PLAYING THROUGH CONTRADICTIONS: INDO-PAK BASKETBALL AND EMBODYING SOUTH ASIAN AMERICAN MASCULINITY

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DISSERTATION
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ABSTRACT

This is a qualitative research project incorporating ethnographic methods alongside interviews. Through these qualitative research methods, I sought out how South Asian Americans attribute meaning to leisure activities of basketball and dance clubs. In particular, I examined the Indo-Pak Basketball North American circuit in general and the local Atlanta South Asian American basketball scene in particular. I looked at how South Asian Americans utilize the cultural practices in basketball, its respective pleasures and desires, to talk about belonging and citizenship at the nexus of masculinity, sexuality, race, class, and ethnicity. By examining these cultural practices of belonging, basketball presents a venue by which to provide a critique of US citizenship through South Asian American masculinity while inserting South Asian American-ness into the cultural logic of US citizenship. Sporting and leisure venues allow for such masculine pleasures and desires that contest hegemonic discourses of South Asian Americans as forever foreign—social interactions and consumptive practices of leisure allow for cultural citizenship. Yet, such counter-hegemonic practices exist in fields of power. Thus, this research project explores how South Asian American identity formation takes place in a dialectical relationship of power whereby acts of resistance and re-imagination of normativities does not do away with such fields of power. Rather, the moment of resistance also implicates other workings of power whereby these cultural parameters of South Asian American-ness, through leisure space, begin to exclude various Others—women and queer subjects. Therefore, contesting citizenship through South Asian American masculinity also leads to productions of various other normativities.
To Amma and Appa, I love you.
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Interview with Ali (member of Indo-Pak Basketball team “Atlanta Outkasts”):

During a conversation with Ali (see Appendix A to get idea of the cast of characters) on May 30th, 2009, I asked how he got into basketball during all his family’s moves in the US from Houston to Nashville to LaGrange, GA to Lawrenceville, GA to Dalton, GA back to Lawrenceville, GA. With confidence and a chuckle, Ali said with authority in his voice, “Wherever we moved, the first thing we did was put up a goal.”

In the conversation above, Ali underscores the pleasures, meanings, and importance of basketball in his social milieu. Basketball, as in the case of Ali and other South Asian American interlocutors, provided a key arena for identity formation through contours of South Asian American masculinity. As South Asian American basketball players creatively and physically challenge each other through their athletic skills, more than just “play” manifests itself in leisure spaces during, between, and after games. The shooting of the basketball through the basket, the passes made, the creative practices of basketball play, and other elements of basketball socialities present affects and pleasures other than simply winning or losing. Another added element of significance consists of peer-group structuring of Indo-Pak Basketball in opposition to other co-ethnic events led by community elders. Aspects of generational difference transpire here where young people construct youth culture through the resources of popular culture by which to transform, negotiate, and manage South Asian American-ness. Players commented that parents placed spatio-temporal limits on playing sport. Khan from team “Atlanta Rat Pack” said, “They [parents] like when i play ball, except when i get injured. Thats when they tell me to stop
playing.” Mohammed, of Atlanta Rat Pack, explained, “They [parents] have no interest really in basketball, but they encourage me because they know I love to play. Of course after injuries or as I get older they say I should stop playing, but I love it too much.” Although parents of players bragged about the numerous trophies garnered by their respective sons, they placed limitations to such sporting pleasures; it marked youth and parents emphasized an end to sport as a coming of age into adulthood. Indo-Pak Players utilize such basketball venues as a commitment to their identity as South Asian American men instead of as a “rite of passage” (Turner 1969) from adolescence to manhood.

Therefore, the importance placed on leisure spaces point to social phenomenon to be studied as sport serves as a “creative force” in identity development (Hartmann 2003). My research focus is primarily concerned with South Asian American participation in Indo-Pak Basketball, South Asian American basketball spaces, and corresponding movement of players across various leisure spaces such as dance clubs. I studied a specific segment of the population to illustrate social processes but do not overstate that this represents all of South Asian America, these cultural texts are always incomplete (Rail 1998). Accordingly, I underscore basketball sites as ritualistic events where participants perform their experiences of self and place. Through examination of South Asian American participation in ritualistic basketball accounts and its respective aesthetics, an American story, rich in contradictions, emerges about ethnic American lives.

As social interactions proceed to take place in leisure spaces, identity formation carries with it multiple contradictions. Therefore, by pointing out the contradictions of South Asian American masculinity, I underscore how cultural practices of identity formation provide fertile
ground rich in contradictions. These contradictions deal with issues of “belonging” and “cultural citizenship” in the US. As the cultural normativities of US citizenship dislocate South Asian Americans as differently gendered, sexualized, and raced subjects, the engagement with leisure spaces allows a measure of belonging. However, these measures of belonging and parameters of South Asian American-ness, at the moment of inclusion within the US cultural fabric, work to exclude various others. Other contradictions, likewise, arise through claims of sameness as South Asian Americans that simultaneously underscores South Asian American difference. Furthermore, as South Asian American masculinity arises in relation to other communities of color, in particular Black masculinity, the consumptive logic of late capitalism undermines progressive coalition building at the moment in which Black men are idolized. Another contradiction, I contend, consists of the move by Muslim American communities to enter the US public sphere intentionally and lay claim to “American-ness” at the moment in which their “American-ness” is best articulated and expressed in exclusive, South Asian-only social spaces.

One major contradiction surfaces in relation to the racial hysteria of September 11th, 2001. September 11th, 2001 has been a critical “turning point” (Naber 2008) in South Asian American communities, especially in Muslim South Asian America. At the moment in which Muslim communities in Atlanta responded to the post 9/11 racial hysteria with greater public engagement, such as the “Islamic Speakers Bureau” and symposiums (see Appendix B) about Islam in Atlanta, this moment also constitutes a point in which ethnic-only South Asian American basketball leagues flourished. This rich contradiction needs attention to understand what pleasures and acts of identity formation take place in ethnic-only basketball circuits that facilitate venues to “American-ness” not readily available in other public spaces. There exists
intricate rituals, acts, and discourses within these leisure spaces embedded with meanings of “belonging” and “cultural citizenship” (Maira 2009).

To make sense of these contradictions, I examine systems of meaning in leisure spaces including Indo-Pak Basketball, processes of community formation, and the relevant cultural practices of South Asian American masculinity. Lipsitz (2005: xi) emphasizes that young people “appropriate the raw materials of globalization—its commodities, mass mediated messages, and displacements—and turn them into tools for building community and critique.”³ By looking at South Asian American participation in leisure activities, basketball practices in particular, I look at how the young people (ages 18 to 40) take up popular cultural realms of sport and leisure to construct community while providing a double critique on US citizenship as well as of South Asian American-ness. Sport, as ritual and social drama (Turner 1988, 1984, 1969), allows for expressions of memberships through emotions and discourses (Archetti 1997). Cultural intimacy, in Indo-Pak Basketball and associated basketball venues, is forged and renewed through its respective expressive practices, pleasures, and desires whereby affirming varying levels of South Asian American-ness.

Through an interpolation of such systems of meaning, I found out what these cultural practices meant for the practitioners and participants (Kelley 1997: 41; Geertz 1973). In this case, meanings do not exist independently but are inscribed by the participants.⁴ Lipsitz’s (1990: 13) states, “Individual artifacts of popular culture have no fixed meanings: it is impossible to say whether any one combination of sounds or set of images or grouping of words innately express one unified political position…consumers of popular culture move in and out of subject positions in a way that allows the same message to have widely varying meanings at the point of
reception.” In fact, through participation in leisure spaces, the subject positions arise through embodied performances of self. At moments in which identity is fixed by participants, there are claims to postmodern notions of identities. At moments of coherence, incoherence emerges; polyvalence underscores the contradictions of cultural identities. Multi-vocality, multi-locality, and contradictions govern the pleasures, desires, and practices of South Asian American masculinity. Culture, as such, is a site embedded in messiness and contradictions.

**Why Basketball? Popular Culture as an Important Social Field**

Popular culture—basketball and its respective leisure spaces—presents venues to writing narratives that make visible the contradictions of South Asian American masculinity and the complexity of South Asian America in the US South. Popular culture sheds light on cultural practices and locations not previously dealt with in the literature. Utilizing popular culture as a means to write South Asian American histories presents sites where “American-ness,” “South Asian-ness,” “South Asian American-ness,” and “other-ness” are complicated, collapsed, and managed in various ways (Maira 2002, 1999). According to Espana-Maram (2006), who examines Filipino laborers and their engagement with popular at the turn of the 20th century US, “Popular culture…opens up critical inquiry into social relations not only among Filipinos themselves, but also between the immigrants and the host society.” (2006: 3) Through an exploration of basketball interactions, my research foregrounds histories of active interactions between South Asian communities in the US, specifically Atlanta, and the mainstream US society. Thus, examination of popular culture—sport—allows for understandings of not how South Asian Americans act out as consumers but also how they creatively work through
mainstream popular culture in differential fields of power to express their identities (Dave et al 2005; Desai 2005; Maira 2009, 2000). 7

Historian George Lipsitz (1990) argues that a careful examination of popular culture “open up for sustained analysis the everyday life activities of popular culture consumers, youth subcultures, and ethnic minorities. Most important, they provide sophisticated and convincing arguments about the ways in which the commonplace and ordinary practices of everyday life often encode larger social and ideological meaning.” These quotidian events of sport and play are embedded in a web of larger social processes while maintaining specificity particular to the sport (James 2003). As a result, the sporting body, like those in Indo-Pak Basketball, “may be seen, not simply as a signifier of meaning, but as a subject actor in a larger drama of culture and power.” (Alter 1994: 24) Participation in basketball spaces and its accompanying leisure spaces (dance clubs and strip clubs) present South Asian Americans with a way to talk about identity formation through the interplay of ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, and class. 8

I use the term “liting it up” to speak to that element of popular culture and urban basketball vernacular while also emphasizing the scholarship that I provide that makes visible South Asian Americans in the US South. “Liting it up” refers to a moment when a basketball player scores prolifically with the opponent struggling to stop this person from scoring. As such, the person is seen as coming out of a darkness and invisibility to not only make one’s self very visible but also make the flaws in the opponent visible. “Liting it up” is momentum and proliferation, it is about getting into a groove that the player scores in many ways and cannot be stopped by the defensive opponent. In this sense, I want to shed light on how a neglect of how popular culture—sport—sutures into the lives of South Asian Americans puts particular cultural
processes and community formations in darkness. This is a move in which the “lighting up” points to the multiplicity of cultural practices of South Asian American masculinity. As a result, sport and leisure do not represent activities on the fringe but are “lit up” as important sites for identity formation and social phenomenon. Furthermore, this research showcases how an examination of South Asian American masculinity “lights up” the role of gender in everyday life, from the pedestrian to the spectacular. Therefore, similar to the player whose point proliferation brings visibility, this project multiplies epistemologies of masculinity in the South Asian American community through various aspects of leisure. Furthermore, gender formation takes place in fields of power, analyzing South Asian American masculinity, through leisure spaces, demonstrates how gender is woven into cultural parameters of US citizenship as well as South Asian American-ness.

Through exploration of the practices of South Asian American masculinity, this work adds to the literature on South Asian America via the lives of these young South Asian American men. Another area I aim to illuminate—“light up”—with my research consists of scholarship done on the US South. Although Joshi (2006) and Dhingra (2007, 2004) examined the US South, Atlanta and Dallas respectively, there still exists a vacuum with regard to scholarship on South Asian America in Atlanta in particular and the US South in general. Previous research conducted on the US South has reinforced a racial logic predicated on a Black-White racial binary (Baylor 1989; Keating 2001; Kruse 2006). Although paying close attention to the African American population and the Latino population in Atlanta is prudent, South Asian American communities take shape in relation to these communities and with relation to other communities. The growing South Asian population in the South warrants careful analytical
attention, I want to shed light on South Asian American communities in relation to other racialized communities.

**Theoretical Foundations: Women of Color Feminism and Queer Diasporic Critique**

To shed light on how gender operates on South Asian American community formation through South Asian American masculinity, I utilize theoretical foundations informed by Women of Color Feminism and Queer Diasporic Critique. Basketball masculinity, as embodied by my South Asian American subjects, indexes an identity at shifting intersections of masculinity, race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality. I underscore gender as a social construction—fluid, sifting, performative, laden with power, and contradictory (Goode 2002; hooks 1999,1990; Mankekar 1999; Ramirez 2004). Therefore, masculinity is not natural but rather a social construction; I emphasize an examination of the signs, gestures, and acts that give valence and substance to gendered identities (Butler 1993, 1990) to make sense of how gender matters in everyday life. I agree with Bolin and Granskog (2003: 4) who argue that “in a very real sense it is the embodiment of gender that informs our lives and sets the parameters for constructing the reality we currently experience.”

I underscore “Women of Color Feminism’s insistence on difference, coalitional politics, and a careful examination of the intersecting processes of race, gender, sexuality, and class, which makes singular identifications impossible, displaces a U.S. nationalist subject formation based on homogeneity, equivalence, and identification.” (Hong 2006: xvi) These South Asian American masculinities contest US normative masculinities while standing in relation to other
racialized masculinities. By examining the discourses around the racial formation of “Muslim looking” (Ahmad 2004), that involves gender and sexuality, the cultural parameters of US citizenship become lucid. Cultural citizenship (Maira 2009) then involves consumptive practices and expressive practices, informed by popular culture, that shore up ideas of South Asian American masculinity. These masculinities gain coherence through processes of constant invocation and repudiation (Butler 1993). Therefore, invocation and repudiation also normalize South Asian American masculinities while standing in relation to other hegemonic and marginalized masculinities. As South Asian American masculinity stands in relation to white hegemonic masculinities associated with citizenship and black hegemonic masculinities associated with sport, South Asian American masculinity also tends to exclude, marginalize, and make invisible other communities.\(^{11}\) Enacting and invoking pleasures that foreground masculinity exist in an uneven terrain of power.

In addition, ideas of race prevalent in the US society (including the South Asian American community) depend on gender and sexuality for its articulations and for its meanings. Diasporic Queer Critique provides an anti-normative foundation with which to dismantle normativities of citizenship and diaspora that rely on gender and sexuality for its articulation. Citizenship, in nation and diaspora, take racialized characteristics whereby excluding through the axes of race, gender, and sexuality. The discursive productions of “model minority” and “terrorist” request manifestations of gender and sexuality to, as this dissertation will show, dislocate South Asian Americans as recalcitrant masculinities outside the normative logic of US citizenship (Puar and Rai 2004, 2002; Puar 2007). Accordingly, sport constitutes one arena where the gendered and sexualized discourse of the “war on terror” marginalizes South Asian citizens in the diaspora (see Burdsey 2008, 2007). Therefore, recuperating masculinity as a
means to counter hegemonic discourses of citizenship also puts into play pleasures, desires, and affects of South Asian American masculinity that provides a critique of nation and diaspora. Such recuperation, paradoxically, depends on the axis of gender and sexuality that initially served to dislocate South Asian Americans. In the process of performing South Asian American masculinities in Indo-Pak Basketball, normative gender orders and normative sexual orders are kept intact (see Brown 2006). As a result, South Asian American masculinity occupies positions of dominance as it subverts national normativities—South Asian American masculinity inhabits positions of hegemony and marginality concurrently.

While affirming the pleasures and desires of South Asian American masculinity, South Asian American men, in my study, also excluded queers, women, the poor, and other communities of color through enactment of masculinities. Therefore, “Popular culture becomes the contested terrain for consolidating ideologies of nation, race, gender, and sexuality.” (Gopinath 2007: 160) Queer Diasporic critique then questions normativities and normalizing discourses associated with ethnic citizenship and the constitution of the diaspora (Eng 2001; Gopinath 2005; Manalansan 2003b). Thus, the pleasures of masculinity affirmed through basketball activities and corresponding social interactions then structure cultural parameters of South Asian America that are problematic, contradictory, and exclusionary.

