility in attracting new clients.

For example, Enrique made a point of leaving supplies and equipment in and around his truck that identified him as a pool cleaner, which was harder to see as he worked in backyards. This became apparent when I noticed him speaking with a neighbor and I asked him how they knew he was a pool cleaner. He responded, "You see that net, I always leave one sticking out the back window," here in reference to a triangular net used to fish debris from pools. In this case the individual explained that he had just moved to the neighborhood and was looking for someone to

clean his pool. Enrique provided his phone number and added the pool to his route several weeks later.

The men also make sure to conceal any signs of disorder or misconduct to potential clients. For example, while Muneco left ripped out carpet scattered throughout the apartment he was flooring, he made sure to carefully bundle the carpet when he placed it in the hallway outside the apartment. I have also found the men less likely to take breaks or engage in objectionable behavior, such as goofing around or smoking a cigarette, in the visibility of onlookers.

That these men secure work through referrals should be of little surprise, especially to migration scholars who repeatedly show the significance of social networks in employment outcomes. In more theoretical terms, immigrants mobilizing their interpersonal ties to further their material interests is a common theme in migration studies. The dynamism and variety of referrals is striking nonetheless. It is the consequence of referrals on the job, however, that is most noteworthy, and reveals the high stakes at play when the men grant and receive referrals.

Referrals on the job

The significance of referrals figures prominently in workplace dynamics, both in how the men consider and carry out their work and in how clients attempt to control and motivate their labor. As demonstrated to me on many occasions, the men claim to take work, and even lower their price, in hopes that it will lead to future employment. Reflecting the multiple sources of referral, this can be from the same client, the client's friends, or local observers.

For example, as Titi painted the interior of a condo in a three unit building, he repeatedly told me that he expected to paint the exterior, which he noticed was in need of a fresh coat. Every time we went outside he would point to the building and confidently say, "Watch, I'm

going to paint this building." While he has yet to secure the job, he was motivated in part to take the inside job in hopes of securing the more lucrative outside job. He did, however, end up painting several rooms in another unit, which was facilitated by a neighborly referral from the initial client.

These expectations influence the type of jobs the men take. For example, Motor was in part motivated to install a fence around a multi-unit condo because he anticipated future inside work. As he predicted, he ended up fixing a door for one resident and installing a shelving unit for another. Last time I checked, he had two more jobs on the horizon as he further established himself as a trusted and skillful handyman for the 10 unit building. Motor also secured work in the adjacent building with a resident who saw him working on the fence. Anticipating these outcomes, Motor said that he not only took extra care when installing the fence—his first job at the site—but offered a relatively low price. According to Motor, a formal fence company would have charged twice as much. If Motor had charged a higher rate or done a substandard job, he may not have received subsequent work and wages.

Titi expressed a similar orientation to his work. For example, when I asked him why he was being so diligent in repainting a closet he replied, "she'll see me doing a good job and recommend me to her friends." He expressed similar objectives when starting a job in an older home a client had recently bought. The condition of the home suggested that there was a lot of potential work. Sure enough, Titi started with a small $500 painting job but ended up repainting the entire house, inside and outside, earning him over $10,000. With the help of his brother and several other men, he is now in the process of remodeling the kitchen and downstairs bathroom. Like Titi, many of the men see value in securing employment with owners of older or rundown homes, as they are more likely to require future work.

Many of the men also explain their pricing in relation to what the job may bring. For example, Titi claimed that he should have charged $7,000 for the condo painting job but only charged $5,000 because he believed that it would lead to other jobs and was worried that he would be out-priced by someone else, thereby missing out on future earnings. In another case, Titi explained to me that he inflated his price because he did not expect the job to lead to subsequent work.

The men also consider the long-term prospects of a particular client. For example, Valderama agreed that he charged one client a low rate because as a manager of several apartment buildings, he provided him a steady supply of work. He even joked that he was in big trouble when the elderly Japanese man passed away as he had secured him much work over the course of their 15 year relationship.

Many of the men have one or two clients that provide them a disproportionate amount of their work. For example, Chango serves as a sort of handyman for a family while Motor earns frequent work from an owner of a dozen rental homes. In both cases, the work is not always lucrative and can interfere with other jobs but the men always make it a priority because of its long term benefit. In fact, I often see Chango leaving the park to attend to his client's needs, be it for something as small as a blown fuse.

On the surface, the men's approach to their work coincides with clients' interests. Certainly, clients want quality work at a reasonable price, which explains in part why they initially hire the men and subsequently rehire or refer them to others. The rehiring and referrals help clients' secure low prices and quality work as workers' maintain a broader orientation or perspective for each individual job. That many of the men are skillful in a variety of trades is especially beneficial, although often it is their brute strength and willpower that is of value.

Work Chango has done for his key client within the past year is a testament to the variety of projects these men do: he repainted two bedrooms, rewired a bathroom, replaced the shingles on the roof, delivered and installed a large bookcase, and removed a small tree from the backyard.

Clients deliberately use and manipulate this process and arrangement as a source of leverage and control. For example, when negotiating costs with Titi, the client repeatedly mentioned that she had "many rich friends" that could use his services. For the fencing job, the client also used future work prospects in and around the condominium to lower the price Motor initially presented. A prospective client of Guero's emphasized a similar point when negotiating a bi-weekly gardening contract, adding, "everyone knows me here, I'll help you out."

Clients also used future work prospects when monitoring the work. For example, when inspecting Titi's work, a client repeatedly mentioned that if he did a good job, she would be sure to refer him to her "rich friends." She then added, "trust me, they know I'm picky," implying that her recommendation carried weight. In Motor's case, the client at first joked that he would be working all over the neighborhood after he finished the fence and eventually introduced him to a condo resident he knew required work on a bedroom door. In another job, a client claimed to be in the process of buying a new home that needed new kitchen cabinets when negotiating a shelving job in his current apartment with Motor.

In the case of longtime clients, such as the relationships developed by Valderama and Chango, for example, such deliberate actions are unnecessary as the prospect of future work is known and can go unspoken. However, it does motivate considerable compliance and commitment on the part of the men. For example, both Valderama and Chango drop almost everything to assist their key clients when they call and, as I discuss in the next section, some of this work goes unpaid.

This section reveals the significance of referrals in the men's work experiences. Referrals not only serve as the primary way of securing work but have important consequences on workplace dynamics. Referrals influence how the men view and perform their work and in how clients attempt to control and motivate their labor. Thus, the men's work must be considered beyond the particulars of one job or one client. For example, it helps explain why the men commit to seemingly low-wage work or why clients make reference to referrals or neighbors when negotiating contracts and inspecting their labor. This referral framework, however, only tells part of the story as much is negotiated and gained in the process of doing the work and interacting with clients.

Extracting "extras"

While referrals open up the possibility for work, it is though "extras" that the men make a good portion of their profit, although clients are adept at extracting "free" labor as well. Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo (2009) have uncovered a similar finding about the financial import of "extras" in the work of Mexican gardeners in Los Angeles. However, they do not fully explain the social processes and material conditions that generate this gain nor clients' ability to acquire "extra" work without additional pay.

The nature of the home and workplace opens up the possibility for additional work, although what is financially compensated varies. Most homeowners have a long list of home improvement needs, be it changing a light bulb or remodeling the kitchen. Some of these jobs are pressing, others remain more of a dream. In many instances, I have observed clients ask the men to complete these tasks, even though they were initially hired to do something else. These "extras" rarely came up until after the work had begun.

Oftentimes these requests are small and seemingly insignificant. For example, one of Titi's clients repeatedly asked him to do menial tasks around the house as he repainted her condominium, a job that took approximately three weeks. In one average day, she asked Titi to change a light bulb, hang a picture frame, water a hard-to-reach plant, empty the trash, watch her dog, and retrieve several boxes from storage. The client prefaced almost every request with "since you're here." Having the men at work in their home increased the incentives to have them attend to the many tasks they were unable or unwilling to do, but seemingly easy and straightforward for the men. In contrast, calling the men or even hiring someone to change a hard-to-reach light bulb would seem outlandish.

Titi did the side work with a smile, although he certainly expressed frustration when she left the room. Not only was the work an annoyance, but it interrupted the work he was being paid to do. Titi did not charge the client for these tasks, nor did she offer to directly pay him for this work. According to Titi, he did these small unpaid jobs because "it keeps her happy." Returning to the power of referrals, Titi also believed that his good deeds around the house would help with the client's "rich friends." Also, keeping his client happy was important in securing additional paid work on the current job. While the mentioned tasks are small, larger tasks also emerged in this job, which Titi was paid for. For example, Titi ended up fixing the gas fireplace, which earned him an additional $400.

As in Titi's case, clients repeatedly ask the men to do unpaid jobs around the home. For example, as Motor was ripping out an old fence around a condominium, one of the residents asked him if he could throw out a dozen wood planks in her back patio. She made this request as we were removing the fence lining her patio. In contrast to changing a light bulb, the request was much more substantial. In fact, it took around 20 minutes to remove and dispose of the rotting

wood. That said, Motor did the work without any mention of pay and used it as an opportunity to speak with her. Before parting ways, he mentioned that she should call him if she had any household needs. That very day, she asked Motor in person if he could fix an uneven door, which earned him $100 for two hours of work.

While the client had to pay to fix her door, the wood was removed for free. Her relief in ridding her patio of the rotting wood seemed to imply that she was very concerned about how she was going to do this, even though for us, it was a relatively straightforward task, if not a little irritating. This development also shows how the balance of power can shift in favor of the workers, whereby something that seems very difficult for the client, and therefore costly from their perspective, can be easy and inexpensive for the worker. In some cases, it can even prove lucrative, such as when they resell or recycle unwanted materials. Of course, many professions share this imbalance, be it a mechanic, doctor, or lawyer, but is often overlooked for more menial tasks like disposing of unwanted wood or an old refrigerator.

While clients are more likely to initiate side jobs, the men also point out issues that need attending to apart from the task they were hired to do. Guero, the one gardener I follow, frequently informs his clients of various landscaping issues that require attention, such as removing a dead plant, fixing the sprinkler system, or cleaning the gutters. In this case, Guero charges an additional fee apart from the standard weekly rate, which significantly augments his income. For Guero, clients who stick to the basic arrangement, and never request additional tasks, are barely worth it financially. Enrique, a pool cleaner, is similarly adept at pointing out pool-related problems that can augment his weekly salary.

These developments differ from the previous sections on referrals in that they are motivated by the men's presence in and around the home in relationship to clients' often lengthy

list of household needs. In some cases the labor goes unpaid, yet the men generally adhere to client requests in the hope of securing additional paid work. Most of the extra work that emerges on the job, especially what gets financially rewarded, is usually related to what the men were initially hired to do.

Household improvement projects invariably lead to unexpected and unintended outcomes that can result in additional work, paid and unpaid. By altering the home, be it in small or substantial ways, pressing needs or potential opportunities emerge that sometimes require attention. The following examples show how the nature of household work creates "extra" work and helps explain why the men take on small and relatively low-pay work.

Chango agreed to paint a bedroom. He had encouraged the client to add wood trim, accented with a different color, but the client declined as this would have increased the costs. However, after the client saw the bare walls and empty room, a requirement of the job, she agreed that the trim would look better and agreed to the higher price. As Chango later explained to me, he did not initially push the more expensive project as he was confident she would go for it once he emptied the room.

In a similar example, Titi and his brother started a kitchen remodel with intentions to keep the original cabinets, as requested by the client. That is, they would take them down and reinstall them, and the client would not be charged for new cabinets. However, once the client saw the old cabinets on the ground, as opposed to on the wall, he consented to buying new cabinets, even though he initially hoped to keep the originals. The addition of new cabinets led to several additional changes, all of which substantially increased the cost of the project. This same client later agreed to install wood floors, instead of the agreed upon tiles, despite the increase in costs. As the client explained, "it's already torn up, let's just put in wood." Be it from the

addition of cabinets or wood floors, the cost of the kitchen remodel continued to rise from the initial price as the work unfolded.

Unexpected complications frequently emerge as well. For example, Chicas was hired to install a new light and heating fixture in a bathroom. The job seemed relatively straightforward and Chicas negotiated a price of $75, plus materials. However, in the course of removing the old unit, Chicas identified a problem that required attention. As Chicas explained, the wires needed to be replaced and he recommended that they install a separate fuse for the new light and heating fixture, which he said would use a lot more power. Taking him at his word, probably because he had previously worked for him, the client agreed to the additional work, which increased costs to $300. The men typically point out the reason or source of the increase in cost to clients, often blaming poor craftsmanship of prior workers.

A joke one of the men made helps illuminate their understanding of the unexpected and potentially lucrative jobs that unfold over the course of a project, especially in older homes. In the kitchen remodel job, Titi and his brother were worried about potential leaks in the pipe. Titi opened up a hole in the ceiling to inspect one of the pipes. After claiming to have identified the problem, he joked to his brother that they would have to "tear down the whole house," and presumably rebuild it at considerable financial gain. An overstatement for sure, Titi's comment highlights the potential gains that surface when servicing homes.

As these examples show, by starting the work a range of unexpected projects can emerge. For example, clients see their homes in different ways once the work has commenced, be it by emptying a room or ripping out floors. In turn, they agree to work they initially declined. Often, the men anticipate this change, which is why they initially agree to do the less expensive job.

The process of household work also encourages additional work, especially projects that require significant construction, such as removing cabinets or realigning electrical wires. That is, clients see some incentive in consenting to additional costs when the men are already at work. This is especially true if a good portion of the work is already done, such as a ripped out floor or opened up electrical box. In contrast, doing this work separately would presumably be more expensive and intrusive. Like the logic of "since you're here" that pushes clients to ask the men to do side jobs, I frequently here the comment, "since you've started," motivating clients to accept expanded work, even if it results in a larger bill.

While these jobs often increase overall costs, clients also exploit workplace conditions to advance their interests. For example, when Titi identified a leak in the ceiling, the client asked him to check all the accessible pipes. Titi agreed and with the kitchen walls and ceiling opened up, this was a relatively simple task. In turn, Titi did not directly charge the client for checking the pipes, although if he had encountered any additional problems, he presumably would have earned more money. As things stood, the client received a free inspection of his pipes, and peace of mind, which would have cost a lot of money and inconvenience had he hired a plumber to do this job independently.

Clients frequently use in process work to get things done, often free of charge. For example, as Valderama was digging holes to install a backyard fence, the client asked him to lay plastic tubes for a sprinkling system he hoped to eventually install. This actually required Valderama to dig additional holes but he agreed to do the work free of charge. In another example, Motor was asked to run wiring along the fence he was installing. If they had not asked Motor to do the job, they would have presumably had to pay an electrician. Motor, however, did the job, at no additional cost, as he was in the process of installing the fence, and attaching a wire

represented a relatively easy task. The wire, however, proved very beneficial for the residents, who now had outdoor lighting, and they did not have to directly pay for its installation. Although as previously discussed, Motor had his own incentives to do the "free" work. In many cases, however, this can prove irritating for the men, especially when they are in a rush to finish a job.

The nature of the home, as a site of steady maintenance and improvement needs, and workplace, as a cause of change and unforeseen complications, provide opportunities for additional labor. In some cases, this results in financial gain for the men, in other cases, the clients receive free labor. Generally both clients and workers benefit from extended projects. This finding helps explain why the men take certain jobs and do "free" work, as it can often lead to lucrative "extras" over the long run.

Conclusion

While the nation's manufacturing base has withered, calls have increased for lawns to be mowed, children to be cared for, and homes to be renovated, painted, and cleaned. Drive around Los Angeles and you are bound to see Latino men and women doing this work. Apart from research on domestic workers and day laborers, not much is known about this work, especially the small-time entrepreneurs who service households throughout cities like Los Angeles.

This chapter presents several findings drawn from participant observations of a small sample of Latino immigrant men doing a range of household service work. One, the men fill an important intermediary role between companies in the formal economy and anonymous day laborers. Two, referrals are a central mechanism for securing work and alleviating client uncertainties, which has tremendous consequence in how the men view and conduct their work and social ties and in the ways clients attempt to motivate and control their labor. Three, the

nature of the home and household work creates opportunities for "extra" work, which workers and clients exploit to advance their interests.

These findings, albeit from a small sample size, shed light on more general migrant settlement and work processes. One, they show how social networks are made and maintained in everyday life, especially through tests of character and the reciprocal exchange of referrals. Two, they demonstrate how migrants create greater demand for their labor through their networking and work activities, even as clients attempt to maximize their interests. Their presence as cheap labor, in fact, sets up hiring practices as people find they have work around the home these men can do. Three, the findings further reveal the social and embedded nature of economic activity, here focusing on transactions in the informal labor market. Four, this paper uncovers the creative ways Latino immigrants make ends meet under difficult circumstances, both in terms of market competition and their undocumented status. The negotiated production of referrals and "extras" is especially illuminating of how the men survive a competitive and precarious labor market.