**Methodology**

A qualitative research design best suited my objectives of mapping meaning making and identity formation through sport (popular culture) for my South Asian American subjects.
Utilizing ethnography of sport (Sands 2002), I conducted ethnographic research on South Asian American communities in Atlanta while also paying close attention to the Chicago Indo-Pak National tournament. The qualitative methods in Anthropology best suited me for this research project and allow for locating individuals “embedded in much broader and more complex cultural environments” (Moore 2004: 37). As a South Asian American researcher, I have not only conducted research on this population since summer 2006 but have known some gatekeepers in Atlanta’s Indo-Pak Basketball scene since 1994. Although a member of the South Asian American community, I was sensitive with my research methods by which I utilized a Feminist trope by which to center the voices of my informants and not let the researcher stand in place for them (Findlay 2000). Through active engagement with the male South Asian American basketball community in Atlanta, my subject position shows similarities and contrasts with my subjects while continuously highlighting the spectrum of South Asian America within Indo-Pak Basketball.

In addition, as a result of the national racial hysteria after September 11th, 2001, South Asian American populations have felt state surveillance intimately in Atlanta. Although US citizens by birth or by naturalization, many of my informants encountered the reach of the US State department; this proved true at the mosques in Atlanta where community leaders felt directly state surveillance. To respect the confidentiality of subjects, I use pseudonyms for all my subjects. I got informed consent and maintain the confidentiality of my informants.

Most of the material from Atlanta comes through participant observation, interviews, oral histories, and “experiential ethnography” (Sands 2002; de Garis 1999) with South Asian Americans involved in the local Atlanta Indo-Pak Basketball scene. Specifically, I mainly
conducted research on a team called Atlanta Outkasts since I have established rapport with them since 1994, they played in local and national Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments; they are mostly Muslim Pakistani Americans, and come from various class backgrounds. I also spent considerable time with another team called Atlanta Rat Pack of which some players of Atlanta Outkasts played with at different points during my research. At various points these two teams combined and dispersed for various reasons while keeping open membership for each other. These teams played at Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments at local Hindu Mandirs (temples), Georgia Tech University, and at Georgia State University; I took note of the interactions on and off the basketball court. Participant observation also consisted of partaking in activities outside of basketball play such as the party scene, Friday prayers at mosques, dinners, and grand events such as weddings.  

In addition to meeting with Indo-Pak Basketball players, I also interviewed key South Asian American elders in the South Asian American community. These elders provided not only their family histories but also accounts of change in Atlanta’s South Asian American community. Furthermore, “A life history can provide a unique diachronic perspective of the changing nature of culture and cultural behavior.” (Sands 2002: 71) These key elders I interviewed were identified by my Indo-Pak Basketball informants and came to Atlanta in the late 1970s and early 1980s—their narratives provide an accurate history of change in Atlanta over the last forty years.  

Alongside participant observation and interviews, I also utilized “Experiential ethnography.” “Experiential ethnography” (de Garis 1999; Sands 2002) consists of not only observation but an active participation that implicates my body in these sporting events. De Garis
(1999) states: Experiential ethnography is “the totality of an experience that does not just privilege the visual, the observed, and the verbal, but the kinesthetic and the somatic bodily experience of the activity as well.” It provides embodied knowledge. The body and its comportment point to embodiments of masculinity. In addition, a study of the body at play showcases the relational nature of gendered discourses while simultaneously implicating the performing body in contexts of power.

As a researcher, I also participated in actual basketball activities with my subjects while immersing myself into the particular training of basketball bodies. In order to make sense of the time, affect, and energy put into basketball activities, I played in recreational games, played in organized leagues, and participated in tournaments with two Atlanta teams—Atlanta Outkasts and Atlanta Rat Pack. Playing basketball took various forms from playing recreational basketball at a player’s house to playing “pick-up” at the local gyms to playing Monday and Thursday nights at a local gym. In addition, I took notice of how the subjects of this study trained their bodies through not only basketball play but also by working out with them at the local gyms.

With regard to Chicago, my research consisted of participant observation while taking on the role of a spectator. Chicago hosts one of the main Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments and is considered the birth place of Indo-Pak Basketball in the US. I interviewed teams that came from across the US and Canada. My interviews took place mainly with various team captains and organizers of the Chicago tournament. A few spectators were also interviewed in order to understand the interplay between the spectators and players concerning masculinity.
**Dissertation Chapter Structure**

To extrapolate the ways in which the pleasures, desires, and affects of basketball practices manifest a South Asian American masculinity, the dissertation moves back and forth in time while illuminating specific cultural processes at work. The structure of this dissertation is one that allows for the reader to locate affect with identity formation, politics, and power.

Chapter one provides the social context for this research project. In this chapter, the particularity of Atlanta is made transparent in order to understand the immigration flows to Atlanta, the relation of Atlanta to Chicago, and the particularity of the South Asian American community in Atlanta. As 9/11 is a turning point in racialization of Muslim communities in Atlanta, I chart the changes in Atlanta with regard to the post-9/11 racial hysteria and state surveillance. In addition, this chapter looks at how basketball gained leeway into South Asian American communities through the unusual venue of South Asian American cultural centers and religious institutions—these are often marked as sites of national, ethnic, and religious difference from the US cultural fabric.

Chapter two complicates South Asian America through team formation. In particular, this chapter delves into team formation and team names as signifiers of social phenomenon. Through analysis of team formation and team names, the “heterogeneity” and “multiplicity” (Lowe 1996) of South Asian America is taken into account. The various immigration waves are examined through the realm of team formation. Also, the team names index national and diasporic histories while continuing to expand South Asian America as more than “Hindu” and “Indian” (see Islam 1993).
Chapter three delves into the acts, discourses, movements, and gestures of masculinity within South Asian American basketball publics. Here the emphasis lies on the particular cultural practices that celebrate South Asian American masculinity through basketball activities. Chapter three explores as to why, how, and when pleasures and affects of South Asian American masculinity arise in Indo-Pak Basketball. This chapter underscores pleasure and desires in gendered identity formation. Therefore, movements and expressive practices of basketball also demand “place-making” and spatialization of gender. Accordingly, ideas of masculinity travel through space and this chapter examines how the contours of South Asian American masculinity take shape in other leisure spaces—in particular dance clubs and strip clubs.

As chapter three explores how racializing discourses are inverted through performing a sporting South Asian American masculinity, chapter four examines the spectrum of power in constructions of this South Asian American-ness and its respective heteronormativity. Whereas the other chapters demonstrated how South Asian American masculinities emerge as subversive masculinities contesting the status quo (hegemonic masculinities), this chapter contests such simple binaries. This chapter illustrates the contradictions of community formation along lines of gender and sexuality—South Asian American masculinity. Recuperating a racialized masculinity, this chapter argues, puts in other sets of exclusions. Thus, South Asian American masculinity can occupy positions of hegemony and dominance simultaneously (Miller 2001) while reaffirming gender orders and sexual orders.

The contours of South Asian American-ness through performances of basketball masculinity also exist in relation to other racialized and other hegemonic masculinities. Chapter five interrogates the contextual specificity of the US South with regard to the Black-white racial
binary. Instead of dismissing the categories of Black and White as insufficient in racially
categorizing South Asian Americans, I examine the means by which the categories of Black and
White talk to South Asian American difference. In the process, this chapter looks at how race in
the US South is then reconfigured through South Asian American sensibilities and racializing
discourses. At the heart of this chapter is how African American men—Black masculinity—in
sport are understood and how they stand in relation to South Asian American men through
ethnic-only leagues.

The final chapter, the conclusion, summarizes the theoretical framings in this dissertation.
In addition, this chapter will demonstrate the literature that this scholarship engaged with while
also showing the interventions made. Taking masculinity as a paradigm of analysis provides
work on masculinity formation at the intersection of race, sexuality, ethnicity, and class that adds
to the literature in various fields. Furthermore, the future directions of research from this project
are examined while underscoring some key themes and questions for study.
Chapter 1

Home Court: Atlanta and its Social Landscape

Welcome to Atlanta where the players play
And we ride on dem thangs like ev-ery day
Big beats, hit streets, see gansters roamin
And parties don’t stop ‘til eight in the mo’nin
—Jermaine Dupri (“Welcome to Atlanta”)

The lyrics above come from the song “Welcome to Atlanta” by Atlanta hip hop artist and producer Jermaine Dupri. Using these lyrics stay with the focus on popular culture as hip hop constitutes one important element of popular culture associated with basketball. Hip hop not only resonates through Atlanta as a major industry but plays a part in identity formation of young people. Like Dupri’s lyrics, this chapter is a “welcome to Atlanta.” The term, “home court,” refers to the original site of a team and the advantages of playing on familiar ground. I hope to recuperate this term as means to highlight the social context of Atlanta, make it familiar ground, and provide insight into the US South and South Asian America.

This chapter focuses on how the social context of Atlanta takes shape especially with regard to the young South Asian American men in my study. As the playing on the court exists, always, in relation to a larger social context, this is an examination of “where the players play.” In this chapter, elements of popular culture, especially that of sport, serve to situate this place in regards to South Asian America. Accordingly, the first part of the analysis will consist of utilizing the 1996 Olympic Games to highlight the constitution of South Asian America in
Atlanta. This survey examines the flow of immigration to Atlanta as well as the mapping of South Asian American institutions in Atlanta. Then, the focus shifts to 9/11 with regard to its specificity in Atlanta and the US South.

1996 Atlanta Olympics: Institutional Constructions of Sport and the Changing South Asian American Landscape in Atlanta

Examination of sport adds nuance to South Asian American histories, thus, one must incorporate an analysis of the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. Accordingly, the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games provide a venue to understanding how construction and imagination of “Atlanta” through the Olympic Games affected South Asian American trajectories in the US. Atlanta’s Committee on the Olympic Games (ACOG) garnered enough media force and capital to bring the Centennial Olympics Games to Atlanta in 1996 (Keating 2001; Kruse 2006). ACOG members produced an image of Atlanta, through an “economy of appearances” (Tsing 2000) and “process of aestheticization” (Jacobs 1998), with the intention to induce, attract, and entice capital investment in Atlanta (Kearns and Philo 1993). Garnering the status “global city” (Sassen 1999) involves intimate production of sporting cultures within cities (Carter 2006; Zhang and Silk 2006), “The existence of a vibrant sporting culture is often presented as evidence of a city’s position in the modern world.” (Carter 2006: 153) Through gaining official acceptance to host the Centennial 1996 Olympics ahead of Athens, Greece, Atlanta garnered attention on the global scene. However, this research project focuses not on the capital brought in by the Atlanta Olympics but rather the movement of people. Saskia Sassen (1999) underscores how global
cities involve not just the movement of capital but also of people, the discourses around the 1996 Olympics marked Atlanta as a favorable destination in the South Asian imagination.

Considerable immigration, of the early 1965 immigration waves, originally took place from South Asia to New York, New Jersey, Chicago, Houston, and San Francisco—Atlanta’s Olympic Games re-imagined the US landscape. The Atlanta Olympics increased South Asian immigration to Atlanta alongside increased internal migration of South Asian Americans to Atlanta. Upon first meeting Atlanta Outkasts members in 1994, Indo-Pak Basketball national tournaments took place in Chicago and Dallas. In the Southeastern US, Greenville, South Carolina hosted a tournament in 1994 and would be the center of Indo-Pak activities in the South. In addition, a major Indo-Pak Basketball national tournament was conducted in Knoxville, Tennessee in 1999 with teams coming from around the country. Certain demographic shifts have taken place whereby Atlanta has a large South Asian American population and now produces local Indo-Pak tournaments. For example, a Tennessee Indo-Pak Basketball team, that had members who hosted the tournament in 1999, claims its Tennessee identity when playing in local Indo-Pak tournaments in Atlanta by calling themselves “Tennessee Volunteers” in relation to the University of Tennessee collegiate men’s basketball team. When the Tennessee team plays in national tournaments such as the DC Indo-Pak Basketball national tournament in 2007, they went by “Dirty South” which reference the genre of hip hop music coming out of Atlanta. When on the national scene, they use this name to show the specificity of their team life. Thus, for members of Atlanta Dirty South, their previous centers in Tennessee and South Carolina have been replaced by Atlanta. There has been a migration of players as professional and career opportunities opened up in Atlanta.
Archival data and interviews with South Asian American community leaders also confirm this social phenomenon of Atlanta’s emergence in the US South. Mr. Mathew, owner of one of the first local Indo-Pak grocery stores in Atlanta, explained, “When I got to Atlanta in 1982 from New York City, only about 500 families lived here and they all knew each other.” In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the South Asian population in Atlanta was about 5,000 people. Upon careful examination of government documents—see figure 1, 2, and 3 (see Appendix D for all figures), Mr. Mathew’s statement proves accurate as the larger communities of South Asian US permanent residents were in the major centers of Chicago, Florida, Houston, New York, and California. The sheer density of South Asian communities in Illinois, Texas, California, New York, and Florida differed from Georgia. Figure 1 shows greater concentration of South Asians arriving through family preference acts in other cities and states other than Atlanta. Chicago, as a site of study, had considerable South Asian populations. With a greater flow of South Asians to Chicago after 1965, an established community formed early in Chicago so that when the family preference acts were passed in 1980, the community could sponsor siblings from South Asia and elsewhere. Thus, Chicago held a large South Asian population both before and after 1980s in contrast to Atlanta.

South Asian immigration to Georgia, as figure 2 demonstrates, increased tremendously during the period from 1990-1999. Mr. Mathew underscored increased visibility and increased discourses about Atlanta that embedded Atlanta into the South Asian and South Asian American imaginary; Mr. Mathew stated that with Atlanta’s Olympic Games, “most people know about Atlanta.” At no point did Mr. Mathew emphasize the actual Olympic Games as the destination point for South Asians but instead the city of Atlanta. He stressed how Atlanta’s appearance on the global map must be coupled with its weather and affordable living. Figure 2 must be
understood in relation to not only immigration from South Asia but also the increased migration of South Asian Americans from other major cities in the US. Atlanta, for some respondents, was not the original point of entry into the US but, rather, their final place of residence.

This population changed tremendously in the mid 1990s till 2009. The census data of 2001 reveals that 26.2% of South Asians in the US live in the South (Joshi 2006: 2). When I inquired about the changes to Atlanta’s South Asian population since 1982, Mr. Mathew stressed the increase in size. Without any hesitation, he pointed to the Atlanta Olympics as an important factor in increased immigration and migration to Atlanta. Upon interviewing two South Asian Americans, Daniel and Harpreet, who grew up in Atlanta, their narratives affirm and add complexity to Mr. Mathew’s history. Harpreet moved to Atlanta in 1977 from Amritsar, India, whereby living in Doraville, a suburb of Atlanta and split between DeKalb county and Fulton County (two major counties of Atlanta in addition to Cobb county). Living in Doraville as a young man, Harpreet made it a point to inform me that most of the young “desis” (South Asian term used to refer to South Asians in the diasporas) and their families lived in Doraville.7 Not coincidently, in 1991 the first ethnically operated cinema theatre showing Hindi movies opened in Doraville.8 Doraville is now a racially mixed community with large numbers of Latinos and Southeast Asian Americans.