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The first four chapters focused primarily on park life from the men's perspectives. Together they showed the rich and complex uses and meanings of the park in the context of the men's everyday lives. The chapters also exposed the range of mini dramas and strong emotions that unfolded over the course of fieldwork. Chapter five also examines charged events and deep feelings involving the soccer field but from the perspective of local residents and city officials.

This case study shows how sources of tension and trouble extend beyond the interests and actions of park users to include the more symbolic and indirect concerns of those who find their identities reflected by park use. Set alongside chapters one through four, local responses to the field reveal the multiple and mixed meanings of city parks. The implications of the field for

those living across the street or driving by, for example, were very different from those using the field.

These political struggles, feeling at times like a parallel universe to what I observed on the field, also highlight the men's precarious and vulnerable use of public space, especially in areas they commute into. While field debates often referenced the men—the abstract outsider causing so many problems—there was little attempt to include them in community deliberations. The men also exhibited little interest or desire to attend when encouraged by people ostensibly speaking on their behalf. Along with minimal face-to-face contact, and all the imaginations and assumptions this spawned, these dynamics expose some of the everyday challenges of contemporary diversity and immigration. Without losing sight of what the field and park means for the men, I now turn to the five-year conflict that engulfed the passions and frustrations of so many non-users of the contested facility.

Chapter Five
Fencing the field

Research on park conflicts has historically concentrated on competing sets of users, an issue typically arising within the context of "changing" neighborhoods, meaning neighborhoods in which the income level or ethnicity of nearby residents is changing (Pattillo 2007; Suttles 1968; Zorbaugh 1929). In contemporary U.S. cities, conflicts over park use are increasingly among high income, local white residents and working class Latino immigrants who come from far off neighborhoods to find public space available for use (Byrne 2012; Gobster 2002; Low, Taplin, and Scheld 2005; Modan 2007; Loukaitou-Sideris 1995; Wolch, Wilson, and Fehrenbach 2005). Unlike the archetypal battle between ethnically diverse neighbors described in research from past generations (see Suttles 1968; Zorbaugh 1929), here a daily migration of "outsiders" coming into local areas structures conflict over park usage.

The distance in time between the studies conducted by Zorbaugh (1929) and Suttles (1968) covers a long stretch of U.S. history when immigration was effectively curtailed. Since the relaxing of restrictions in 1965, a vast wave of immigration began. Los Angeles, in particular, emerged as a primary destination for new immigrants from Asia and Latin American (Waldinger and Bozorgmehr 1996). The Latino proportion of Los Angeles County, for example, officially grew from 18% in 1970 to 48% in 2010. The size of the foreign-born population in Los Angeles County also skyrocketed from 14% in 1970 to 41% in 2000.

As park use patterns change in the wake of new immigration, so do the dynamics of ethnic conflict and exclusion. Instead of growing out of daily interaction, conflicts over parks emerge in a context of social distance, between sets of people who rarely if ever encounter each other personally (Mitchell 1995; Smith 1996; Zukin 2009). Park conflicts are not necessarily

more intense, but they differ in their processual nature. The historically new social ecology of conflict over park uses has brought novel features into the conflict process.

In the neighborhoods of ethnic succession that characterized cities in the mid and early twentieth century, tension was a matter of daily culture among neighbors. As Suttles (1968) found, local residents—divided among Italians, African Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Mexicans—developed practical moral orders to deal with the feelings of distrust and uncertainty that accompanied residential closeness, whether at the park, in grocery stores, or on the street (see also Gans 1962; Horowitz 1983; Kornblum 1975). Symbolic meanings were important, but the audiences were not so much imagined as encountered frequently. Living close to each other, people of different ethnicities routinely practiced avoidance.

Contemporary conflicts over park use display a new character of volatility along dimensions of both time and space. Immigrant park users come from far away, and their interactions with local residents are sporadic. When tensions arise between locals and the immigrants who commute to use parks, they are likely to be volatile in historically distinctive ways (see Rosenzweig 1983). Thus the macro historical change in immigration has led to meso-level changes in the place and timing of conflictual encounters, in turn leading to micro changes in the careers of given disputes.

This chapter studies a conflict over the installation, removal, and reinstallation of a fence around a soccer field in a West Los Angeles public park. The field was located in a predominately white, upper-middle income neighborhood and it attracted working-class, first-generation immigrant Latinos as users. Tensions were present but sporadic and indirect from start to finish. Most significantly, there was minimal face-to-face interaction between field users and field opponents. There was also little concern that the working-class users of the field would

soon be moving into the upper-middle-class area, another factor that distinguishes this case from prior studies linking park conflicts with neighborhood change. Something more indirect was motivating local opposition and shaping how the conflict played out over a series of phases.

The conflict arose, changed course in the substantive positions taken by locals, and was resolved through contingencies involving how each side imagined what others would think. A recurring, critical contingency of the conflict's progression was how local residents speculatively anticipated how the use of the park, and their role in the conflict over the park, would be seen by others like themselves. A quixotic version of Mead's generalized other (1934) was the key protagonist in the drama. Local residents first developed the conflict by anticipating that the immigrants' use of the park would shape the perceptions of acquaintances or homebuyers, in ways that would damage the neighborhood's reputation and lower the prices of local residential real estate. Subsequently, and ironically, local residents quieted the tension as they anticipated that their opposition itself would reflect badly on them by eliciting views that they were racist and by projecting an image of disorder about their neighborhood.

Concerns with being identified as racist influenced the tone and direction of the field debate, even as local residents vehemently refuted the charge. The "NIMBY" (not in my back yard) label has been shown to silence and discredit local opponents of public land-use and human service projects (Gibson 2005); being charged with the NIMBY label is especially frustrating for those who see themselves as "progressive" (Lyon-Callo 2001). Indeed, the term often implies underlying prejudices beyond self-interest, namely racism (Dear 1992; Takahasi 1998; Wilton 2002). In this chapter, I show how dueling perceptions of racism and NIMBY-ism were used and combated in the unfolding of a park-based struggle. The park's location in an area commonly regarded as "liberal" further incited suspicions and rejections of racial prejudice.

While urban geographers have examined similar instances of park conflict, they have focused more on the implications of their findings for normative and theoretical debates about public space and citizenship, than on the social interactions and processes that motivate and structure these conflicts (Mitchell 1995; Smith 1996; Staeheli and Thompson 1997). Park conflicts, however, are not natural or constant; they have to be started and sustained, and they often end, or at least go into extended quiescent phases. The social meaning and perception of conflict and disorder can also vary and change over time (Sampson 2009). Moreover, while these scholars have certainly alluded to the significance of imagined others in public land-use conflicts (see also Benton 1998; Brownlow 2006; J. Duncan and N. Duncan 2001; England 2008; Low 2000; Madden 2010), they have not systematically analyzed their complex role in the rise and fall of such disputes.

After describing the park, the neighborhood setting, and how I collected the data, I analyze the rise, stages, transitions, and decline of conflict over proposals to fence a park where Latinos commuted in to play soccer. Taking the social form of conflict, especially volatility, as the matter to be explained, I focus on the explanatory role of multiple moments in which participants imagined how others would see them, either as residents portrayed by what was observable in the park or as bellicose combatants. In conclusion I draw out implications for how this case study contributes to conflicts that others have examined as indicators of NIMBYism, racism, and everyday contemporary political culture at the grassroots level.

Methodology

This chapter draws from a variety of sources accumulated over four years of ethnographic fieldwork. Since I came onto the scene in January 2008, two and a half years after the field was opened, I have observed 42 community meetings regarding the field and other park

and neighborhood matters. During these gatherings I sat quietly taking notes, although my researcher identity was known by many because I also conducted a series of interviews with a range of actors on all "sides" of the issue, including area residents, park activists, and city administrators and politicians. In total, I carried out 28 semi-structured, taped interviews with individuals I identified as relevant subjects from my observations or from recommendations by others. I also engaged in many informal conversations with park users, neighbors, and city employees. Primary sources were used to develop local history, including more recent activities regarding the soccer field. In addition to what I personally gathered, such as public records, newspaper articles, and meeting notes, several participants graciously handed over stacks of materials, including flyers, reports, photographs, and hundreds of emails.

Rarely did individuals I knew from the field attend or directly participate in community meetings and debates about the field. In speaking with many of these men, it became clear that they felt both unwelcome and uncomfortable in these settings, and lacked time or interest to participate in lengthy and often convoluted deliberations. The few instances the men attended park meetings were discussed in chapter three.

The combination of ethnographic observation, interviews, and document analysis allows me to assess the relation between private beliefs and public practices by "checking" and noting the context-specific nature of views on a sensitive and controversial topic (Duneier 1999). Concerns that were deemed illegitimate or too provocative to express in public settings were aired in one-to-one interviews or in settings where the individual was among "likes." The public and private range of situations observed allows for an analysis of subterranean forces as explaining otherwise seemingly contradictory or mysterious changes of position.

Soccer at the Mar Vista Recreation Center

The Mar Vista Recreation Center opened in 1947 in West Los Angeles.[22] The conversion of the 18-acre lot from private farmland into a public park typifies a period of park expansion that accompanied a postwar housing boom in the city. The neighborhood around the park has remained primarily residential, white, and middle to upper income.

For example, 82% of the 1,461 residents living in the four census blocks bordering the park identified as white and reported a median family income of $135,108 in 2010. In the 18 city blocks directly north of the park, which was home to the most vocal opponents of the field, only 3% of the residents identified as Latino. Areas less adjacent to the park, however, have experienced increases in foreign-born Latino residents over the past 25 years, most of whom rent in scattered apartment complexes in the city's historically white and affluent Westside. This development follows a growth in Latin American immigration occurring throughout the region since the 1970s. The Latinization of Los Angeles, however, has been uneven, as seen in the area bordering the park (see also Charles 2004).

Shifting demographics are reflected in changing use patterns at the park. In June 2005, a soccer-specific facility was installed in the park. The new field formally replaced two softball diamonds, although the area had been increasingly used for informal soccer matches over the past two decades. The vast majority of players were Latino immigrant men who lived or worked in the general area.

Consistent soccer play rendered this section of the park a “dustbowl” and “eyesore,” as two local residents described it to me. Park administrators and local volunteers also shared their frustration in trying to maintain grass in this area, an objective viewed as futile as long as the

[22] I identify the park and neighborhood so others can better evaluate and think about my findings (see Duneier 1999). It was not, however, necessary for the sake of clarity to identify those I interviewed, especially as I did not want to contribute to already contentious relationships (Deener 2012).

space was used for soccer. In response, local park advocates mobilized to install a more manageable and attractive soccer field, which was facilitated by a surge in park funding in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Wolch et al. 2005). The publically-financed project came to include synthetic grass, regulation lining, anchored goals, and bleachers. In addition to those that attended meetings, signed petitions, and lobbied park administrators on behalf of the field project, five area residents served on the Local Volunteer Neighborhood Oversight Committee (LVNOC) set up by the grant.

While benefiting from its construction, none of the players were directly involved in the process that brought the field to the park. In speaking with those involved in the project—none of whom played soccer in the park—the field was primarily envisioned as a resource for area youth and as an aesthetic improvement for a persistently unkempt and unmanageable section of the park. As users of the field were not part of the process, those pushing for the field were not in a good position to anticipate the social consequences and meanings of what they were doing. In particular, local advocates of the field did not foresee the amount of adult activity and "outsider" interest the new facility would invite, much less the problems this would create for some area residents.

There was also no historical precedent of neighborhood objections to draw from in that prior to the opening of the new field there was little publically-voiced opposition, much less anything resembling the local controversy that ensued, to the Latino men who for decades had played soccer in this space. As one of these men put it to me, a sentiment repeated by others, "They never noticed us until they put in the nice field." The rapid escalation of conflict, however, suggests that concerns were lingering beneath the surface, without a clear source of opposition.

The role of imagined others in the abrupt installation and removal of a park fence

Before field use surfaced as a local concern, the city's administration of the facility created its own problems. Specifically, community members expressed opposition to a gated fence installed around the new field, citing this "eleventh hour" addition as a change they had not been consulted on. The fence was not, in fact, part of the original plans presented to the community, but a request submitted separately by the then park director shortly before the field's opening. Imagined others played a key role in shaping this policy decision, in particular, park administrators' anticipation of residents' evolving complaints, from at first opposing to then demanding a fence.

In contrast to local residents, park administrators anticipated management problems when installing the soccer field in this neighborhood. To begin with, park administrators, unlike area residents, recognized that the new field would attract heavy use, especially by Latino men who were flocking to limited park space throughout the city to play soccer. Based on their experiences in other neighborhoods, park officials also understood that in a predominately white and affluent area, some homeowners would express discomfort or opposition to the increased presence of Latino men in and around the field.

While never identifying these concerns as discriminatory or exclusionary, much less "racist," park officials repeatedly suggested to me that residents preferred "local use" of parks and generally resisted park changes. For example, a park director assigned to the facility after the field was installed shared with me that homeowner complaints were much more common on the city's Westside, where residents were seen to be more sensitive and vocal about park problems, adding: "I have some personal feelings that I don't know I should share or not but I do think it's the feeling of outsiders coming in. They want it to be a neighborhood park." Like private

developers who restrict access to bonus plazas (Smithsimon 2008), she claimed that her predecessor fenced in the field so staff could control its use, recognizing that without a fence it would be difficult to manage when and by whom the field was used, which they expected to be a playing population some residents would find problematic.

On the other hand, by not informing local residents about this decision, despite their formal involvement in the field project, it appears that park officials anticipated a different complication. Specifically, park administrators were concerned that neighbors would object to the fence because it would be seen as indicating conflict (i.e.: people have to be kept out) before they were ready to accept this. As the later park director explained to me, "People usually don't like fences, at least talking about them. It makes them feel uncomfortable." Rather than travelling touchy terrain about "outsiders coming in" during the planning stages, the then park director had the fence installed without community input.

Internal communications show that park officials anticipated opposition. For example, in an email to the park director, the field architect shared that as he had "barely survived" local backlash over a proposed fence in a similar neighborhood, he was hesitant to inform the community about this project. His assistant also revealed to me that they expected resistance to the fence, even though they both supported the plan. Indeed, the park director's decision to install the fence without public deliberation—despite debating most other aspects of the project with community members—suggest serious concern over initial opposition. Reflecting on the decision to fence the field without community support, a park administrator shared with me the challenge of implementing unpopular projects: "It's tough when you know what's right or needed but the community doesn't get it," adding, "the public has more knee-jerk reactions to things while we have a more long-term perspective."

As park officials anticipated, local residents opposed the installed fence. Several objections were raised: For one, as the fence went against, or was simply beyond, the approved plans, its underhanded inclusion called into question the legitimacy of the public participation process that accompanied the field grant. A more pressing and widespread reason for uproar was because the fence, which suddenly closed off a section of the park, was said to be unsightly, illogical, and offensive, especially as it often remained locked during daylight hours. In my conversations with those involved in the fence debate, many spoke of its "prison" look and "privatized" feel, as experienced in the park, when passing by, or from adjacent homes.

While anticipating local objections to the fence, park administrators did not foresee its removal. However, less than two months after its controversial installation, the park department was forced to remove the $29,000 structure because of political pressure from the local councilman, who was persuaded by angry constituents. Of interest to this study is that the fence was removed because it was viewed by local residents as both unattractive and counter to the type of park community members envisioned. As park officials expected, neighbors objected to the fence as a sign of exclusion and conflict.

Like subsequent use of the field, the fence had symbolic implications for local residents in that it was experienced as characterizing the neighborhood in a negative light. Specifically, the fence was felt by local residents to indicate to imagined others that this was an area that neither wishes nor needs to restrict its public spaces, which was felt to project both aesthetic and ideological messages. In an interview, a park neighbor reflected on the resulting implications: "I didn't like how it looked and I didn't like what it said about us." The role of imagined others in motivating concerns was made clear when I pressed the local resident on her second point: "I

knew that when people drove by they'd think that we were trying to keep people out, it says that you don't belong and we don't want you."

Looking back, another local resident explained to me: "It was felt that this was not a park that needs or wants to fence in its facilities." Indeed, the fence, like iron bars on a home, was felt to indicate to outsiders that there was a problem, even when no direct or immediate observations of troublesome conduct indicated that there was a problem. That few used the field, and were thus less motivated by practical concerns over access, shows how more symbolic and indirect objections provoked opposition to the fence.

It is worth noting that adjacent homeowners who would later take issue with field use claimed to be either indifferent or similarly unsatisfied with the fence. They also shared with me that they were initially pleased with the new facility without having any intensions of using it, primarily because it replaced a dirt section of the park they all agreed was an "eyesore," several of whom could see the area from their homes or when passing by. That the field remained largely locked and empty during this period meant that the consequences of an accessible and attractive field were yet to be experienced.

Thus, we see how "imagined others" comes in at the start, with the installation of the fence. Specifically, by the park administration anticipating that residents will imagine others seeing them as déclassé when they see Latino men playing there, and trying to avoid that opposition by independently putting in a fence that will show control. While park officials did not fully appreciate the force of local opposition in removing the fence, they did anticipate that neighbors would be unhappy with the restriction and its implications. Responding to this dilemma, they installed the fence without consulting area residents as this would have brought up

sensitive issues of difference and rights to the city, even though they expected those precise concerns to motivate neighbor demands for a fence.