Sunni (a branch of Islam) communities, like Sultan’s family (Sultan is a member of Atlanta Outkasts basketball team), were set up in DeKalb County as a result of the early post-1965 immigration waves to the US while other Sunnis with parents coming through the family preference acts like siblings Mustafa, Ali, and Qamar grew up in Gwinnett County on the far outskirts of metro Atlanta. With increased population in the mid 1990s, Gwinnett
County now has the largest South Asian population in Georgia. Upon careful investigation of Figure 3 with relation to Figure 4 and Figure 5, one can see the increased concentration of South Asians specifically in the Metro Atlanta region. Atlanta, especially Gwinnett County, constitutes one of the fastest growing South Asian communities in the US. Although Chicago continues to outpace Atlanta with regards to South Asian concentration, Atlanta has a sizeable South Asian community. Whereas Chicago had a large South Asian population from the early waves, Atlanta’s population is attributed to the later waves and from internal US migrations.

Since the Olympics, the population skyrocketed to over 85,000 currently in metro Atlanta with the majority of this population in Gwinnett County. The US Census Bureau in 2005 gave estimates of 79,169 Asian Indians, 1,761 Bangladeshis, 3, 814 Pakistanis, and 265 Sri Lankans in Georgia. Current estimates given by the Atlanta Regional Commission points to roughly 77,000 persons of Indian heritage alongside 12,000-15,000 persons of Pakistani heritage. South Asians have outnumbered other Asian American communities in Atlanta. South Asian Americans also vie for political seats in Gwinnett County. Jamil Imran sought such a political voice in 2004. “A Bangladesh-born Muslim, Imran is campaigning for state House District 69, which runs along I-85 to Ga. 316;” this district is located in Gwinnett County.

Business and organizational proliferation took place paralleling population increases in South Asian America. In lines with Khandelwal’s (2002, 1995) examination of increased South Asian immigration to New York, increased migration from other parts of the US and immigration to Atlanta as a major port of entry after the 1996 Olympics facilitated the production of numerous organizations that cater to the spectrum of South Asia and South Asian
America. Upon investigation of Georgia Indo-American Chamber of Commerce (came to existence in 2001), a spectrum of organizations emerged with the purpose of catering to Atlanta’s South Asian American communities. Even South Asian politicians visit Atlanta to garner transnational economic, social, and political support: former Pakistani President Benazir Bhutto came to Atlanta in 2000 to garner support in her campaign to lead Pakistan again.13

9/11 and Atlanta: Adding to the Social Context

Atlanta’s growing significance in the South Asian imagination simultaneously makes Atlanta a key point of US state interest and state surveillance. The events and discourses surrounding the spectacle of September 11th, 2001 also made Atlanta a key point in the internal “war on terror” launched by the US state. Similar to Naber’s (2008) work on Arab Americans and racialization, I also situate 9/11 as a “turning point” with regards to how discourses of “war on terror” have changed the meanings attributed to South Asian Americans in the US national fabric. The racialization of Muslims, Moallem (2002: 298) contends, “has its roots in cultural essentialism…Islamic fundamentalism has become a genetic signifier used constantly to single out the Muslim other, in its irrational, morally inferior, and barbaric masculinity and its passive, victimized, and submissive femininity.” Very local examples of racial profiling and increased state surveillance present themselves while adding to the social context of South Asian American life in Atlanta. Muslim men, in particular, are attributed a recalcitrant racialized hyper-masculinity through the figure of the “terrorist”, this figure is seen as threatening to national citizenship, civility, and middle class respectability (Alexander 2004; Burdsey 2008). One of my subjects, Ali (member of Atlanta Outkasts), mentioned, “I felt like they [airport officials and
Transportation Security Association staff] looking at just me. They gave my parents a hard time, especially my mom.”

Individual acts of racial profiling also progressed to institutional levels in the US South. In a 2002 issue, *Atlanta Journal Constitution* stated: “Georgia ranks 12th in the nation for the number of employment discrimination cases filed by Muslims, Arabs, South Asians and Sikhs --- or those perceived to be from these groups --- because of alleged Sept. 11 backlash.” Dr. Said also iterated how “talk show hosts” and those with media power “discredited Muslim Americans through a bias that developed in the community at large against Muslims.” This, according to Dr. Said, works against the truth of Muslim life in the US: “Every Muslim feels that September 11th was a tragic event; contradictory to the teachings of Islam…there are feelings of loss for the lives lost…Muslims are more patriotic to the US than non Muslims in this country.” To counter such misguided prejudice, Dr. Said and members of the Muslim community in Atlanta formed the “Islamic Speakers Bureau” shortly following September 11th, 2001. This Speakers Bureau interacts with the US public to provide information about Islam while opening doors, according to Dr. Said, for “all Muslims and non Muslims to interact, feel safe, feel welcome.” (See Appendix I for information on the quarterly symposium hosted by Al-Farooq Masjid)

Other elements of institutional racism in the South consist of the emerging detention centers and deportation of South Asian Americans. The *Atlanta Journal Constitution* states:

In Georgia and around the United States, the INS has significantly stepped up the detention and deportation of foreign nationals from Muslim nations in response to public pressure to safeguard the United States from terrorists like the ones who struck Sept. 11, 2001. The number of people deported to Muslim countries in North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia multiplied faster than for citizens of virtually every other country, according to a Journal-Constitution computer analysis of INS records.”

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There have also been illegal detentions of Atlanta Muslims and unfair trials—state-led invisibility of South Asian American men.\textsuperscript{17} One such case is that of Ehansul “Shifa” Sadequee who has been sentenced to 17 years in prison.\textsuperscript{18}

In addition to deportations, an increase in detention centers across the country has taken place. Emerging detention centers are affiliated with the US Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office that is part of the Homeland Security Department. However, these privately owned detention centers operate with a certain freedom and lax of rules not permitted to governmental structures. In Atlanta, an ICE office exists for the Southeast which also works alongside the Steward Detention Center; Steward Detention Center is located in Lumpkin, Georgia, which lies far outside metro Atlanta.\textsuperscript{19} The Steward Detention Center houses mostly Latinos and some South Asians.

Furthermore, other governmental task forces have used the September 11th, 2001 hysteria to partake in racial profiling of South Asians and South Asian Americans in Atlanta. One such project, “operation meth merchant,” was put in place in January 2004 and lasted till June 2005\textsuperscript{20} at which point indictments mounted. The July 19th, 2007 issue of the Atlanta Journal Constitution states “While 80 percent of stores in the area of "Operation Meth Merchant” were owned by whites or other ethnic groups, 23 of the 24 stores targeted were owned by South Asians, claimed the ACLU.” Organizations such as Raksha (a South Asian domestic abuse shelter) along with the ACLU sought social justice in these issues of racial profiling.

While 9/11 created fragments and fissures in a South Asian American community whereby there were attempts by non Muslim South Asians to distance themselves ideologically, symbolically, and physically from Muslims\textsuperscript{21}, the social interactions within Indo-Pak Basketball imagine “Muslim” and “South Asian” in different terms. Indo-Pak Basketball venues allow for
greater intimacies within homosocial, ethnic-only social spaces by which to collapse poles of “South Asian,” “Muslim,” and “American.” South Asian American institutions, in this respect, facilitate means by which to assimilate to mainstream society through sport.

**Michael Jordan, Origins of Indo-Pak Basketball, and South Asian American Institutions**

Contrary to mainstream discourse in the US and within South Asian America, cultural-religious institutions wove US sports into the fabric of religious and cultural identities. Indo-Pak Basketball players encountered their cultural institutions as not sites of dissonance from “American-ness” but a site to articulate the amalgamation of “South Asian-ness” and “American-ness.” The young men in Indo-Pak Basketball in the US and in Atlanta are mostly second generation—they were born in the US or came to the US at a young age. Some parents of Indo-Pak Basketball players engaged actively with cricket and field hockey but their children, the respondents in this study, favored basketball. Opportunities for participation in cricket existed but these subjects chose basketball as embodying their sense of self. Sport, specifically basketball, in many ways, presented opportunities for social interaction with co-ethnic peers whereby reinforcing social bonds and allow for particular identity formation (Jackson 2001). For these young men, ideas of “masculinity,” “cool,” and “race” emerged through basketball practices and African American athletes (Cole and King 1998).

Various South Asian American cultural and religious institutions exist in the US; I focus on those institutions that my informants have talked about as well as those that I have visited. Although numerous ethno-religious teams exist in this North American circuit, this paper
examines Christian South Asian American churches and Muslim South Asian American religious institutions extensively with a survey of Sikh Gurdwaras and Hindu Mandirs as critical venues in the respective formation of Indo-Pak Basketball nationally and Indo-Pak Basketball locally in Atlanta.

Whereas Pascoe (2007) examines and underscores how masculinity and sexuality synthesize through the institution of US high schools, this paper examines the importance of ethnic institutions in interpellating ethnic American-ness through basketball. Too often, in the mainstream, South Asian American institutions and “American-ness” have been positioned as dichotomous terms. Ethnic cultural institutions, such as mosques, gurdwaras, and temples, are interpellated as “South Asian” and not “American.” One Sikh American elder mentioned that heightened post-9/11 and attacks against Sikh American communities led many Sikh Americans to wonder if they would benefit from a banner at the Gurdwara stating “We are not Muslim.” They chose not to hang such a manner. Nativist sentiment along with local surveillance surfaced and intensified, especially with regard to mosques (masjids). For example, in Lilburn, Georgia (a city adjacent to Atlanta), heightened Islamaphobic rhetoric emerged with relation to the expansion of an existing mosque. Dar-e Abbas mosque existed in this community for eleven years and the expansion plan consisted of the addition of a Muslim cemetery to accommodate the needs of its members. Some of quotes from the Gwinnett Daily Post and CBS News foreground such non Muslim nativist sentiment:

“*This is about hurting our community, this is about hurting our kids*”

“*I just don't like Muslims and I don't want them taking over our neighborhood*”

"*This is not what Lilburn needs. This is a Christian community, and they are anti-Christian.*"
Such diatribes locate South Asian Americans in cultural parameters through religion as irreconcilable with American-ness. There lies an explicit emphasis on the Christian ethos of US belonging which stands in opposition to a perceived defunct morality and dissonance from “American-ness” that Nativist believe Muslims to possess. On the contrary, South Asian American institutions stress their “American-ness” and cultural citizenship through one such practice of basketball.

Basketball’s popularity infiltrated the lives of South Asian American communities—individually and institutionally. During the 2006 Chicago Indo-Pak Basketball tournament, I sought out Max as an interviewee. Atlanta Outkasts player, Mustafa, suggested that I meet Max to find out more about Indo-Pak Basketball, and also as a result of the increased popularity, significance, and prominence of the Chicago tournament. I asked Max, “How did you become involved with basketball?” He replied, “Well, I didn’t play basketball initially. I loved baseball and that was what I played.” Puzzled, I inquired, “Why did you play basketball?” With a matter of fact assurance, Max said, “All my friends started playing basketball. I am from Chicago, it was Michael Jordan’s city. I couldn’t escape it. I loved the competition.” LaFeber (1999), Farred (2006), and Andrews (2000) examine how the spectacularity of Michael Jordan spread basketball globally and locally. Max, an ethnic Malayalee Christian American, created Indo-Pak Basketball in the US in 1989 while being influenced by the iconicity of Michael Jordan. However, Michael Jordan’s popularity and linkages between basketball, cool, and American-ness were also re-constructed by Max’s Malayalee church.

This switch, however, was not only facilitated individually but also institutionally through South Asian American institutions. Why would sporting spaces for basketball prove
necessary or relevant? Basketball stood as a key site for a rendezvous with US society for South Asian Americans. Maram (2006) describes how popular culture and sport present opportunities for Filipino men to assert their masculinity while finding a process to “Americanization.” Like the subjects in Maram’s work, South Asian American institutions as well as individuals utilized basketball as a means to assert their “American-ness.”

For Max, ethnically Christian Malayalee American, the Malayalee Church and Malayalee cultural organizations played a critical role in advocating basketball for its male population. Through the figure of Michael Jordan and socializing with his Malayalee church teams, Max got introduced to the pleasures of basketball, ideas of cool, performances of masculinity, and urban aesthetics. Referencing his experience playing basketball with Malayalee American institutions, Max said, “They [Malayalee church and Malayalee community elders] would break up the teams. But…they would stack the best players on two teams. We would kill everyone, the games were easy. There was no competition and it wasn’t fair.” Although participating directly with his co-ethnic community through the Malayalee church, this religious institution also presented limitations to the conceptualization of basketball sporting cultures. Desiring the pleasures and intimacy of competition, Max created, along with help from his basketball playing peers in the Malayalee community, the first US Indo-Pak Basketball tournament in 1989 in Chicago.

With a growing Malayalee population in the US, co-ethnic organizations have emerged such as FOKANA “which is the national organization of Keralite associations in North America.” (Maira 2002: 86) Utilizing organizations like FOKANA and the Malayalee Churches (Evangelic, Church of South India, Syrian Orthodox, and Marthoma churches), Max reached out
to Malayalee communities in Houston and Dallas. Vijay, one of the Jain players from a Houston team and captain, said a verbal contract materialized between South Asian American basketball communities in Chicago, Houston, and Dallas. As a result of coming up to Chicago for the Chicago IPN in 1989, Max agreed to bring Chicago teams to Houston and Dallas for their tournaments (Dallas in time would then structure and put in place the Indo-Pak tournament in Texas). Through his Malayalee cultural and religious organizations, Max constructed the co-ethnic (South Asian) basketball tournaments known as Indo-Pak Basketball that would constitute a North American phenomenon.

**Al-Farooq Mosque and Atlanta’s Muslim Community**

Like Max, Mustafa—member of Atlanta Indo-Pak Basketball team “Atlanta Outkasts”—also played various other sports initially but built social bonds with other South Asian Americans at local mosques. Similar to the role of the Malayalee American institutions in Indo-Pak Basketball formation, masjids (mosques) in Atlanta played an instrumental role in sporting identities for Atlanta’s South Asian American men. Malik, another member of Atlanta Outkasts, gave me an interview which told of the role of sport and assimilation for the early founders of Al-Farooq Masjid in Atlanta. During the course of conversation, he informed me that his father and other Muslim elders considered deeply the idea of a basketball court on premises of the first non African American mosque—Al-Farooq Masjid—built in Atlanta. Malik iterated that his “father and a couple of elders wanted to include a basketball court” as a means to help their children—*their sons*—find ways to “assimilate into US society” thereby not feeling the alienation felt by the first generation. The interview with Malik points to two interesting social
phenomenon that are interrelated: 1.) Cultural alienation by first generation South Asians in the US whereby legal citizenship does not guarantee cultural citizenship and 2.) The role of South Asian American institutions in providing venues for integration into mainstream US culture for Muslims. Malik, a Muslim South Asian American, was born in Atlanta and his father is a prominent businessperson in that city. He mentions, through the figure of his father, how marginalization and dislocation take place for Muslims in a Christian dominated US culture (Joshi 2006). Elements of popular culture, such as sport, present minority groups with one such venue for “cultural citizenship” (Maira 2009) through which cultural practices and its respective social relations produce different sets of belonging within the US national fabric.

In addition to meeting with Malik, I also met with Dr. Said—a South Asian Muslim elder and a key figure with Al-Farooq Masjid. Dr. Said came to Atlanta in 1977 as a medical doctor. According to Dr. Said, the South Asian Muslim community in 1977 was “small” and about “50 or 70 people” who were professionals and “mostly students or academics…majority of the Muslims were affiliated with the university.” The burgeoning Muslim community, according to Dr. Said, met Georgia Institute of Technology Student Center. At this historical point, Dr. Said stated, “highway 285 was the outskirts” thus most South Asians and South Asian Muslims resided inside the perimeter unlike the present day where most live in Gwinnett County—a county outside the perimeter.32

With this Muslim community growing, they purchased a house near the Georgia Institute of Technology campus in 1980 that became the Al-Farooq Masjid.33 Initially, no basketball court existed on mosque grounds and, Dr. Said mentioned, the elders noticed young men playing at the basketball court at a nearby educational facility—Homepark Learning Center—during
their break from activities at the mosque. Sultan (Dr. Said’s son) and Ali (Mustafa’s younger brother), both played for Atlanta Outkasts, discussed spending considerable time socializing during Islamic camps. In between camp sessions, Sultan said that he and Ali “would hoop during the break…that is all we did. We did not want to go back.” Implementing sports in general and basketball in particular at Al-Farooq Masjid brought in young men since, according to Dr. Said, basketball was: “1. Inexpensive, 2. All the youth are attracted, 3. Don’t need many people, and 4. Not dangerous but still *manly.*” In this sense, commonsensical associations take place between manliness and basketball.

Dr. Said also alluded to the NBA and the influence of “indirect role models” in addition to Michael Jordan and Larry Bird. To add, Dr. Said emphasized how young South Asian American men found a further level of intimacy with basketball through Muslims playing in the NBA who served as “indirect role models”: Dr. Said referenced Hakeem Olajuwon (African Muslim), Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf (African American Muslim), and Atlanta native Sharif Abdur Rahim (African American Muslim). Sultan, one of Dr. Said’s sons, highlighted the importance of basketball in the 1980s for stimulating his interest and mentioned an idolization of Dominique Wilkins of the NBA Atlanta Hawks. Sultan stated, “I grew up in the best time of basketball, the 80s…the money wasn’t there yet…it was pure.”

A growing interest in basketball led to cementing in a basketball court on mosque premises for the spiritual training and socialization of young Muslim men (South Asian American and African American). With the advent of the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, the Muslim population grew rapidly in the early 1990s till the late 1990s. Dr. Said estimated the Muslim population in Atlanta at “80,000 Muslims with 35% African American.” He iterated how the
remaining “65% of Muslims in Atlanta are half South Asian while the other half came from North Africa, Middle East, and Eastern Europe.” In lines with the growth of the population, Dr. Said highlighted how Al-Farooq Masjid was underway for dramatic reconstruction, renovation, and expansion starting in 1995 \(^35\); it now includes a full outdoor basketball court painted in green to fit Muslim aesthetics. To meet the demanding needs of an expanding population, a neighborhood mosque, Omar Masjid, branched out from Al-Farooq Masjid \(^36\) and contains an indoor basketball court for its Muslim youth. Several of Atlanta’s South Asian American teams come out of Al-Farooq Masjid and players on these teams spent their young formative years playing basketball on mosque grounds. The teams are Atlanta Outkasts (played in the North American Indo-Pak Basketball circuit), Camel Jockeys, Atlanta Rat Pack, Sand Brothaz, a religious Muslim team, and Atlanta Franchise.

**Hindu Temples, Sikh Gurdwaras, and Basketball in Atlanta**

As the case with the Malayalee organizations and Al-Farooq Masjid, Hindu Mandirs (temples) played a role in how their South Asian American young men would engage with the host society. When South Asians arrived in Atlanta in the 1960s and 1970s, they utilized and shared worship spaces with the Hare Krishna Temple (ISKCON) until their own South Asian temples came into existence (Joshi 2006). Hindu Temple of Atlanta came into existence in a southern suburb of Atlanta, Riverdale, in late 1989 but incorporated 1984. \(^37\) Another temple, Shree Shakti Mandir of Atlanta, came into existence shortly thereafter in June 1993. \(^38\) This temple, Shree Shakti Mandir, contains a cultural center built alongside the main temple grounds—several Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments were held here during the years 2006 till
Hindu Americans, Muslim South Asian Americans, Christian Indian Americans, and Sikh Americans attended these tournaments. Adjustable basketball goals were wheeled in while all chairs moved aside to create two courts on which to play basketball.

Sanjeet, a Sikh American, moved to Atlanta in 1993 and iterated how his Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) would hold sport days; he formed the base of friends for basketball here. However, Sanjeet did not simply come upon basketball by himself. Rather, the influence of basketball cool from the NBA and encouragement from other Sikhs like Harpreet influenced Sanjeet in his development. One of the early Sikhs I encountered and played against in the 1994 Indo-Pak Basketball tournament was Harpreet. Harpreet moved to the US as a young boy in 1977. In this case, Harpreet stood as a role model for Sanjeet and other new Sikh arrivals in Atlanta—they found their ideas of self, “American-ness,” and South Asian American-ness through basketball play.

With increased Sikh immigration to Atlanta, no longer did the Gurdwara Sahib in Stone Mountain, Georgia suffice. Sanjeet attends the SEWA Gurdwara Sahib in Roswell; Roswell is on the Northwestern side of Atlanta in Cobb County while the Gurdwara Sahib is in Stone Mountain which is located in Gwinnett County. As a result, Sanjeet’s team, “Air Punjab/Hit Squad,” formed through male homosocial bonds at SEWA Gurdwara Sahib.

“Lock Down”: South Asian American Institutions and Spatializing Exclusion

As South Asian American religious institutions opened up venues for young South Asian American men to claim belonging within the US through cultural citizenship, claims to belonging can produce new sets of exclusions. One key arena of exclusion takes place through
conceptualizing physical spaces—the very act of place-making produces such exclusions. The phrase “lock down”, sporting vernacular, refers to the act of playing rigorous defense to prevent one’s opponent from scoring or even touching the basketball. I recuperate this same phrase to address the acts of place-making that manufacture new exclusions and restrict the mobility of various “Others.” In a way, spatializing practices of “South Asian American-ness,” I argue, “lock down” other possibilities whereby underscoring heterosexist, heteronormative practices at the intersection of class, race, gender, and sexuality. “The production of locality is, at its core, an exercise of power.” (Carter 2008: 15) As institutions produce basketball courts as South Asian American places and engender affects of American-ness, they also become key agents in restricting, constraining, and limiting who can claim these cultural parameters of South Asian American-ness.

Pascoe (2006), in her work on gender and sexuality identities in high school, examines how social constructions of gender, masculinity in this case, operate through institutions and not just through interactions between persons. Masjids and their respective practices make real such gender difference by cementing the gender binary; affirming the gender binary also operates as a force of exclusion. I specifically focus on Al-Faroor Masjid and tournaments hosted by Pannum (Muslim youth organization). Institutionally, Al-Farooq Masjid spatialized and normalized gender practices of masculinity upon social spaces including sporting spaces of basketball. Dr. Said did not mention spaces of sport for Muslim women; elders created social spaces within the mosque as distinctly “feminine” and “masculine”. When asking Sultan about interactions with young women at the mosque, he responded, “Girls played in the playground or hung out together in the hallway. They never played sports.” Upon investigation of player demographics in Indo-Pak Basketball’s institutionalized circuit, local Indo-Pak tournaments in
Atlanta, and recreational pick-up games, women did not attend these events as players and no attempts were made to recruit women. Ideologies normalizing men in sport construct and reaffirm the gender order.

A young African American Muslim woman, Yasmin, pointed to activities for young Muslims at the mosque which also reinforced and naturalized gender differences. Yasmin referenced the Muslim Interscholastic Tournament (MIST) as a site of social interactions for young Muslims—across the religious observance and racial spectrum—involving both young men and young women. She states, “There is a sports component for both girls and boys (basketball, I think).” As the opportunities for gender integrated social activities, the cultural nuances still produce elements of gender segregation and limit who can claim “American-ness” through such activities.

A 3-on-3 basketball tournament hosted by Omer Masjid mosque and Pannum facilitated social interactions that solidified gender dichotomies. Held at a public facility in Norcross (outside Atlanta proper and part of Gwinnett County Parks and Recreation), the 3-on-3 tournament brought together Muslim players and Muslim community members. Close investigation of the website for Pannum provides details on the organization, their mission, and their conceptualization of “ummah” (Muslim community). According to the website (to maintain confidentiality, this website is not shared and the organizational name is a pseudonym), they define “Pannum” as:

“The actual name of [Pannum] was taken from Surat al Rahman. It means precious gems [sic] or jewels...The idea was symbolic in naming our youth group [Pannum]...This is how we view the youth in today’s Muslim Ummah. We are all precious jewels, gems [sic], pearls, yet each one of us needs to be found under the scope of Islam to be polished and groomed to become valuable assets to society.”
Furthermore the organization’s mission is:

“The goal of [Pannum] is simple; to create a **brotherhood** around the teaching of Islam with Quran and Sunnah as our core, for the betterment of our lives as well as for the betterment of society… Inshallah, with the guidance from Allah (swt), we can create a sense of Islamic awareness within the Muslim youth to help them realize that they are indeed the crux of our religion, and that with the youth the beauties of Islam spread fourteen hundred years ago, and that now, with the youth, that same beauty can be spread across the modern times of the 21st century.”

Accordingly, the explicit association of “Ummah” and “Muslim youth” with young Muslim men produces exclusions while providing vistas for young men to express Muslim American-ness. At the moment in which a “brotherhood” is affirmed, it forecloses opportunities for others to participate in this space—specifically women and queer subjects.

The structuring of the tournament reflected the character of “American-ness”, Muslim-ness, and masculinity at play in this sporting space and its subsequent exclusions. The vignette below details the August 15th, 2009, 3-on-3 Muslim tournament:

**With the blistering Atlanta summer heat scorching the pavement outside the gym, the energy, competitiveness, and sporting passions of the young Muslim men heated up the indoor court. Instead of celebrating Pakistani Independence Day and Indian Independence Day—August 14th and August 15th respectively—at various festivals across Atlanta, these South Asian American youth gathered to play basketball which indexed their American-ness that also posed a generational difference from their parents. Beside them and with these young South Asian American men were African Muslims, African American Muslims, Latino Muslims, and Middle Eastern Muslims. At the gym, Pannum tournament organizers, South Asian Americans ranging in age from early twenties to late forties, divided the young Muslim male population into two age groups—one of high school and younger group and the other of adults in college or older. Young South Asian American Muslim men patrolled the courts with a whistle in hand to officiate the various games, to keep game scores, and to document the tournament through photos.**

**Sanjeet, a Sikh American, played for one of the adult Muslim teams but also plays in the more competitive South Asian American basketball scene. Atlanta Outkasts and Atlanta Rat Pack did not play in this tournament. When inquiring into their absence, Sanjeet replied, “Imran [Atlanta Rat Pack] said this tournament is weak, they won’t play in this. The refs are horrible and they don’t call anything. I am here because my friends [Muslim South Asian Americans] asked me play. I really want a trophy.” Sanjeet’s explanation of Imran’s and Mustafa’s absence rings similar to Max’s reasons to play in South Asian American basketball**
publics outside of their institution. As a South Asian American, Sanjeet entered this Muslim space freely and no one questioned his membership. I sat on the cold steel bleachers with Sanjeet and his teammates as they discussed the gamut of players at the tournament and who would provide them the greatest competition.

I observed the interactions on the court and took note of the bodily comportments. In addition to baggy basketball shorts hanging below the knee, sleeveless t-shirts, basketball shoes, and hyper-masculine team names such as “Killaz” and “Tenacious,” other expressions of a Muslim identity materialized in this space not seen in other basketball spaces. For example, one African Muslim and a South Asian American Muslim performed basketball aesthetics while layering such practices with Muslim sensibilities and Muslim respectabilities. The African player played in jogging pants inside the gym while a blistering, muggy August Atlanta heat awaited players outside the gym. Similarly, a South Asian American player wore a full length burqa-like religious outfit consisting of a long sleeved shirt down to his knees and baggy pants. Instead of representing “matter out of place” (ibid), these two men moved seamlessly through the social fabric of this basketball site.

These expressive practices gathered momentum while explicitly collapsing poles of Muslim-ness and American-ness that are often painted as irreconcilable in the US imaginary. Such cultural practices of ethno-religious garb at basketball events complicate how basketball and American-ness are imagined. The particular social interactions, through a Muslim “heritage economy” (Afzal 2006), underscores a social phenomenon that is very American in nature. Muslim men of various persuasions rearticulate the meanings of this physical venue for basketball with basketball meanings around Muslim respectability and American-ness. Instead of seeing this basketball space as defined only by particular garb and linguistic codes, contrapuntal items such as burqas, speaking of Urdu, spoken African languages, English vernacular, and basketball garb co-exist to produce the particularity of this American-ness. Through heightened basketball competition and social intimacy facilitated by the masjid and Pannum, the young men re-define this public space thereby conflating Muslim-ness, masculinity, heterosexism, and American-ness.
There also exist various forms of surveillance in this space through the bodies of the organizers, South Asian American men. Moments of basketball play for the young Muslim men present opportunities for spiritual training and particular kinds of discipline. One of my Sikh American 47 subjects, Sanjeet, underscored this spiritual training taking place during a mandatory interval to the tournament. During a break between games, two Muslim community elders at the tournament, according to Sanjeet, gathered the young men to talk about Islam as well as proper “Muslim masculinity” through basketball analogies. This is what Sanjeet, playing on one of the teams, thought about the events that followed: “I missed the first part of the prayer’s…[sic] i got there late but basically from what [Abhijeet] told me they had lunch which was provided by them, and then they went inside, [sic] the Imam( I think that's how you spell it) came and started praying…[sic]which was fine but then he went on and started talking about what is a good Muslim, why is Islam such a good religion and what does life mean in Islam. Most of the player's sat there and listened. He talked for a good 45mins or so.” As basketball can be appropriated to underscore American-ness, this expression is also policed by adults to suit their own interests. Furthermore, the Muslim elders take this opportunity to represent American-ness that is also a specifically managed Muslim-ness. These forms of discipline and surveillance are creatively weaved into South Asian American appropriation of basketball cultural practices.

As I observed these acts of policing, I noted an important absence during the course of this tournament. Over the course of the day long tournament, only two African American women made an appearance at the gym—these two women came to watch their African American friends play. Young South Asian American women did not have a site for basketball play available here; in addition, South Asian American women could not come to spectate and socialize. There is a policing of the “legitimate kinds of bodies” (Muller 2007) by roving South
Asian American men—who serve as panoptic technologies—thereby making sport, nation, and diaspora battle ground for “symbolic masculine legitimacy” (Brown 2006). South Asian elders provided, at this tournament, opportunities for basketball pleasures alongside spiritual training for Muslim men. Women cannot claim “American-ness” and modernity through such means but, rather, South Asian American women are asked to represent South Asian tradition, culture, and purity (Gopinath 2005).

Through basketball practices, South Asian American Muslim men and other Muslim American men are trained, through masculine tropes, to be particular Muslim American subjects while other spaces, outside of this sporting space, presents itself for the socialization of Muslim American women. The gender order is upheld through such distinctions and separation of spaces as masculine and feminine; this also marks in a subtle way heteronormativity.

**Queer Exclusions: Interview with Sharif**

Normalizing men in basketball occurs alongside processes that naturalize heterosexuality in sport thereby perpetuating heteronormativity. Such concepts of masculinity and femininity are naturalized and made commonsensical through incorporation of sexuality (Anderson 2003). These homosocial spaces present complex understandings of masculinity at the intersection of sexuality. “With heterosexual identity firmly entrenched in the male patriarchy of sports, there is little room for the ‘other’, whether that other be gay or female.” (Wenner 1998: 311) As this analysis will show, homosocial spaces with homoerotic actions—basketball movements—do not
promote queer\textsuperscript{49} identifications but rather solidify heterosexual masculinity through homophobia (see Carrington 2002).