Park officials grounded this expectation not in direct use conflicts—i.e.: neighbors trying to use the field—but by imagining, or anticipating, opposition based on residents imagining how the park would look to others and how that would reflect on them if not fenced. However, as the population park administrators anticipated causing problems for local residents were effectively barred from the field by the fence, the consequences of an open field had yet to materialize. In turn, neighbor objections focused on the fence, and through their influence with the local councilman, they were able to have it removed.

Local opposition to the open field

As word circulated about the first-rate and now unrestricted field, its use increased substantially, which created problems for residents living near the park. As anticipated by park administrators, adjacent homeowners voiced concerns over an increase in noise, street parking, traffic, loitering, trash, vandalism, and crime and more subjective discussions of the park and neighborhood's deteriorating "nature." One individual, who maintained that his daughters no longer felt safe in the park because of field-related activity, described these changes to me: "Just the numbers of people and the quality. I hate to say quality, it sounds so snobby, and I don't mean it to be, but it is. It was the nature of the park being so very different."

Five local homeowners aggressively mobilized in hopes of "controlling" the field and "overflow" problems. In an article for the *Villager*, the newsletter for the Westdale Homeowners Association (WHOA), which represents a housing tract of roughly 900 single-family homes directly north of the facility, the authors argued that while the park used to be a "real asset to this neighborhood," since the installation of the field, "the nature of the park has changed

substantially." Even more, the field had "displaced a community of residents who used to enjoy the park for quieter recreation, exercise, and relaxation." This point was stressed in circulating photographs of field problems, including images of garbage as well as large numbers of predominately Latino men in and around the field, as in the case of one picture captioned with the text: "What parent will ask these men to stop so he can play catch with his child?"

The offending users were often identified as people not from the "area." For example, in an email to the WHOA president, a frustrated resident wrote: "The users of the field, are for the most part NOT homeowners in your area, but it is your responsibility of office to represent our interests," adding, "You are defending the rights of people to PLAY, while we have been spending 27 months fighting for our rights to LIVE in peace and quiet." In fact, residents frequently spoke of their violated right to "reasonable peace, quiet, and safety that I'm afforded as a homeowner," as one individual put it to me, adding, "I paid a lot of money for this house." Indeed, many wrote of an "out of control situation" at the park.

In interviews, the personal impact of the new field was also expressed with anger and fear—one neighbor claiming that he no longer felt comfortable having friends over to barbeque, another concerned that she will never be able to sell her home because of its adjacency to the field. On a more everyday basis, neighbors spoke to me of the personal affront of having to pick up discarded trash from their front lawns. Photographs of litter, especially beer bottles, were often included in circulating reports and public presentations as objects "out of place" (Douglass 1966; see also Murphy 2012).

Arguing that the park is "too small and too close to residential homes to adequately support the amount of traffic [the field] has invited," the authors of the aforementioned *Villager* article urged local residents to sign a petition addressing these problems. The petition, which was

endorsed by the WHOA and eventually signed by 130 area residents, demanded that the park "reduce hours of operation, in order to remedy the negative impact its current use is having on the surrounding neighborhood." As park officials expected—as demonstrated by putting in the initial fence—they also demanded a return of full-perimeter fencing.

The role of imagined others in broadening support for the return of a park fence

Individual complaints were not always effective in gaining support from those not directly impacted by field use. In hopes of influencing park policy, field opponents stressed the broader appeal and urgency of their concerns and objectives, at least to fellow Westdale residents. Specifically, organizers were more and more explicit in identifying field problems as a symbol of larger developments that were threatening the park and neighborhood. The role of imagined others was key in mobilizing broader support.

The result was an expression of opposition increasingly independent of any problems over personal use of the park or with trash, noise, or other negative spillovers onto neighbors' properties. This shift away from practical concerns was made clear in a strategizing email: "The more interest and concern we show for the park as a whole, and as a part of the neighborhood, the more our voices will be heard." In turn, community meetings about the soccer field were identified as opportunities to "protect," "preserve," and "save" "our neighborhood," recurrent catchphrases in distributed materials and public presentations.

The risks to safety and property values were increasingly included in these appeals, both implicitly and explicitly. For example, a letter to the homeowners' association newsletter concluded: "While the direct impact is felt most by those living nearby, these problems will affect the overall peaceful quality of our neighborhood and also our property values." Indeed, the "market reaction" was a consistent source of unease for local residents, reflecting the ways in

which locals' preoccupations with imagined others in the real estate market entered to accelerate conflict. As warned in a circulating flier, "if we do not have a large, unified showing at all these meetings, others interests will prevail and determine the future of life in Westdale."

The campaign picked up critical support by appealing to opponents who, living at a distance from the park, were more likely to be concerned about the symbolic meaning of park use. That many local residents signed the petition and attended meetings, including those who lived several blocks away, and were thus not directly impacted by field activity, nor appeared to use the field, shows the appeal and effectiveness of this approach, at least in the early stages. Encouraging emails, such as "I commend you for all your work to keep our park and neighborhood safe and clean" and "I so hope that we, the immediate locals, can get our wonderful neighborhood park again," speak to the resonance of the campaign.

The invocation of symbolic issues, such as homeowner rights and neighborhood security, distant from the particulars of the case, was key in accelerating conflict. For local residents, the future of the park and neighborhood was felt to be at stake. Of particular interest is how others, abstractly conceived, promoted conflict, as indicated by more vaguely expressed concerns over the neighborhood's changing public perception, be it via concrete connections to property values and crime or more subjective allusions to the area's disturbed "nature." Apprehension over guests driving by the facility on the way to their homes or when mentioning that they lived near the park also helped rally support. For example, in interviews, several local residents identified with one neighbor's frequently expressed complaint that he no longer felt comfortable having friends over for backyard barbeques because of field activity.

Further showing the artificial base of opposition, field activity did not appear to dramatically alter neighbors' use of the park as few expressed any practical interest in using the

field. Many shared that they either never used the park before the field controversy or continued to visit other areas in the 18-acre facility. Moreover, few spoke of any face-to-face contact, much less direct conflict, with field users.

Soccer players were not invited to their meetings or included in communications about the field, which kept them unspoken for and imagined as well. Having them there, speaking for themselves, rather than imagined by provocative accounts and photographs taken from a distance, would have certainly changed the tenor of debate, especially if contradicting their characterizations as unruly and depraved. Residents thus imagined how they were being seen by unidentified others in part because the players were not there to show the residents how they were being seen.

It is also noteworthy that everyone I spoke with agreed that Latino immigration had transformed use of the park well before the opening of the new field. In fact, it was heavy use by Latino immigrant men that, in part, necessitated the installation of artificial turf. Even more, prior conditions of play described to me by users of the "dirt" space, such as large numbers, beer drinking, and raucous interaction, correspond with locals' complaints about use of the new field. As one longtime park user, a 42 year old native of El Salvador, put it to me, "They didn't care about us until they put in the nice field." Thus, the field drew collective attention to the park and crystallized opposition to the Latino use that had been building informally for years but without a focus for opposition.

Despite these inconsistencies, it was by expressing concerns about how "Latino soccer players" were threatening to change anonymous others' views of park residents, that complaining neighbors drew increased support from area homeowners. More concretely, the fence catalyzed local opposition to the field and in effect helped them organize and communicate with each

other. Getting something done, and maintaining local support, as opposed to showing that there was a problem, however, proved to be a much more difficult and drawn-out process. In fact, by expanding their objections to gather broader support, field opponents provoked a counter-movement that surfaced in opposition to their demands.

The rise of opposition to demands for a fence through imagining others' responses

Opposition to restrictions was also spearheaded by a small number of outraged individuals. While initially less organized and committed than local residents pushing for greater controls, their numbers grew to be much larger although with varying involvement and interests. For example, in contrast to the 130 individuals who signed a petition in favor of a fence, over 500 signed a counter-petition to keep the field "open." Most of those actively involved in opposing restrictions were also local residents, but generally younger and newer to the area than those advocating for a fence. The role of imagined others was key in mobilizing opposition.

Again, few actual users of the soccer field were actively involved in any of these debates (but see chapter two). Many of the men explained to me that it was their appreciation for local concerns that in part kept them from attending public meetings as they anticipated their presence in these settings as problematic. For example, when a member of the park office encouraged a group of Latino players to attend a community meeting about the field, one commented to me that it would "make things worse if we went," humorously adding, "who's going to listen to him," pointing to a player known for his disheveled appearance and combative temperament. This absence leads their interests to go unvoiced, mischaracterized, or spoken for by others. In contrast to how they were imagined by field opponents, those opposing demands for a fence represented the players in a very different light.

Arguments against a fence, or any restrictions, varied. Most immediately, those closely involved in park affairs maintained that not only was the field never intended to be enclosed but, in reference to the original fence, it had been previously shown not to work as the field often remained locked during daylight hours. In turn, the notion of building an expensive fence to "appease a few neighbors," as one local resident put it in a community meeting, represented a consistent source of anger and frustration for open space proponents.

While opposition was initially in response to local demands for a fence, it quickly took on new energies and mechanisms. Many area residents joined the debate in response to their neighbors' outspokenness and the feeling that something invisible and illegitimate was driving their demands, and thereby reflecting badly on them as part of the neighborhood. Much of this was indirect and subterranean but helps make sense of lots of otherwise inexplicable developments, including the expansion and crystallization of competing positions on all "sides." Thus, while challenging what they considered to be the artificial base of locals' concerns, proponents of open access were also motivated by imagined views of self by anonymous others, but in this case, acting as advocates on behalf of those imagined others.

Most notably, fence opponents viewed complaints at best as a small minority position, which had underhandedly gained the support of local residents, and at worst as exaggerated, unproven, and driven by racist and undemocratic motives. According to the author of several reports in opposition to a fence, "They didn't even know why they were there. They were ill informed and driven by hysteria. It was all about protecting their neighborhood over unfounded threats." The inclusion of perceived non-field related concerns was in turn viewed as masking more sinister objectives, a thinly veiled association described to me by one observer:

> They kept dragging in other issues, parking, garbage, and alcohol. And that was the nexus that then said, that it's this element that is being brought in by this Hispanic community, they litter, they drink, and they socialize drinking beer out of their car. By letting the conversation go there, the lines could be connected. It should have never gone there.

The threat of lawsuits, talk of crime, reference to property values, militarized rhetoric, and use of terms like "outsiders," "invaders," and "thugs" was seen as representative of this exclusionary and reactionary viewpoint. Referring to a park neighbor pushing for a fence, a member of the local Park Advisory Board shared with me: "It didn't take long to figure out that maybe it was the people who were playing soccer [rather than the noise] that he had the issue with." In fact, the immediate response of many was to view demands for a fence as racist and disingenuous, with less attention given to practical field matters, such as after-hours access and parking overflow. For example, the councilman's field deputy assigned to the area confided to me that she *initially* regarded field detractors as "NIMBYs who don't like the fact that there are now young men of color coming into their neighborhood to play soccer." That the conflict was covered in a local newspaper (Echavaria 2006), an adjacent neighborhood council referred to the matter as a "cultural conflict," and a widely distributed report identified neighbor demands as "politics of exclusion" further aroused local insecurities about "outsider" interpretations.

For many, perceptions of racism and NIMBYism were especially appalling given the area's self-identification as "liberal" and inclusive. As one individual put it to me: "It's hard not to be particularly offended when a group of people who love to espouse their liberalism at every opportunity and take almost a community pride in it suddenly do a reverse polarity." An email regarding the escalating field controversy to the area councilman captures this indignation: "I was proud of my neighborhood but now I am a bit ashamed to say I live in the neighborhood."

This surface reading of the conflict was used to acquire a letter of support from the ACLU of Southern California encouraging "equal access."

As seen with the "pro-fence" faction, those opposing such measures broadened the debate by introducing new arguments, which mobilized greater support and escalated the conflict. For example, any perceived changes in park life were seen as reflective of living in a large metropolitan area, especially one that was rapidly changing and failing to provide adequate park space; the growth in Latino residence in the general area of particular significance. The lack of outreach and consideration of this population was viewed as emblematic of the neighborhood's isolated and intolerant position.

That Latino players generally did not attend the meetings helped keep them imagined and invoked by their supporters. Descriptions of the men and soccer activity certainly contrasted with how they were characterized by field opponents. For example, a local resident described the players in the following way during a public meeting: "Maybe something that not all the stakeholders are aware of but the people that come out to play here work hard, they have families, they have jobs, this is a great place for them." In this comment and others, the absent players were re-imagined from ruffians and criminals into hard-working family men, although it is unclear how many personally knew the men they were describing and speaking for.

In turn, having a welcoming and diverse park was viewed as a positive reflection of the surrounding community, an association more in tune with how locals perceived the area and themselves. For example, many spoke in community meetings with pride of seeing the "city represented in the park," as one participant put it during public comment. Calls for field restrictions were hence a violation of these well-regarded interests. For certain, demands for a fence came to carry very different meanings and implications at the height of debate. Thus, what

started as concern over real and perceived "spill over" from a new soccer field rapidly escalated into a much larger conflict, which, while adding to its volatility, also worked toward its eventual resolution.

Resolution: How conflict led to a new fence

A final stage developed when the debate itself was seen by all "sides" as reflecting negatively on the local community. Again, the force driving the conflict to a new phase was the anticipation by residents of how anonymous others would view them, rather than practical problems over park use. Indeed, as the debate dragged on, there was growing concern and regret over how it was reflecting on the local community, especially galling for those who lived in the area or held it in high esteem.

Many local residents, including those in favor of a fence, felt that the debate was giving the neighborhood a "black eye" and tried to censor or distance themselves from untoward behavior and rhetoric. An area resident and Park Advisory Board member spoke of how embarrassed she was by what she perceived as "racist comments" by her neighbor: "I was appalled because he lived in my neighborhood and I couldn't believe it. And I surely didn't want to be associated with him." Similarly, a park neighbor in favor of a fence recounted the horror of overhearing an individual at a party refer to Westdale as "that snooty neighborhood trying to keep outsiders from using their park."

Allegations of racism, in particular, were difficult to accept and firmly rejected by those in favor of greater field controls (see also Lyon-Callo 2001). Most namely, to what they perceived as deliberate and unfair misrepresentation, they frequently clarified that they had no interest in locking the field—or harbored any ill feeling toward soccer or soccer players, much less racist views—but only wanted to secure "reasonable" hours and "balanced" use, which they

had been told was only possible via a gated fence. In an email to his collaborators, which captures an indignation expressed by many, the ACLU letter of particular incredulity, a supporter of the fence wrote:

> I think everybody should be very careful about making allegations of racism unless we want this to get real ugly, real fast. First, NONE of us have ever made any reference to skin color and frankly I don't even know the nationality of any of the players on the field. My only bias is against people yelling and whistling outside my house at 6am and waking up my family. [He] should be very careful about declaring that the [neighborhood council] Board feels the neighborhood is racist, if that is what he says. Personally, I am furious if he or the Board has made this allegation. Really, how dare they!

While outraged by charges of racism, some of the fence supporters recognized how their objectives may have appeared and attempted to control incendiary rhetoric, especially given a surface reading of white homeowners opposing Latino soccer players. One of the men, who became a spokesman of sorts for the group, reflected openly on the matter with me: "I can understand how that can be taken, particularly historically. Listen, I'm old enough to have lived through the civil rights movement, so I know all that was said about black people: they're always loud, they always throw garbage, so I understand that that can have a certain resonance."

Another local resident, who played a more mediating role, addressed these growing concerns with me:

> There was a couple of individuals, I'm not going to name names who, for lack of a better word, their approach and their terminologies had a sense of racial profiling or racism that put a real ugly tone into the whole process because it moved the discussion away from, ok, we've got this valuable resource and maybe there's some issues that we have to address about its use and dealing with its availability, especially at the very early morning and late hours of evening, into we're a lily white community and we don't like this kind of ethnic, predominately Hispanic entity in the park.

In speaking with those involved on all "sides," most agreed that such tactics were ultimately counterproductive. As one individual explained to me: "they thought they could somehow garner

support of the broader community with those kinds of fear mongering, if you'd like, which I think ended up torpedoing their own plans because the community is generally rather liberal."

On the other hand, the impulse to completely dismiss local concerns as racist and invented was also viewed as unfair and unhelpful. The sarcastic suggestion that unhappy residents should "move to Montana if they don't like it"—as expressed several times during public meetings—was similarly rejected. In fact, many early opponents of the fence came to accept the need for greater controls as the debate progressed. The evolving views of the councilman's field deputy characterized this shift in perspective:

> My position that these are just racist NIMBY types who don't want to deal with shifting demographics in Southern California started to switch because I started to talk to some of the younger homeowners in the area who didn't seem as so narrow minded and they would tell me I don't care that people come and play on the soccer field, but I have young children and at 11 o'clock at night when the park is technically closed to the public they are yelling and screaming and making noise. I was more sympathetic to that and I thought maybe we have to control the use of the field better and the whole, you're just being racist, was always a way to drown them out.