Through certain discourses, particular actions, and institutional ideologies, commonsensical associations are manufactured between heterosexuality and masculinity thereby excluding queers. Heteronormativity takes shape through “the discrete distinction between homosexual and homosocial forms of same-sex desire” (Kim 2005: 11) and involves the production of an abject subject—the queer subject. Upon meeting with Sharif, a self-identified gay Muslim, his narratives countered the other discourses of inclusion at South Asian American institutions while simultaneously locating the “gender politics” within the category of masculinity (Connell 1995). Sharif, when questioned about the interactions at the mosque and these sporting spaces, provided detailed accounts of both the intimacy and hostile nature of male homosocial encounters:

“We had sleepovers at the mosque, field trips to different states, and Sunday school. We were introduced to each other and non Muslim South Asians at the mosque. I played in the sport gatherings with groups, I played basketball and football. People would make friends through sport. It [sport] got me out of my shell because I was introverted, being gay led to minimal conversations other than in sport. Sports gave me confidence, did not feel defiled. Overall, it was good. Homophobic terms were used on occasion and it irked me. There were talks about girls and marriage, these were the salient topics and made me feel isolated…I was not on Atlanta Outkasts because those guys went to more heterosexual places, clubs, with girls.”

He alluded to the prevalence of homophobic terms in sport and underscored the intimate, intensified character of Urdu homophobic slurs, such as “gandu” and “chakka”. Sharif said,

“These terms in our language can also be used as gender-bending words and when I use them it does not feel like I am compromising anything. I can use it to feel empowered through the language used against me. I have heard the Urdu words, and unlike ‘fag’ or ‘faggot,’ they are more penetrating. It is sweeter and used in a more painful feeling. It hurts a lot more…more offensive…king of sobering…you feel like you get angry when it is in English and feel sober and melancholy when used in Urdu. You feel like anger would be an anger against your own community and feel individualistic and feel like you are going against the community.”
Heterosexual desires and hyper-masculinity, for males, existed in the realm of the politics of respectability while female and queer desires received little recognition as respectable (May 2007). As Butler (1993: 9) puts it, “Gender is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitutive outside to the subject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own found repudiation.” Conversations of this sort, according to Sharif, led to productions of binaries of “them” and “me” whereby his queer masculinity was put in opposition to other masculinities through the intersections of sexuality and gender. This also led to Sharif, both by choice and exclusion, playing basketball elsewhere other than at the mosque or in Indo-Pak Basketball. Sharif also added that conversations about sports took place in such a way that “as a gay guy I felt I couldn’t contribute anything.”

Sharif mentioned homophobic terms being used while playing basketball; he expressed, “On certain occasions terms such as ‘fag’ and ‘faggot’ irked me.” The presence of the heterosexual South Asian American masculine subject demanded the queer for its articulation. The self-disciplining discourses posit “Muslim-ness” and “queer identity” as dichotomous entities. The immense pressure to “remain one of the guys” foregrounds heteronormativity and leads to silences within the various sporting publics. Sharif states that regardless of sexuality, “the principle of Islam applies to all mankind. I say it with a lot of conviction.” One Muslim South Asian American activist, Kavi, stated otherwise. Kavi played an active role in engaging Muslim communities in discussions on taboo topics of suicide, abuse, and depression among South Asian American youth—Muslim youth in particular. When asked about possibilities for working with LGBTQ youth, Kavi shook his head and softened his voice to foreground his
anathema to this topic. Kavi explained, “There is no basis in Islam for domestic abuse… I have a problem with the coupling between gay rights and domestic abuse. There should be a separation between gay rights, domestic violence, and Islam. I do not believe the Quran supports gay rights.”

Sharif addresses this process of alienation within the Muslim community, “Other Muslim queers have moved away from the Muslim community.” Acknowledging his commitment to interact with the Muslim community, Sharif also pointed to the problematic character of Muslim-ness for queers. He said, “Gay Muslims don’t have role models, the path is not paved…I have heard a lot about gay Muslims being victimized, violated, and being visible brings the violence…It is unfortunate, disheartening, and angering that there are not many resources for gay Muslims.” Neither Indo-Pak Basketball nor local South Asian American—or Muslim—publics facilitate safe spaces and incorporation of the queer subject, the process of such sporting masculinity engenders repudiation and distance from the queer subject. Thus, one does not find a “cast of heroes” within Indo-Pak Basketball who embody queer politics or express queer identities. Sharif also attributed this to the mainstream associations of queer identities with “the story of Sodom and Gomorrah. But this story deals with power and rape. It is also about adultery and I believe these are about heterosexuals.” When asked if Masjids provide safe spaces for young queers, Sharif shook his head slowly in admitting the lack of structural support.

To solidify Sharif’s argument, Mustafa’s comments about Sharif’s sexuality, during a car drive to his place, fixed homophobia within religious institutions. I asked Mustafa if there were support groups for gay men, such as Sharif, at the mosque, he replied quickly, “No way! They
would kick his ass, they would beat him straight.”

Idea of “Muslim-ness” is constructed as incompatible with homosexuality. Muslim-ness and South Asian American-ness, as political categories, are imagined as a strategy that expels and is free of homosexuals (Gopinath 2003). As a result, other organizations and separate social spaces emerged that, Sharif states with pleasure, “gay Muslims can claim as our own space.” One such organization is Al-Fatiha Foundation. Sharif mentioned, “Al-Fatiha Foundation was established in 1998 with a broad vision. They help youth and folks seeking asylum. It has limited resources…They put together mixers, gatherings and direct contact; be supportive and show them [gay Muslim youth] safe spaces…try to take care of the next generation.”

Sharif also alluded to separate sporting spaces for gay Muslims. He said, “there are sport teams, these are passionate teams but are all gay teams and do not engage in the mainstream. These are separate teams and leagues. We don’t want to be violated, misunderstood, stereotyped; we also want to be loved.” Sharif emphasized how “being misunderstood and discouraging homophobic comments make mainstream sporting spaces hard and thus create gay only spaces out of necessity.” Yet, through his voice and presence, he contests the “narrative coherence” of South Asian American masculinity—disrupts this (re) presentation of masculinity (see Kennedy 2007: 31).

This chapter explored the social context of South Asian America in Atlanta while providing a nuanced look at South Asian American religious institutions with regard to “American-ness.” South Asian American institutions, as symbols of otherness in the American imaginary, allow for articulations of American-ness and assimilation; they also produce their own set of exclusions through overemphasis on American-ness and heterosexual masculinity.
Yet, the complexity of South Asian American masculinity cannot be fully extrapolated by examination of South Asian American religious institutions. These religious institutions play a key role in the formation of some South Asian American basketball teams but how these young men organize and express themselves take place when they compete against each other in Indo-Pak Basketball circuits. In this sense, how they see themselves as South Asian American, specific South Asian American men, is examined in the next chapter. The next chapter delves into team formation in relation to South Asian American-ness; I will analyze the complex terrain of South Asian American-ness and its own respective contradictions.
Chapter 2

**Huddling Up: Ethnic Politics and Reimagining South Asian America**

“Words that aim to define
Never fit like skin on fruits,
There is always some space
Accommodating other meanings.”

—Stanley Greaves

In his poem, "Definitions,” Caribbean artist, Stanley Greaves, addresses the limitations of definitions--how they fail to fit; definitions are always in flux. Identities, in a similar manner, do not remain constant but, rather, they are multiple, and are always in “process” (Hall 2003). Defining “South Asian American” in the same fashion would always create spaces whereby “accommodating other meanings.” Aspiration to South Asian American-ness through leisure activities contests normative categories of ascription and loosens up master narratives of South Asian American-ness to accommodate different meanings. In this case, the peer group creates the social network and defines the boundaries of community (see Maram 2006).

In opposition to the construction of South Asian American-ness in basketball venues, the discursive construction of “South Asian” takes places in fields of power whereby conflating Hindu, India, and South Asia (Islam 1993). According to Prashad (2000: 14),

India is present today in the body of the Indians and others from the South Asian subcontinent, who now number 1.4 million in the United States. But these people are not all “Indians.” Many are from Pakistan, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Bhutan, the Maldives, Africa, England, Canada, Fiji, or the Caribbean, and many are born and bred within the United States. The stain of ancestry and the hegemony of the word
“India” remains with us as we seek to make our way through the morass of the contemporary world.

South Asian American participants of Indo-Pak Basketball, in addition to the local South Asian American basketball scene in Atlanta, utilize basketball practices to make visible the plurality of South Asian America while contesting the hegemony of “India” and “Hindu.” Teams in Indo-Pak Basketball move beyond metonymic projects where one essence, “India” and “Hindu”, is used to represent an entire community. Yet, popular culture, such as basketball practices, present ground for sameness as South Asian Americans while acknowledging difference within this category. Singular points of origin or a simple location does not constitute South Asian America.

Indo-Pak Basketball players complicate point of origin while illustrating the moments in which they activate “South Asian America” or “desi” as an identity while showcasing much greater specificity ethnically (specifically with regards to religion) and with regard to class in other settings. Burdsey (2007), in his exploration of South Asian British cricketers, states,

One should point out that their patterns of allegiance are no more or less multifarious, complex, and contradictory than those of other ethnic groups. They simply reflect the fragmentation of identities that influence attitudes, behaviours and choices across different social spheres in late modernity. As Stuart Hall argues: ‘National identities do not subsume all other forms of difference into themselves and are not free of the play of power, internal divisions and contradictions, cross-cutting allegiances and difference.’ ([Hall 1992: 299] 92)

“South Asian American” and “desi” becomes a way to talk difference and sameness (Abraham 2000); activating “South Asian American-ness” or a “desi” identity complicates rather than erase South Asian American difference internally and externally. Using leisure spaces of basketball to lay claims to identity concurrently involves claiming such spaces as South Asian American spaces. Bonus (2000) understands claiming spaces as “practices of forging communality,
shifting boundaries of ethnic formations, and constant negotiation between structural forces and active agents.” (169)

“South Asian America” and the contradictions of identity formation do not emanate directly from South Asia but is implicated in the flows of global capitalism, engagement with other communities of color, and actively consuming popular culture (Dave 2004; Dave et al 2000; Maira 2002). In lines with Clifford (1996), one must not look at South Asian American identity formation as solely a structural project with hierarchical flows from top to bottom but rather examine the “lateral connections” that prove critical to community formation. Identity formation, through the compositions and naming of teams, illustrates how notions of self arise in relation to various other men within South Asian America and in relation to other racialized masculinities. The organization of teams is itself a social phenomenon that is voluntary, not conscripted.

The voluntary nature of team formation foreground the complexity of South Asian America. An examination team formation underscores “heterogeneity” and “multiplicity” (Lowe 2003, 1996). According to Lowe, “heterogeneity indicates the existence of differences and differential relationships within a bounded category” (2003: 138). Interrogation of team formations points to the “heterogeneity” within the bounded category of “South Asian America.” Furthermore, “multiplicity’ then designates “the ways in which subjects located within social relations are determined by several different axes of power, are multiply determined by the contradictions of capitalism, patriarchy, and race relations” (Lowe 2003: 138). By examining team formation and the social interactions around basketball spaces, I demonstrate how teams “huddle up”—with reference to the organization of teams through the linguistic play on sporting
intimacy—at the intersection of ethnicity, immigration, class, and gender within South Asian America. Team formations, as will become evident in this chapter, take place through organizing principles centered on masculinity while producing differentially-signified bodies. The contradictions in this chapter stem around how ideas of solidarity and fraternity also exist within notions of shifting identifications (Carter 2008; Maira 2002). Although these teams asserted clearly bounded ethnic, religious, or national identities, the category of South Asian American operates at a meta-level through which we have various players of different ethnic backgrounds switching teams. A player’s skill and close social bonds also work to collapse strict social boundaries. I underscore how shifting identifications also work within environments where essentialization and boundary making take place.

Team names and particularity of team formation offer other readings of South Asia that contest the unmarking, normative category of “Hindu-ness” (Visweswaran and Mir 1999) while interrogating essentializing discourses that conflating “India,” “South Asia,” and “Hindu” (Radhakrishnan 2003). These team formations, however, exist in relation to the historicity of racialized discourses that employ gender, race, and sexuality in marking South Asians as alien subjects. The racial category of “Hindoo”, for example, is an essentializing, racializing, gendered practice early in US history where discourses of perverse, queer masculinity were mapped onto the corporeality of South Asian men (Shah 2005). After the 1965 Immigration Act, the waves of professionals created the racialized category of the idealized “model minority” that underscored “brain” rather than “brawn” (Prashad 2000). Recently, the new racial formation of “Muslim looking” (Ahmad 2002) emerges with a reliance on race, gender, and sexuality to construct South Asian Americans as a dangerous, perverse masculinity (Puar 2007). Through basketball practices and team formations, South Asian American men work through the terrain of
racializing discourses to pattern their identity in fields of power with relation to each other, other communities, and other men. Therefore, “Self-definition takes shape not simply against the center but against other marginals.” (Bahri 1999: 25)

One area of differentiation within South Asian America in Atlanta and in the Indo-Pak Basketball circuit consists of the particular immigration wave of players’ parents. In this instance, Canadian Indo-Pak Basketball teams utilize immigration history as a point of differentiation from South Asian American history. Accordingly, South Asian American subjects in the North American Indo-Pak Basketball circuit foreground this generational difference through the figure of the Vancouver basketball teams—team “Donkey Riders” in particular.\(^4\)

Unlike US Indo-Pak tournaments, Charles (Chicago IPN organizer in 2006), Mohammed (an Atlanta Muslim player and member of Atlanta Rat Pack) and Krush (member of Maryland Five Pillars) state that South Asian Canadian communities come in full to support the Vancouver tournament. Charles informed me that “they [Vancouver teams] were mainly fourth generation.” In opposition to Canada, Indo-Pak players position themselves as second generation Americans. Vancouver teams have mostly Sikh and ethnically Punjabi players. Punjabi migration, consisting of mostly Sikh and Muslim men, to Canada took place in the late 1800s and early 1900s (Chan 1991; Chadney 1984). As a result, most South Asian basketball players on the Vancouver are discursively produced as fourth generation North Americans. In opposition, US Indo-Pak players have parents who came to the US after the 1965 immigration act that opened up US borders, these young men are mostly second generation or came at a young age.\(^5\)
With the 1965 immigration act, South Asian populations in the US expanded with increasing immigrant waves from South Asia. Most of the early post-1965 waves consisted of professionals such as doctors, engineers, nurses, and scientists who the US state recruited with hopes of outdueling the USSR during the Cold War (Agarwal 1991; Dhingra 2004; Fisher 1984; George 2005). The “model minority” moniker is used to reference these immigrants as a result of their social mobility and educational status. However, other players’ parents arrived through the 1980 Family Reunification Act (family preference acts) that allowed these parents to follow their siblings already in the US (Khandelwal 2002). These South Asian communities were not classed the same as the earlier waves of professionals (Mathew 2005) and do not possess the same kind of social or economic mobility as their earlier counterparts. To add, the 1993 US Census Bureau numbers indicate the increase of unskilled, poor workers and the decrease of the “techno-migrants” (Prashad 2000: 80). Therefore, some of participants and their families contest the “model minority” status as not fully representative of the South Asian experience in the US.

Other Sikh Canadian and Sikh American Teams—Contesting South Asian America

Whereas the hegemony of “India” in South Asian America emphasized Hindu and Muslim communities in the configuration of South Asia America, Sikh Indo-Pak Basketball teams emphasize their “heterogeneity” and “multiplicity” within the Sikh diaspora—a group identity is not static but rather a manner to situate one’s places within various hierarchies (Dhingra 2007). Group identity does not operate outside of concepts of time or space. Spatio-temporal difference emerges in relation to when Sikh communities came to North America, how they embody and creatively signify their “Sikh-ness,” and their relation to other South Asian
Americans and other Sikh communities. The Sikh teams in my study foreground men as emblematic of the Sikh nation—Khalistan—and the boundary markers of Sikh-ness. Axel (2001: 4) argues, “Sikh men became the privileged site for negotiating who could be recognized as a member of the Sikh panth.”

Several Sikh teams participate on the North American Indo-Pak Basketball circuit, there are Sikh teams from New Jersey, Houston, Chicago, Toronto (Canada), and Vancouver (Canada). Certain elements of shared identity emerged during tournaments when Sikh teams from across North America congregated together for the Chicago IPN. The Sikh teams at Chicago IPN in 2006 and 2008 would switch linguistic codes from English to Punjabi. Intimate joking and teasing would take place in Punjabi between Toronto Khalsa, New Jersey/Cali Soormay Franchise, New York/New Jersey Franchise, Ontario Farmers, and Chicago Sher. There existed a level of comfort mentioned and produced by co-ethnic individuals while using communicative competence to establish sensibilities of community. Language constituted a tool for generating and building solidarity (Anderson 1991; Dhingra 2007).

Although sharing some similarities as members of the Sikh diaspora, their lived-experiences underscore difference within the category of Sikh. Through particular expressive practices and donning of urban gear, Sikh teams accentuate difference among themselves with regard to religious practice, generational status, and class. At moments in which sport unites them as Sikh men, the cultural practices also divide these men. Through the various expressive practices, Sikh American players assert masculine “cool” while performing their own set of cultural sensibilities. They affirm a brotherhood as Sikhs while highlighting the different locations within the Sikh diaspora.
At the 2006 Chicago IPN, I interviewed Sikh captains from “Toronto Khalsa” as well as “NJ/Cali Soormay.” At the Chicago IPN in 2008, I interacted with “Toronto Khalsa,” “Ontario Farmers,” “NJ/Cali Soormay Franchise,” “Chicago Sher,” ”D-Unit,” and “NJ Franchise.” These teams contain ethnically Punjabi Sikhs, but Sikh membership alone does not constitute team formation. Rather, the social interactions and respective symbols index Sikh-ness at the same time they represented dynamic, shifting identifications.

Toronto had a team in the 2006 and 2008 Chicago IPN called “Toronto Khalsa” with Sikhs who all claimed to be second generation Canadians and second generation “North Americans.” When asked about reasons for team formation in a survey, Toronto Khalsa players responded “friends” and “same community/background” as reasons for team formation and represented the main organizing theme. Similar to Jackson’s (2001: 104) examination of the multiplicity of Blackness, Khalsa players “use basketball as a means of keeping their relationship viable.” As sources of work as well as mainstream social spaces limit expressions of identity and minimize intimate relations with other South Asians, participation in basketball solidifies relations with other Sikhs. By calling themselves “Khalsa,” the team, containing Sikh men with turbans and those with shaven faces, simultaneously constructs an “imagined community” (Anderson 1991) as diasporic Sikhs through claims to an imagined homeland for the Sikh diaspora—Khalistan (Axel 2001; Shukla 2001). “Khalsa” speaks to their ethnic identity as Punjabi Sikhs in the diaspora but also accentuates a tough masculinity as “Khalsa warriors.” The Sikh players play up sensibilities of “physicality” and “genetic toughness” as seen in South Asian discourses of Sikh men (Burdsey 2007; Ismond 2003). For example, Sanjeet, a player on Atlanta’s Sikh team “Air Punjab”, said, "My father stressed that Sikh men are man enough for two."
The Sikh American team, NJ/Cali Soormay Franchise, came to the 2006 Chicago IPN and brought another team with them 2008 Chicago IPN—“NJ Franchise.” Soormay Franchise contained Sikh South Asian Americans out of college and young professionals; their excellence in Sikh-only tournaments produced an invitation to Chicago IPN. NJ Franchise, on the other hand, received an invitation to Chicago IPN through affiliation with NJ Soormay Franchise. The NJ Soormay Franchise stayed to watch all the games of NJ Franchise while providing mentorship for the younger generation. Whereas some Toronto Khalsa players wore turbans and kept beards, all players on NJ Soormay Franchise and NJ Franchise were clean shaven, close haircuts, and no turbans. Soormay Franchise and Franchise congregated together during the course of the 3-day tournament. It was a part of socialization and mentorship on the part of Soormay Franchise, it was a rite of passage and the establishment of kinship ties. However, unlike NJ Soormay Franchise, NJ Franchise players' ages ranged from 18 years old to 23 years old with some classifying themselves as working class and first generation Americans.

Chicago Sher contains a few Sikh Americans who captained and organized the team. Taking the term “Sher”, which means “lion”, presents a way to assert a tough masculinity seen as congruent with basketball masculinity. In contrast to Toronto Khalsa, Ontario Farmers, NJ Soormay Franchise and NJ Franchise, Chicago Sher did not have a completely Sikh team. Their socialization in multi-ethnic Chicago communities meant they had three Hindus, a Muslim, and four Sikhs on the team. Rather, this team make-up points to the social phenomenon in South Asian America where socialities go across various ethnic, national groups unlike that in South Asia—this posits a very US phenomenon.
Another team with several Sikh Americans was another team coming out of New York and New Jersey area—“NY D-Unit.” They had four Hindus (of which one identified as “Guyanese” Hindu), four Sikhs, and one Muslim. Household income was spread out from $40,000 to $300,000 a year. Ages ranged from an 18 year old to a 30 year old. As mostly second generation South Asian Americans, their team name exemplifies an active engagement with US popular culture through not only basketball but through hip hop specific of New York. “D-Unit” refers to hip hop artist “Fifty Cents” posse' and clothing line referred to as “G-Unit” where “G” references cool associated with “gangsta.” Boyd (1996: 131) states, “The association of oneself with this imagery [gangsta/bad N word] allows one to remain ‘down’ with the program of hyper-masculinity that is so closely linked with lower-class ghetto experience.” In this respect, the symbolic appropriation of a tough, urban masculinity with G-Unit is translated into “D-Unit” where “D” stands in for “desi”—“desi” allows for movement beyond ethnic specificity but rather points to heterogeneity in “South Asian America.” While taking on the contours of a lower-class ghetto aesthetic, their consumptive patterns and their social location point to middle-class identities. Furthermore, identification as “desi” affirms politics that take ideas of cool Black masculinity but divergent from political Blackness.

“Air Punjab”: Sikh American team in Atlanta

Sikh American teams in Atlanta also demonstrate their active engagement with US popular culture. "Air Punjab," as a team name, illustrates immersion of young Sikh Americans in basketball practices and the iconicity of Michael Jordan. As a result of Michael Jordan’s basketball skills and ability to elevate, Jordan was nicknamed “Air Jordan.” Nike capitalized on
this by producing the popular Nike “Air Jordan” basketball shoes. Sanjeet, team captain of “Air Punjab,” when asked about the team name, pointed to correlation with “Air Jordan” as a means to insert an urban “cool” simultaneously with claims to ethnic essences of being Punjabi Sikh. This team also took the name “Hit Squad” during the second half of the 2009 Asian American summer league.

On Sanjeet’s team were his close friend Abhijeet and two relatives—Navreet and Navreet’s younger brother, Anhad. Socialization and social interactions across generations takes place among men who share the pleasures of playing basketball. Navreet is an upperclassman in college while his younger brother is an underclassman in college. Through these basketball practices, Sanjeet (age 28) and Abhijeet (in his late twenties), have intense and intimate homosocial basketball encounters with Navreet and Anhad. They carried their ethnic bonds as Punjabi Sikh Americans from their Gurdwara onto the basketball court.

However, Sikh and Punjabi sensibilities do not alone restrict membership as absolutely Sikh nor does it open membership to all Sikh Americans. Whereas Toronto Khalsa opens up the category of Sikh to Sikh Canadians of various sensibilities, Air Punjab expands the category of South Asian America through their team composition. Sanjeet included young South Asian American men of other linguistic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds on his majority Sikh American team. When asked about why Sanjeet had David, a Malayalee American, and Siddiq, Muslim South Asian American, on his team, Sanjeet stressed, “I can’t imagine playing without one of my boys.” The term “boys” underscores male networks and friendship that transcends ethnic specificity but still within the category of South Asian America. In time Sanjeet would meet Ali, of Atlanta Outkasts, during Monday night pick-up and ask him to play with Air
Punjab/Hit Squad. Sanjeet stressed the importance of winning a trophy and wanted better talent on his team to help achieve this goal. The pleasures of competition, wins, and holding trophies show the dynamic nature of South Asian American-ness as it shifts through spaces and incorporate various other ethnic individuals.

With a large South Asian American population in Atlanta, Sanjeet’s specific choices of team members materialize the multiplicity and heterogeneity within South Asian America. Sanjeet pointed to a distinction between Air Punjab Sikhs and the two Sikh American brothers on team “Sand Brothaz.” During an interview June 4th, 2009, Sanjeet alluded to the different professional trajectories of his father in opposition to the parents of the Sikh American men on team “Sand Brothaz.” He said in a joking and nonchalant manner, “Punjabis don’t get along with each other…they [the two Sikh American men on Sand Brothaz] had a superiority thing that they got from their parents.”

Sanjeet also alluded to his caste standing as Jat Sikh while locating Sikh Americans on Sand Brothaz as higher caste and as products of a professional household. These tensions on the basketball court are symbolic of greater social relations—they index the conflict within the category of Sikh America that led to the building of various Gurdwaras in Atlanta.

Unlike South Asian Americans (including some Sikhs) who came in the early post-1965 immigration waves, Sanjeet’s father (a teacher and business man in Punjab) utilized the Family Reunification Act to follow his brother to California in 1993 before ending up in Atlanta. Although financially located as upper-class with an income of over $500,000 a year and classifying himself as upper class a result of his income, Sanjeet did not have the other symbolic markers of “model minority” status such as professional parents (doctors, engineers,
scientists) or an occupation in medicine, law, or engineering. Sanjeet’s family originally lived in working class African American neighborhood in Southeastern Atlanta; they could own a house without credit checks here.

These tensions and differences of class and caste play out irrespective of one’s income but rather in how one consumes and performs class identities (Frykman and Lofgren 1987). The comportment of their bodies and the discussions led to greater affinity between those men working jobs outside the fields deemed as “professional.” Thus, during pick-up basketball games with other South Asian Americans, these young men voluntarily “huddled up” at one corner of the gym before games began. Sanjeet would shoot along with Abhijeet (Air Punjab teammate) on the far goal from the gym entrance. Eventually Ali, Sultan on occasion, and Ali’s friend, Abdul, would join Sanjeet. On the closest goal to the gym entrance, Daniel, one of the original and main organizers of Monday night pick-up, would shoot alongside several other South Asian American and white acquaintances. The bonding on the nearest goal consisted of individuals who had professional jobs, all went to college, and were mostly Hindu or Christian. Ali, Abdul, Sultan, Sanjeet, and Abhijeet were those religious and ethnic communities dislocated from the Indian as well as US imaginary.  

**Christian Teams in Indo-Pak Basketball: Rethinking Immigration Histories and Multiplying South Asian America**

The presence of Christian South Asian American teams force a move beyond essentializing discourses about South Asian America. In similar fashion to Monday night pick-
up basketball in Atlanta where various ethnic South Asian Americans congregate to play, such heterogeneity takes shape at the Chicago IPN. Various Malayalee Christian American teams exist in the Indo-Pak Basketball circuit.

Several of my Malayalee American informants are second generation Americans, their professional parents came after the 1965 Immigration Act. “Patterns of post 1965 immigration from South Asian show that most women immigrate to the United States as dependent wives.” (Gupta 2006: 84) Research on these communities, as a result, tended to overemphasize and conflate “professional” with “masculine” and “men.” Therefore, scholarship on South Asian America has produced immigration as masculine and dominated by men (Abraham 2000). However, some of my Malayalee Christian informants shared different narratives of immigration that expand, complicate, and multiply South Asian immigration. As with the need for scientists, engineers, and doctors came a need for nurses in the US. Communities of Malayalee women then formed the waves of immigration “when the women come first” (George 2005; Maira 2002). These Malayalee women came first and then brought forth their families. Daniel is a Malayalee American active in the Atlanta sport scene and one of the key organizers for the mostly South Asian American recreational pick-up basketball game nights. Unlike the other narratives of immigration, Daniel’s mother led the family’s path of immigration to the US. Daniel said, “I believe that my mom came to the US in 1970, and yes it was to Atlanta. They got married 1 year later in 1971. My dad got here I think 6-7 months later in 1971.”

One Chicago Indo-Pak Basketball team illuminates such history of women leading immigration waves. Known as the “Chicago Untouchables,” this team draws its name not only from the popular Chicago-based gangster/mafia movie “The Untouchables” but also from the
location of this team in the South Asian American cultural milieu. Max, founder of Chicago IPN, and most of the young men on “Chicago Untouchables” are Christian Malayalee Americans; they also had Muslim South Asian Americans and Sikhs on the team at various points. A team name of this sort points to a demographic of team members, as non Hindus, who would be classified in the South Asian imagination as “untouchables.” Early conversations to Christianity, such as the Malayalee Christians, were often those of the Dalit caste—pejoratively called “untouchables.” Their dominance on the basketball court loosens up the hegemony of “Hindu” in the South Asian landscape, basketball success allowed for greater visibility of these Christian South Asian American communities. Similarly, they add elements of “cool” and normative masculinity to the embattled figure of the “untouchable.”

Furthermore, their team name also produces a history of South Asian immigration led by women—also discursively produced as untouchables. Some of these young men are the children of Malayalee nurses who arrived on US shores after 1965. In this interesting social matrix, young Malayalee American men, products of female-led immigration from South Asia, affirm their identities through polyvalent terms of the “Untouchables.”

Finally, while affirming a particular history and subject position in South Asia, the use of “untouchables” also underscores key elements of a basketball “cool.” In this case, as basketball players, they hint at a level of high basketball skill that most opponents cannot keep up with them therefore making these Malayalee Americans “untouchable.” It is a colorful and creative play on words to make clear their identity formation through basketball practices and US popular culture. Utilizing the term “Untouchables” with elements of basketball cool allow for productions of a cool, superior masculinity.
Other Malayalee teams, like “Dallas Bandits,” “New York Balloholics,” and “Detroit Diesel,” also demonstrate an active engagement with sport, urban culture, elements of cool, and popular culture. For example, the “Dallas Bandits” are influenced by the NBA team, the Dallas Mavericks. Likewise, the New York Bollaholics represent New York City through imitation of the New York Knicks jerseys. At the 2008 Chicago IPN, I met with team members of “Detroit Diesel” (three of them engineers) who creatively assert their identity in relation to the NBA franchise in Detroit, “Detroit Pistons.” The term “Diesel” is also part of urban vernacular by which to reference a muscular masculinity. Detroit Diesel also complicates the Christian Malayalee American community; whereas other Malayalee teams had Catholic and Evangelic Malayalees, Detroit Diesel is composed of all second generation Christian Pentecostal Malayalees and one Gujarati Hindu. Using such team names inserts South Asian Americans into this urban cultural milieu. It also shows how the embrace of local sporting teams plays a critical part in an affirmation of the local in the creation of South Asian American masculinities.

**Muslim South Asian American Teams in Atlanta- Beyond Essentializing Practices**

As the Christian South Asian American teams contest monolithic constructions of South Asian America and its respective Christian communities, Muslim teams in Atlanta and the Indo-Pak North American circuit also undo essentializing practices within the category of South Asian America and Muslim. Membership on the various Atlanta Muslim South Asian American teams takes place at various intersections of religious observance, ethnicity, race, and class. Burdsey (2006), in his examination of Muslim South Asian Brits in soccer, acknowledges the internal diversity that is not simply based on nationality, class, ethnicity, and generation but also a
product of how these participants interpret and practice Islam. This section demonstrates how Muslim-ness and masculinity intersect as well as work through immigration, generation, class, religious observance, and branch of Islam. “Muslim” is used to make plural Islam in South Asian America while also serving as an “essentialist” point of difference within South Asian America.