Potentially more pressing, the area councilman became increasingly concerned with the political ramifications of this brewing controversy, which he urged his field deputy to resolve before his looming reelection campaign. Around this time, the city and more formal neighborhood organizations became involved in hopes of resolving the local conflict, which was also felt to be casting a dark shadow on their positions in the community. Aided by the political process (see Roberts 2004; Silverman 2009), this push towards the "center" resulted in a fence compromise.

The city's approval and support of a fence certainly facilitated the decision, although it also became apparent that many of those locally involved were in fact open, or resigned, to the functional need for a fence but were concerned about the form it would take. Once the city secured funding, energies shifted to negotiating a community-sanctioned plan, rather than

arguing whether or not the field should be enclosed, a debate all agreed had gotten way out of hand. After more deliberation, this resulted in the opening of a $450,000 publically-financed enclosure plan in September 2010, which came to include a jogging path, exercise stations, and ornamental plantings.

When referenced in local meetings and everyday conversations, the new and elaborated fence is generally viewed as a park improvement and touted as a symbol of community cohesion, with little mention of the heated debates and divisions that preceded its completion, much less the then five year-old battle to remove the original fence. For example, the fence was described as a "cooperative, creative, and problem-solving effort on behalf of the community" in a newsletter celebrating the Mar Vista Community Council's ten-year anniversary in 2012.

The crucial point here is that the introduction of the conflict into the political arena pushed out the extremes and mitigated some of the pressing obstacles, thereby making compromise likely. Potentially more significant, once a city-backed solution was put in place, the controversy died down because, as few of those debating the field used it, there were really no practical issues to work out, as most of the concerns and objections were peripheral to the field. Indeed, as discussions shifted to administrative matters, rather than competing concerns over the image of the park and neighborhood in the eyes of imagined others, the gridlock and animosity characterizing earlier debates subsided substantially.

Of course, support for the community fencing plan was a result of the problems brought about by the field and contradicted opposition to the previous fence, notwithstanding locals' retrospective memories. In fact, it was the pressing need to resolve a debate that all sides agreed had spiraled way out of control, with serious ramifications for the reputation of the neighborhood, that most encouraged the fence plan. It is also clear that many early fence

opponents grew to accept the need for greater controls, despite initial concerns over racism and exclusion. While park administrators predicted this outcome from the beginning, local residents needed to come to this realization on their own, which they could not if imposed from the outside, as seen in their opposition to the original fence.

Conclusion

This study of a contested and symbolically charged park in West Los Angeles follows a long line of research on examples of parks triggering, or somehow figuring in, inter-group tensions in the city. Rather than park use, it is the "spill over" that made this conflict so consequential and meaningful for local residents, especially important as few claimed to use the facility or interact with field users. While some initially mobilized in favor or against greater controls, the debate quickly came to symbolize much more than installing a fence around a soccer field.

Employing a more fluid and situational notion of the "generalized other" (Mead 1934), I show how local residents constructed a sense of self and community by anticipating the standpoint of others like themselves at all stages of the conflict. This distinctive kind of interaction, in which individuals argue face-to-face as each invokes imagined views of others who are not present, has not been sufficiently analyzed in earlier studies of conflicts over parks. But, as this chapter shows, it is a critical causal force, powerful although changing in its significance for the life of the conflict: First setting it off, then escalating the conflict, then spurring its resolution. Changes in position indicate that it was not the substance of any conflict but the ungrounded social processes, in which imagined others stimulated shifting emotions, that explains the course of the conflict.

As this case study demonstrates, neighbors' relationship with area parks is delicate and volatile. For example, locals' investment helps explain why the park is relatively well resourced and cared for. Their investment, which is in part driven by the negative potential of living adjacent to parks, also turns to feelings of ownership at times. Yet proprietary claims on a public facility that draws from well outside the immediate neighborhood provokes resentment and resistance. Indeed, local attempts at constituting the park's public did not go as planned—as seen in the unanticipated problems that surfaced with the new soccer field. How to balance local involvement with user autonomy is no easy task, especially as neighbor concerns often extend beyond the use of the park to include more symbolic and indirect associations between park life and the meaning and quality of their lives, property, and neighborhood.

While these concerns are real and deeply felt, they are not easily expressed by white homeowners who choose to live in contemporary cities—often, because they think of themselves as liberals, appreciating the multicultural nature of today's urban world. The seemingly wild reversals by local residents on the fence makes sense as they come to terms, over time, with the compromises they must make because they cannot reverse demographic changes or the unequal distribution of park space, and they are not unanimous on excluding "outsiders." The park administration has recurrent experiences with this type of conflict, but for each park's neighborhood residents, it is a new matter, and the locals have to be allowed to work through their posture on these macro changes, as they are not ready to accept them until they have to.

Threats and accusations of racism certainly complicated the matter by making some concerns less legitimate to express than others (Van Dijk 1992). The general embrace of tolerance, however, often clashes with desires for status recognition (Brown-Saracino 2010; Deener 2012; Kefalas 2003; Pattillo 2007). In fact, the field controversy enabled resentments to

mobilize that had been building informally for years but without a focus for opposition. Moreover, while "prejudice" comes in, it is not simply theirs but their anticipation of how others will see them and the area given the social life of the park. Shifting associations between the field and neighborhood (i.e.: déclassé, racist, and cosmopolitan), conflicting characterizations of the players (i.e.: criminals and working fathers), and contrasting views of the fence (i.e.: exclusionary and inclusionary) reveal the uneven and unpredictable potential of park conflicts.

These dramatic shifts in position are also indicative of the dynamic link between social context and the perception of disorder (Hipp 2010; Sampson 2009; St. Jean 2007). For example, while local residents may have acted as folk advocates of "broken windows theory," what they perceived to need fixing varied and changed over the course of the conflict. How this happened was also more complex than simply being the product of selfishness or prejudice but reflected the uncertainties and contradictions surrounding diversity and order in the contemporary city (Deener 2012; Fischer 1999; Gibson 2005; Kefalas 2003; Lyon-Callo 2001; Murphy 2012).

These developments, of course, emerged from the tensions created by the soccer field, including the "new" users and uses it unexpectedly brought to the park. As Latino soccer populations outgrow other park-user populations, potential for conflict around this issue promises to remain a pressing concern in urban parks, and may signal a changing tide of informal power dynamics and contestations of ethnic identification in public parks. However, unlike past descriptions of park conflicts, the lack of face-to-face interaction between field users and local residents, keeps them imagined in the eyes of the other. Future research should consider the complex dynamics and status implications that shape local beliefs and responses to the ongoing Latinization of city parks. This case study, then, may index a generation of urban

park disputes that will grow as the Latino immigration population continues to spread from early, major immigration destinations, such as Los Angeles, throughout the country.

Echoing previous research, public parks represent pivotal grounds for testing whether and how societies can work out relations across divides routinely managed smoothly, without apparent tension, through the geographic segregation that private property rights make possible. Indeed, cities are distinctively characterized not by whether they have conflicts in and over public space but how and the extent to which they get resolved. What this case study shows is that the sources of tension and trouble extend beyond the interests and actions of park users to include the more symbolic and indirect concerns of those who find their identities reflected by park use, in particular, the imaginative work of interpreting what "others" like them will think of them.

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As this chapter revealed, the field attracts and provokes multiple interests and concerns. While the men may use the field more than others, they are not necessarily more or less passionate and affected by it than others. Where they differ is their willingness and ability to influence local decisions about its fate, especially when contrasted to area homeowners. Yes, to some extent they control everyday interactions on the field during the midday hours, when it is currently available for open use. However, they had little sway over the course and conclusion of the fence debate, even though the vast majority of the men were deeply concerned about its effect on their continued use. Most users were in fact absent from these many discussions occurring roughly 100 yards from the field in the park auditorium.

Although its installation proved to have minor impact on their use of the field during my research—several tournaments were thwarted by a locked gate and police patrols—the future

remains to be written. The gates are opened and closed everyday and park officials, for whatever reason, could decide to invoke a more restrictive policy on who uses the field and when. Indeed, it was the potential of greater controls that so motivated fence advocates and opponents.

As this chapter shows, local residents can significantly shape park policies, even if it takes time and requires compromise. The men do not have comparable skills and resources at their disposal. The inequalities in power and influence over park policies are certainly striking. While the men have proven to be remarkably resilient and resourceful, I do leave the park uncertain about what I will find when I return.