Almost all of the Muslim Pakistani teams belong to the branch of Sunni Islam. The Muslim teams in Atlanta who play an active part in the research are “Atlanta Outkasts,” “Atlanta Rat Pack,” “Atlanta Franchise,” “Camel Jockeys,” and a religious team that competed in the 1994 South Carolina tournament; their social interactions at Al-Farooq Masjid were critical to team formation. These team names contest both master narratives within South Asian America and racialized narratives in mainstream US society. On the North American Indo-Pak Basketball circuit, the Muslim teams in my study are Chicago Pak-Attack and Maryland Five Pillars.

Of all the Muslim member South Asian American basketball teams in Atlanta, I first came across “Atlanta Outkasts” in 1994. The vignette below describes the encounter, in 1994, with the young Muslim American men of Atlanta Outkasts.

_I came to know Mustafa, Ali, and Qamar (oldest sibling) through two Muslim Pakistani Americans at Emory University—Little Sheik and Kumrain. I met Kumrain through an Indian cultural organization’s intramural basketball team at Emory University._17 _Kumrain came over to my house in the city of Decatur (located in DeKalb County) and drove to meet Mustafa, Qamar, Ali, and their Muslim South Asian American basketball friends. Driving with Kumrain for 30 minutes, we crossed the Atlanta perimeter bounded by Highway 285 and entered places interpellated simultaneously as white and as hostile to people of color. Coming to Mustafa’s parents’ driveway, a lone, broken-in basketball goal stood—holding up on sheer will alone—with Mustafa, Ali, and Qamar playing. After a few hours of intense basketball, I sat in the Mustafa’s family room surprised at the level of basketball skill exhibited by South Asian Americans living this far outside the Atlanta perimeter. In my own way, I had held up the stereotype of South Asian American men as not athletic as a result of my numerous encounters at Emory University and imagined the countryside as antithetical to basketball excellence._
Having sweated through our shirts, we all sat in the family room while Mustafa’s father and mother tended to us. His mother, Asma, gave us drinks and applauded us on the good basketball games. In the midst of a dark room with thick, shaggy carpet, there stood basketball trophy upon basketball trophy earned by Ali and Mustafa. Having been asked to attend the Indo-Pak Basketball tournament in Greenville, my first Indo-Pak Basketball tournament, the young men sat together in this dark family room to shine light on a possible team name. Various names, all playing with ideas of “cool masculinity” and “toughness,” were thrown out to only disappear into the darkness. Finally, Mustafa mentioned that we name the team after one of his favorite Atlanta hip hop groups—“Outkast.” I thought I had accidently heard “outcastes” and it made cultural sense to me as all the players on the team—Muslims and myself, a Christian South Asian American—were discursively produced as “outcastes” in South Asian politics. Upon further investigation, Mustafa informed me that “Atlanta Outkasts” was in relation to hip hop group “Outkast.” The young men decided upon this name and took joy in its coolness.

The vignette above underscores the critical role of basketball in the lives of young South Asian American Muslim men. Mustafa, Ali, and their friends played for hours upon hours in their carport, basketball provided a key venue for affirming relationships and maintaining solidarity. Although they started playing together at Al-Farooq Masjid, the friendships and levels of competition carried over to Mustafa and Ali’s parental home. When not playing at home, these young men socialized on the basketball at the masjid. Playing basketball allowed for expressions of masculinity and cool that embedded them in the US cultural fabric.

This vignette above illustrates the clear role of hip hop as another element of popular culture that infiltrated their lives and their ideas of self. Mustafa and Qamar appropriated elements of urban cool and “cultural blackness” (Kelley 1997: Vargas 2007) to accentuate their cool, their masculinity, their relevance as urban subjects, and their difference as ethnic American subjects. While using elements of cultural blackness, the appropriation of such aesthetics allows them to embody Black stylistics without slipping endorsing Black politics, these stylistics represent commodified versions of urban cool. Through the utilization of “Outkasts,” this team name inverts the Indian/Hindu hegemony while inserting coolness to subjects located as marginal in the South Asian imaginary—Muslims and Christians. Outkasts, as team name,
points to the South Asian American sensibilities where essences of cool also contain various political commentaries.

The term “Outkasts” is polyvalent. Not only was Mustafa situating himself as an “outcaste” in the traditional sense of Indian politics and the specter of the Muslim, he also foreground a difference from more affluent post-1965 South Asian American families. His father entered the US in 1981 by utilizing the Family Reunification Act; Mustafa’s father already had a sibling in the US. Subsequently, Mustafa did not have the same social class standing or early residence to be termed “model minority.” Often the “model minority” moniker infers involvement in prestigious institutions of higher education, professions of medicine, engineering, or corporate business. Mustafa told me that he went to a community college and never pursued additional higher education since, according to him, “I made good money coming out of high school.” Expressive practices in basketball also allowed him to challenge a non-threatening, passive masculinity produced by the model minority discourse. By using the team name “Outkasts,” Mustafa challenges the hegemony of model minority discourses while underscoring pleasures in claiming his Muslim identity in an overwhelmingly Christian religious ethos of the US South (see Joshi 2006).

Other than Mustafa, Qamar, Ehsanul (Qamar’s friend), Kumrain, Malik, Little Sheik, Little Sheik’s friends, and I, there would be other players who played on “Atlanta Outkasts” in several other tournaments. Malik’s life history ran parallel to some of the meanings associated with “Outkasts.” Although Malik’s father holds prominent roles in Atlanta’s business community and Atlanta’s South Asian American community, Malik and his family grew up without the material benefits associated with the children of professional parents. Ehsanul
shared a similar development as did Qamar, Mustafa, and Ali.\textsuperscript{19} The brothers—Qamar, Mustafa, and Ali—attended junior colleges and jumped straight into the work force.

Malik, Little Sheik, Kumrain, Malik, and I attended prestigious universities in the US South unlike Mustafa, Ali, Qamar, and Ehsanul.\textsuperscript{20} However, Mustafa controlled and dictated the interactions on and off the court. In time, regardless of the ages of the people on Atlanta Outkasts, Mustafa and Ali played the role of elders and dictated most of the movements and conversations on and off the court. They did not have the same control with their work life as did their professional peers even though Ali and Mustafa had good paying jobs. As a result of having only a high school degree or a junior college degree, they were much more vulnerable to the workings of the market and faced economic downturns with angst. With the economic downturn in 2008, Mustafa and Ali were aware of mergers taking place with their respective companies. While Mustafa’s company’s stable base provided security, there still existed points when he and the company’s owner had tense moments concerning getting paychecks punctually. Ali’s financial situation took a turn for the worse. His managerial role that came about through years of sales experience could not protect him from the wrath of the economic crisis. Another company bought Ali’s company and terminated all current staff; this put Ali in a precarious situation. This situation took place a month before Ali’s wedding on April 18\textsuperscript{th}, 2009 and he could not find another job till late July. These social facts demonstrate the class position and limited mobility of these men who are the foundation of Atlanta Outkasts—their stories diverge from the “model minority” narrative.

Another Muslim team coming out of Al-Farooq also came to this tournament. Faisel, a 6’5” Pakistani Muslim American, led this team.\textsuperscript{21} As a religious Muslim and in training to be a
Muslim religious leader, Faisel and Faisel’s team had very different Muslim sensibilities. Each team stressed a *different* Muslim American masculinity. Faisel’s team stressed an observant religious Muslim ethos compatible with basketball and American-ness. Whereas Mustafa, Qamar, Malik, Kumrain, and Little Sheik shaved their faces completely, Faisel and his teammates had long, trimmed, kept beards without a mustache. Mustafa stated that Atlanta Outkasts did not associate with them because they were “too religious” and did not partake in the party scene. Ali, during our interview on May 30th, 2009, reaffirmed that by saying, “Mustafa and Qamar would go to Atlanta to party and get into trouble.” This affinity to the party scene proved accurate as Mustafa and Qamar were very visible and assertive of their masculinity and heterosexuality at the tournament after-party. Faisel’s team did not attend the party as they considered it antithetical to their notions of Muslim manhood.

**Shifting Team Compositions and Points of Identity Formation in Atlanta**

Atlanta Outkasts have themselves changed membership in time while reconfiguring their ideas of “Muslim American-ness.” The shifting nature illustrates the particularities of alliances, the nature of social relations, and the dynamic character of masculinity. In addition, the pleasures of competition make way for differently ethnic men and differently religious men to partake in team play. The boundaries of team identity are not rigid. Rather, these boundaries of South Asian America change to accommodate various South Asian American subjects that pull at the seams of essentialized identities. South Asian American communities differ from those communities back in South Asia through their ability to form social relations and community through and with other ethnic, religious, national subjects (Khandelwal 2002). Accordingly, the
boundaries of South Asian American masculinity is always witness to re-drawing, contestation, and various types of policing (Whannel 2007).

For the 1998 Chicago IPN, three new players joined Atlanta Outkasts—Ali, Bucks, and Faisel. Ali had been in Middle School in 1994 and considered too young to play, he joined Atlanta Outkasts to play in tournaments in 1998. Mustafa’s greater piety and religious engagement led to increased intimacy with Faisel. In the tournaments to follow in Tennessee in 1999, Dallas in 2000, Greenville in 2000, and Washington, D. C. in 2002, Mustafa and Faisel would discuss sections of the Quran and perform Muslim piety. These two young South Asian American men would also perform salat (prayer five times a day) at different points of the tournament-weekend while facing Mecca. While at the 1999 Tennessee tournament, Mustafa and Faisel ordered a fish sandwich from a fast food restaurant in order to maintain “halal.” Accordingly, after dinner, they walked to their cars to retrieve their prayer mats and set it in one corner of the parking lot facing Mecca. Furthermore, huddles before games consisted of prayers led by Mustafa’s mother; Faisel led prayers in case Mustafa’s parents did not travel for a particular tournament. Such religious piety and sporting competitiveness existed alongside each other as emblems of Muslim masculinity. In addition, Mustafa’s mother leading the huddles and saying the prayer showcased the complex nature of social relations where a female Muslim elder acted as a catalyst for basketball play.

Bucks joined the team as Ehsanul (Buck’s older brother) played basketball in a limited quantity. Close affinity between Ehsanul and Qamar along with his athletic skill opened up space for Bucks to play with Atlanta Outkasts. Friendships opened the space for socializing but a certain skill set and athletic prowess determined playing time on the basketball court. Malik’s
younger brother did not have the skill and thus would accompany the team at tournaments for the party scene but would not compete with Atlanta Outkasts. In 1999, Sultan would also be incorporated into Outkasts along with Hasan. Sultan was incorporated into Atlanta Outkasts as a result of his close ties to Ali and his ability to play basketball while Abdul’s (a friend of Ali) lack of basketball skill kept him off the team.

Other young men who would play with Atlanta Outkasts in leagues and tournaments consisted of Ahmed and various other players from Atlanta Franchise. Ahmed’s parents owned and worked at a convenience gas station and immigrated to Atlanta after the 1980 family reunification acts. These young South Asian American Muslim men were “outcasts” in the sense of their immigration history, their professional status, and their dissonance from what they perceived as normative South Asian America. For example, Sultan went to a prestigious university for his bachelor’s degree but would not actively seek employment. Furthermore, he was not seen with the same prestige as his father—Dr. Said; Sultan considered himself an “Outkast” in South Asian American social arenas. Sultan failed to occupy the same places of prestige as other South Asian Americans.

Recently, for major Asian American national tournaments held in Atlanta, the composition of Atlanta Outkasts opened up to include various players of strong athletic ability, skill, and a desire to win at high levels of competition. For the Asian American tournament in August, 2006, Atlanta Outkasts incorporated Mohammed and Imran (players on Atlanta Rat Pack) alongside Mustafa, Sultan, Ali, and I. In 2008, a different ensemble was arranged by Mustafa and Ali. In addition to Ali, Mustafa, and myself, Mustafa brought two young South Asian American, Riad (a Middle Eastern American), Hasan (who had not played with Atlanta
Outkasts in almost 7 years), and a multi-racial Asian American/African American player—Bobby—who played Division I collegiate ball and played professional basketball overseas. Afzal’s (2006) research convergences with these ethnographic details. Afzal looks at how the increase in numbers of the Muslim communities in the US has led to a shift from South Asian American community formation in general to one based on a “Muslim heritage economy.” Similarly, Atlanta Outkasts incorporated Muslims of Middle Eastern background, Indian American background, and Pakistani American background.

**Other Muslim Teams: Making Visible Racialized Histories and Muslim Difference**

Players on some of these other Muslim South Asian American teams have played with Atlanta Outkasts in some senses while others know of, respect, and look up to Mustafa and Ali. Team formation takes place through differential locations of class, ethnicity, age, skill, sentiments of exclusion, and religious observance. Although some of these teams emerge out of Al-Farooq Masjid as did Atlanta Outkasts, it would prove false to make them a “cohesive counter-public” (Muller 2007) whereby conjoining Atlanta Outkasts with other Muslim teams—there is not a singular Muslim narrative. Rather, team formations are inlaid with varying degrees of power, difference, and lived experiences.

One of the teams that competed against Atlanta Outkasts on the local Atlanta Indo-Pak Basketball scene was “Camel Jockeys.” The team name is itself a play on racist epithets that conflate Muslims, Arabs, and Middle Eastern persons as those foreign subjects who ride animals in lands distant from the US. This team consisted of Pakistani Muslim Americans who were at
least five years younger than Mustafa and other Atlanta Outkasts, Mustafa stood out as an elder, hero, and basketball guide for these young men. While Sultan played with Outkasts, Sultan’s younger brother, Khalid, played with Camel Jockeys and formed this team alongside Mohammed. I first met Khalid and Mohammed at an Indo-Pak Basketball 3-on-3 tournament in a Gwinnett County recreation center in 2003. Mohammed played high school basketball unlike some of the other South Asian American Muslims in Atlanta. Both Mohammed and Khalid had fathers who arrived in Atlanta during the early years of South Asian Muslim immigration to Atlanta. Whereas Dr. Said, Khalid’s father, arrived in 1977, Mohammed said, “My dad first came here in the mid 60's, then he went back to Pakistan and got married. They came back here in the early 70's.” Like Khalid’s father who is a doctor, Mohammed’s father is an engineer and part of that immigration wave of South Asian professionals post-1965 and lived in DeKalb County, Fulton County, and Cobb County. Mohammed and Khalid attended a four year college in Atlanta together. When I asked Mohammed about whom he socializes with and if he spends time with his Indo-Pak basketball team, he replied, “A lot of us grew up together so we hang out fairly often… I have acquired a lot of close friendships from playing basketball. Playing, practicing together, and going to basketball camps means that you spend a lot of time with those guys and you form special bonds with some of them.”

Similar to Khalid and Mohammed, Sultan’s youngest brother, Imran, formed team “Atlanta Rat Pack” with his Muslim South Asian American peer group. These young men who comprise of Imran’s peer group attend a four year college with him, play football with him, and take part in other leisure activities with him. Amir is one of Imran’s closest friends and younger brother of Afzal who played with Camel Jockeys. Amir and Imran attend the same year of college together at a four year college, both plan on going into business like Mohammed and
Khalid, they socialize together outside of basketball and school, and also travel together for tournaments. With close relations to Mohammed, they incorporated Mohammed on their team when “Camel Jockeys” disbanded but do not take part in all social activities with him. Mohammed served as a mentor, ally, and friend for members of Atlanta Rat Pack. Atlanta Rat Pack did not only have Atlanta Muslims, they also incorporated skilled South Asian American peers from other ethnic backgrounds. Atlanta Rat Pack also had a Hindu American attending the University of Georgia play on their team alongside several Muslim South Asian Americans at Emory University. One particular Emory University student playing for Rat Pack during the first session of the Asian Ballers league was Usman who also played for Chicago Pak-Attack (an Indo-Pak Basketball team discussed later in this chapter).