Conclusion

Creating community and social ties

This is a study of the ways in which migrants create a community thereby reducing the dislocation and displacement generated by movement to a strange world. Sociologists have studied this process by examining work, neighborhoods, religious activity, and hometown associations, but so far they have not attended to a vitally important community building activity that countless immigrants do on their own: sports. It seems that only academics think that playing and having fun with others is not important!

My dissertation examines the very serious business of having fun. It seeks to understand the ways in which immigrants overcome the strangeness of a foreign environment by coming together to have fun, creating a familiar environment that makes them feel better. And in so doing, generating relationships and other resources that help them solve the practical problems associated with settlement, although also creating conflicts, whether with neighbors, spouses, or friends.

The creation of a familiar environment is not simply the reproduction of something that previously existed; it is at once similar and different—because of the location, the mix of people, and all the other changes the men have undergone. This transformative process is often missing from migration studies, which assume more than they explain. Even more critical studies of social networks generally fail to show how migrants make new ties in new places over time.

Strangeness is one of the greatest difficulties and costs of migration, which is why the creation of a familiar environment is so important. For working-class immigrants having fun may be even more important than for others, as this is one outlet in which they are doing what they want as they want to do it: no one is bossing them around. For example, unlike religion, and

especially congregational life, the men themselves determine how they have fun, without guidance from a book or leader. At the park, fun is the basis on which commitment rests.

Having fun is also a significant accomplishment. It takes a lot of creative and cooperative work to sustain interaction and control the space. Moreover, having fun helps the men solve other problems, though the solution of these practical problems had nothing to do with the reasons to come together in the first place. The search for fun and sociability creates a community that both diminishes the costs of migration and creates new resources facilitating settlement. That community is also a new community, one that does not simply reproduce prior hometown, ethnic, or even national origins but reflects the diversity of their new interactive context.

While the men come together in a place they have made familiar and productive, it is not an environment they fully control, and they often get treated as strangers and threats. The comforts the men find in the park can also have a negative impact on their family and work relations. It is not always so easy to have fun together. This generalization about social interaction applies with particular force to the men, given their lack of economic and political resources and their unequal relationship to authorities and neighbors around the park. These inequalities simultaneously circumscribe their ability to have fun and the ways in which the men first come to understand those constraints and then figure out how to manage them, as best they can. Ironically, this contributes to the risk and uncertainty that is required for trusting relations to develop. The balance, however, can be very difficult to manage, all the more so as they are on a legal and financial tightrope, often with no one around to pick them up if they fall down.

The heart of this story is what the men actually do and accomplish together in the park. The situated, interactive nature of these experiences is very difficult to capture through more

distanced methodologies. A lot of what the men do in the park is not the result of reflection or planning, but emerges in the swirl of social life. The key is what repeatedly and recurrently happens in the moment—the on-the-spot, free-flowing interactions and negotiations that this dissertation highlights. To get this, one has to be on the scene and deeply engaged over an extended period of time. The discovery of various ripple effects—both positive and negative—on so many aspects of their lives, is why a focus on play and fun provided an especially fertile strategic research site.

I have tried to present sufficient data for the readers to interpret for themselves whether my analyses and conclusions seem valid. I have also been forthright about my shortcomings and the limitations and biases of my research. In the end, whether you empathize with the men is not so important, my goal was not to use them as moral props or abstract variables. My aim was to present them as multifaceted and creative human beings striving to live with dignity and meaning in their new home.

Implications and extensions

Actively participating in park life gave me a unique opportunity to look more deeply at the taken-for-granted processes by which immigrants make social connections in new places. The abundance of research on the consequences of social ties in migration research is indicative of the focus on structure and outcomes over interaction and process. Migrant networks remain essential but they emerge under changing and dynamic conditions. Social ties are not innocently "there" or passively reproduced but actively created and maintained by people who are well aware of the benefits that inhere in social relationships.

Social networks, however, are not created equally or effortlessly. People face constraints and opportunities in forming and sustaining social ties. Understanding people's connections—

and how they generate advantages or disadvantages—requires understanding the contexts in which those connections are embedded and organized. This study hones in on this dynamic social process, paying special attention to the role of soccer and public parks in generating connections and facilitating settlement.

In particular, it shows that people need shared commitments, in this case, a fascination with soccer and beer drinking, to sustain interactions and create new relations. Like parents networking at daycare, through the innocence of children, the play at the park creates a fabric and texture that the men share, thereby breaking down boundaries between them. Soccer and park play is universally understood and enjoyed by the men, regardless of origins and backgrounds. This commonality around play is used to create community, which is the foundation for networking. As opposed to seeing networks emanating from pre-existing ties, this study shows how the men manufacture a basis for making new ties. These findings encourage migration scholars to look more carefully at the contingent and social nature of network formation and to examine less traditional research sites of interaction and meaning making. This may involve going beyond conventional gatekeepers and mixing more deeply with the rank and file in their everyday lives.

Moving away from migration studies, I conclude with three additional implications of this research. One, this study highlights the role of history and biography in generating and sustaining meaningful interactions. This is most evident in how the men play with local knowledge about the games and players to sustain and intensify their interactions with others. For example, as newcomers quickly learn, player achievements—good and bad—are not equal at the park. A strict interactionist approach, focusing solely on *in situ* back-and-forth, here-and-now exchanges, would have failed to understand what the men are doing and creating when they play,

watch, and comment on the games. Moreover, soccer becomes an obvious way to keep the past alive in the present. Interactionistists would in turn benefit from drawing deeper connections between what their research subjects do with their histories, biographies, and shared experiences.

Two, this study begins to reveal the rich and nuanced meanings parks can have for different sets of people. These findings could not be ascertained from a distance or through survey techniques. Academic writings and policy reports, however, generally apply a more surface representation of parks. In most cases, parks are either glamorized or vilified in ideal terms and accounted for in reference to broad social categories, be it by the racial makeup of park users or the social class of adjacent neighbors. Local residents applied a similar approach when expressing concerns over the men's presence in the park. For them, the games and field represented a problem that needed to be controlled, despite any first-hand knowledge of their use or meaning for the participants. In contrast, this study shows the importance of the social relations formed around playing soccer and drinking in public as well as the social implications of policing and marginalizing these activities. While not without problems and complications, my findings espouse the democratic value of public parks, but a defense that is more in tune with their actual uses and meanings.

Three, a similar problem appears to plague sports studies. This research generally focuses on issues of power, domination, distinction, and social identity, rather than on how and what people do with sports on the ground. That is, these studies fail to sufficiently conceptualize sport as activity in action—abstracting it rather for other purposes, often political—thereby overlooking the diverse relationships and meanings participants form with and through sport. Soccer at the park does not exist or have meaning by itself, nor can it be read as a text from a

distance. It was only through in-depth participant observation that I could begin to appreciate how soccer is made meaningful and compelling by men at play in a public park.

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While ethnographers usually leave the field with ambivalence, I depart with sadness. Paradoxically, the park gave me an academic career that sent me thousands of miles away. The ways I experienced the park helps illustrate its meaning and function, despite all the factors that differentiated me from most of the men.

I also had to develop trust and establish my reputation before the men were willing to accept me and give themselves to my research. While always in process and never fully knowable, I accomplished this over time through my interactions with the men. Social exchanges also helped form and sustain personal relationships; the men offered me access to their lives, I provided other resources that were of benefit to them. Power dynamics and inequalities were certainly at work, but they always are at the park.

I had many moving experiences with the men as well—the fun I tried to capture in this study—but park life also presented various challenges and problems for me. While these outcomes were all shaped by my material and subjective realities, deep engagement helped me better understand what the men were doing and creating together in the park. This dissertation is my attempt to convey and give justice to this rich and complex social world, which the men graciously allowed me to observe and experience.

Figure 1: Photographs from the field


Marvista
Bicentenario
La porra con ustedes


MAR VISTA.F.C


AON


Coca-Cola
CRISTAL


NO
PARKING
ANY TIME


SEAL RITE INC


POLICE
88566


MAR VISTA PARK
SOCCER FIELD
ATTENTION FIELD USERS
The Synthetic Turf Soccer Field Rules:
To protect and preserve this field & park
please observe the following rules:
No metal cleats, spikes or plastic cleats longer than 3/4".
Please clean footwear prior to entering the field.
No food or beverages (including gum). Water bottles
are ok but please deposit them in the trash after use.
No pets.
No vehicles or bicycles.
Only players, coaches and league officials are allowed
on the playing turf.
No field markings of any sort.
No furnishings on the field, tables,chairs, canopies, etc.
No Vendors.
Failure to comply with the field rules may result in
loss of permitting privileges.
"Please be considerate of our neighbors"


MEXICO

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