During all tournaments and games I attended with Atlanta Rat Pack, Mohammed served as one of the main voices on the court. Mohammed also directed plays on the court and provided commentary, guidance, and strategy during game-time huddles. Kinship as Muslim men is re-established during basketball tournaments as the younger men defer to the older men with basketball prowess. Cultural competence allows for such kinship relations to take place effortlessly on the court. The only time when Mohammed restrained from speaking out was when Mustafa took center-stage. Mustafa, on the other hand, did not have the same class sensibilities as Mohammed, Imran, and others on Rat Pack. However, the basketball skills of Mustafa and his local iconicity over-rode his points of class and immigration-generation difference from other Rat Pack members. On the basketball court, as a result of Mustafa’s basketball experience and assertiveness, Mustafa would also lead all huddles and conversations during games.²⁶
However, Ali did not receive verbal invitations from Atlanta Rat Pack players to play in tournaments. In fact, Ali arrived at the April 4th, 2009 Asian tournament at Georgia Institute of Technology in the role of the spectator even though Atlanta Rat Pack needed some extra players. Although considered one of the premier players in the Indo-Pak Basketball circuit in Atlanta, played high school basketball at a high level, and received basketball scholarships for college, Rat Pack players did not invite Ali. When asked why Ali does not play with Rat Pack, Mohammed explained, “He loses his temper easily; he starts yelling at the officials and gets us in trouble with the refs.” These behaviors were seen as “unsportsmanlike” and antithetical to the ethos put forth by other Rat Pack players.

Ali, when asked why he does not get invited by Rat Pack to play, said bluntly, “Rat Pack guys are not tough or competitive. They can’t handle my intensity.” Mustafa pointed to another set of non basketball related activities—these particular activities situated Ali as a different kind of “Muslim man” from Rat Pack members. They, Rat Pack, according to Mustafa, saw Ali as problematic as a result of his pleasures in drinking alcohol and recreational drug use. Yet, Sultan, Imran’s older brother, also had such predilections but played with his younger brother, Imran, on Atlanta Rat Pack. Such contradictions showcase the limits of Muslim-ness in forming teams, other factors play a key role in team formation. Kinship is also made real through middle-class respectability and Muslim respectability.

Exclusions of this sort along lines of proper Muslim manhood also happen in realms of basketball skill as well. Kashif played with Rat Pack on occasions but then did not get invited to play in leagues with Rat Pack. Kashif formed a team called “Sand Brothaz.” Strategically using the name “Sand Brothaz” adds several elements of “cool” and urban vernacular to their team
name. Ending in “az” instead of “ers” for brothaz accentuates that element of cool through urban/hip hop vernacular (see Kelley 1997). It also addresses social bonding and community formation for people of color via the paradigm of brotherhood. The brotherhood in this case hits a spectrum of South Asian America, engages with ideas of “Muslim heritage economy,” and contests processes of racialization. Two Sikh Americans, Riad (Arab American), and several Muslim South Asian Americans made up this team. Upon inquiring about the team name through a survey I handed out, team captain Kashif replied, “I wanted the team name to be something funny, ethnically describing us, and something related to brotherhood or team chemistry-like. So i first thought of Sand Niggaz(haha out of joke only) but of course that word wouldn't work then I thought of Muslim Brotherhood but not all the guys were muslim. At the end, i combined it to make Sand Brothaz.” Using the phrase “Sand Niggaz” is also reconfiguring a pejorative term in the US used to conflate communities of Arabs, Middle Easterners, Muslims, and South Asians.

The shift from Sand Niggaz to Sand Brothaz is also a historical shift. By considering this term, they point to a history in which various groups of people of color were conflated as one but yet the term “sand” connoted a difference from African Americans. Using “brothaz” allows for a sense of community and an embrace of that social bond especially for the players whose communities have struggled with racial profiling after 9/11. “Brothaz” points to an affirmative sensibility by positively marking social bonding as ethnic Americans. Kashif, Riad (the Arab American), and the Sikh American players through their team socialities create a sense of community that incorporates those subjects produced as “terrorist” in the American imagination (see Maira 2009; Naber 2008). Utilizing that team name also gives the players pleasure in inverting racist terms to affirm their American-ness as ethnic Americans.
Racist experiences shaped how other teams formed in the greater Indo-Pak North American circuit. Team Chicago Pak-Attack, unlike Chicago Untouchables, is a product of a different history where you have a “Muslim heritage economy” (Afzal 2006) of Muslims from South Asia. When asking Chicago Pak-Attack how they formed their team and who they enlisted as players, Abid provided answers. Abid underscored the importance of an all Muslim team whereby all members understand religious norms and cultural ways of life. During our interview at the 2006 Chicago IPN, Abid admitted explicitly, “It is a team of just Muslims, we like playing with guys who share our culture…I admit that a Muslim-only team is racist.” While underscoring the importance of shared cultural conventions, Abid acknowledged how this practice “might be racist.” Two historical moments come out of this statement. First, the team consists mostly of Pakistani American Muslims with Bangladeshi Muslim Americans like Tariq. Therefore, there is a particular “Muslim heritage economy” that operates to create a sense of Muslim-ness that goes beyond nation-state and national origin. Similarly, it also re-imagines “Pakistan” through an open category of “Pakistan” that includes Muslims of various other South Asian origins.

Secondly, Abid’s use of the term “racist” for religious exclusivity within team formation also addresses particular historical processes. In a way, Abid points to the process of “cultural racism” (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991) through which cultural difference is made irreconcilable and absolute. By situating this practice as “racist,” I contend that Abid locates Muslim South Asian American experiences of exclusion within the US nation that reinforced racial difference through religious difference. This is a difference that is acknowledged by Sand Brothaz, Camel Jockey, and Outkasts. Through the use of “race” with religion, a reference is made to the normalizing of Christianity in the US national fabric whereby experiences of alienation take
place for non Christians (Joshi 2006). Such team names illustrate how the idea of race in South Asian American history has involved an active engagement with religion as a site of difference from the national fabric, the ways in which South Asian Americans and Asian Americans have always been cast as outside normative US citizenship as “permanently foreign, inassimilable to the nation and ultimately, alien in the eyes of the nation.” (Ngai 2004: 8) With the racial profiling and “racial formation” (Omi and Winant 1994) after September 11th, 2001 the new racial formation of “Muslim looking” (Ahmed 2004; Volpp 2003) conflates race, religion, and nation to situate South Asian Americans outside the US national fabric. For example, K-Rock, a collegiate basketball player of Hindu American origin, said, “People [opposing spectators as sanctioned college competitions] were screaming ‘Go back to Afghanistan!’ when I was on the foul line shooting.”

Muslim teams like Maryland Five Pillars demonstrate the heterogeneity and multiplicity of South Asian American Muslim communities. With Islam split into two major branches of Shia Islam and Sunni Islam, majority of Muslims from South Asia are Sunnis. According to coach, player, and founder—Aadil, Maryland Five Pillars came into existence in 1991 through family members (brothers) and other young Muslim men they knew. Aadil and Aafiya are brothers who belong to a smaller sect of Islam known as Ahmadiyya. The brothers considered their ethnic background as Pakistani American and most of the Muslims on the team are Pakistani American. Maryland Five Pillars has a star player who is Persian Muslim American. They also had a Malayalee Christian American on their team for numerous years till the end of the 2006 Chicago IPN. Furthermore, a close friendship came about with Maryland Cobras, a Hindu team, whereby they joined forces in 2001 to represent what Krush—Maryland Cobra player—considered a “better talented” and less “drama” basketball team. Pleasures arise from
team compositions, team chemistry, and social bonds that produce championship teams—
Maryland Five Pillars won the 2006 and 2008 Chicago IPN. Teams with such heterogeneity and
multiplicity do not congregate so easily in South Asia, this is an American story.

The final Muslim South Asian American team examined in my research consisted of
team “Atlanta Franchise.” This team constructed its team name through ideas of cool associated
with the NBA and urban stylistic. I first met Ahmed, who would play with Atlanta Outkasts at
various times, through Atlanta Franchise at a local Indo-Pak Basketball tournament organized by
Suleiman at a Hindu Mandir (temple). Suleiman captained and created Atlanta Franchise with
Ahmed and several other young Muslim South Asian American men who recently graduated
high school; their parents arrived after the 1980s. Suleiman, a stout fellow with little athletic
ability, could not play basketball well and would rarely play in these tournaments unless his team
held a considerable lead in games. However, by organizing tournaments and composing the
team, Suleiman interacted with his co-ethnic peers. Suleiman also invited Mustafa to play with
his team and got Riad involved with his team early. Mustafa, in turn, invited Ali and me to play
with him. During one tournament at the Hindu Mandir, Ali left the tournament early in
frustration stating these local Indo-Pak tournaments were “a waste of time…get tired of telling
people what to do…and isn’t serious.” In addition, members of Atlanta Franchise did not
socialize with Atlanta Rat Pack outside of the social space of basketball tournaments.29
However, this did not limit “hero-making” by members of Atlanta Franchise who looked up to
Mohammed, Imran, and Mustafa. Mustafa, in particular, held a special place in the lives of these
young Muslim South Asian American men—he represented an accessible figure to engage with
and represent their aspirations to tough, cool masculinity.
Inverting Mainstream Idols, Celebrating South Asian American Heroes

Through the formation of these teams, certain individuals, such as Mustafa and Ali, stood out as heroes and points of mimesis. Most Indo-Pak Basketball players highlight a core of present and former NBA players as basketball idols and sites for mimesis: Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Larry Bird, Hakeem Olajuwon, Shaquille O’Neal, LeBron James, Kobe Bryant, Mark Price, and other players. However, through South Asian American basketball publics, a new “cast of heroes” (Archetti 1999; Maram 2006) emerges who stand as templates of South Asian American-ness. Like the cricket players in CLR James’s seminal work, basketball heroes in Indo-Pak Basketball “are not only entertainers here, they seem to offer promise and possibility.” (2003: xi) As the above section demonstrated, this cast of heroes “nourished pride and hope” (James 2003: 93) that negotiates South Asian American-ness in contrast to racializing discourses.

Basketball, as popular culture, presents a site for “inverting dominant icons” in basketball often marked as African American men (Farred 2006; Lipsitz 1990; King and Springwood 2001). Through their creativity, toughness, aggressiveness, urban style, cool, and tournament victories, players acknowledged the critical role Ali and Mustafa played as exceptional exemplars of “desi” and “Muslim” masculinity. Twice after Monday night/Thursday night pick-up basketball, Daniel and I conversed about games played that night and the respective highlights. Daniel said, “I didn’t think desis could play basketball till I saw Ali play.” He alluded to Ali’s body type that also makes it impossible for Daniel to position basketball excellence upon the body of Ali. Daniel believed South Asian Americans to have genetic traits that made it impossible to excel in sport. However, Daniel could not believe at the skill
possessed by Ali and commented on that. Ali, at 5’11” and 230 pounds, does not fit the model of a “normal” basketball body. Yet, his understanding of the game, his training, his expressive acts, and his control of the game makes him one of the premier players in the local circuit. His physique and ethnicity, however, were not reviewed positively by college recruiters who, despite Ali’s success, figured him as incompatible with basketball success.32

Mustafa and Ali were accessible and their stylistics available for intimate consumption. Mahmoud, while driving with me and Mustafa to Midtown Atlanta’s dance club scene on February 7th, 2009, alluded to Ali and Mustafa as the reasons why he and so many “desis” got involved with basketball. Mahmoud expressed simultaneously surprise and pleasure in seeing basketball skills manifested in Mustafa and Ali. Through the figures of Mustafa and Ali, the traditional icons of basketball masculinity are inverted.

On the North American Indo-Pak Basketball circuit, most team captains involved with Indo-Pak Basketball over the course of a decade or more know of Mustafa and Ali as a result of their spectacularity on the court. However, they valorize other individuals as heroes. One such site of hero-making and mapping positive sporting values on South Asian bodies consists of the Indo-Pak Basketball website where Parambir is celebrated.33 During the interview on the website, the camera focuses in on the muscul arity of Parambir while capturing his dunks. Most Indo-Pak players know of Parambir and mention his basketball accomplishments—playing Division I basketball in the US and starring for the Canadian Junior National team.

However, one must take into account the normative context in which such characters are heroes are produced. Affects and pleasures in mimesis are embedded with politics (Taussig 1993); producing a new cast of heroes presents a new template of South Asian American-ness.
laden with power whereby there exists a lopsided media coverage and interest in men’s lives and bodies (Miller 2001). Male players, like Parambir, are given notions of “heroic masculinity” (Kennedy 2007) while privileging the male body with sports through a “patriarchal dividend” (Connell 1995) that normalizes and provides benefits to men in sport. Although a women’s Indo-Pak Basketball circuit is underway, these tournaments have not come to fruition and receive little discursive attention within the Indo-Pak Basketball internet community. The gender binaries get reinforced by values put on these terms. In a Derridian sense, “Nature of the first term [masculinity] is superior to, and depends on the definition of the second term [femininity].” (Rail 1998: xiii)

These sporting activities are sites for “asymmetrical ideologies of gender” (Bolin 2003: 7) thereby privileging men and masculinity. Madeleine Venkatesh, South Asian American female athlete, does not appear in these celebratory discourses of basketball heroes in Indo-Pak Basketball. Venkatesh holds various basketball records in Division I women’s basketball but she does not stand in as a point of mimesis. Accordingly, sport and bodies in sport, through figures like Parambir and Michael Jordan, are battle ground for “symbolic masculine legitimacy” and policing of “legitimate types of bodies” (Brown 2006; Muller 2007) whereby devaluing and excluding the contribution of women. My conversation with Ali points to why Madeleine is missing as a figure in discourses of basketball heroes. Ali stated with conviction, when asked about the WNBA (Women’s National Basketball Association), “Basketball is physical. I don’t think basketball is a women’s sport, I hate the WNBA. I hated it when they act masculine. Chest bumps, tattoos, pounding the chest, and the gear are masculine and childish. They are butch.” Discourses of this sort make women in basketball as abnormal femininities and do not
allow for their own articulation. Furthermore, sexualizing female basketball players as “butch”, according to Carrington, “devalues their sporting achievements” (Carrington 2002: 12).

(Mis) Representation of South Asian American-ness takes places along the axis of masculinity whereby eliding other possibilities for women and sport. For example, Indo-Pak players stressed getting young men into basketball while their daughters, sisters, and wives stayed off the courts but could reside in the stands. Indo-Pak Basketball organizers in Dallas, DC, and Chicago expressed their angst that not enough young South Asian American men participated in Indo-Pak Basketball events and materialized it through the creation of two tournaments to run concurrently at the 2008 Chicago IPN—an adult Indo-Pak tournament and an under-18 years old youth tournament. Chicago IPN Organizers sent out fliers to all the North American Indo-Pak teams and team captains to spur interest within the younger age group. Thus, it normalized young men in basketball; there was not the same concern for involving young women in basketball practices and in providing full membership to this cultural community.

With the discursive manipulation of women in basketball as alternative femininities and female masculinities (see Halberstam 1998; Muller 2007), there is a policing of basketball sites as places for a particular masculinity and a site for excluding femininity. Madeleine Venkatesh, now a collegiate coach, spoke of her recruiting trips for her collegiate team. Madeleine said, “I only met two Indian girls from playing and recruiting for 15 years.” The paucity of South Asian American female basketball public also plays out with Indo-Pak Basketball. On the local Atlanta scene, Daniel’s wife, Maria, alluded to how there were no convergent sporting spaces for young South Asian American women other than sports gendered as female; they could also be
spectators. Maria states, “I never played sports in school- except for required PE -volleyball, tennis, etc... Little girl [activities] with sports was kickball in school, playing backyard [badminton] with family and friends, swimming in the summer.” Unlike Daniel, Maria did not have recourse to basketball and sporting activities as sites for producing cultural identities. The social relations in Indo-Pak Basketball are then naturalized by normalizing the gender order by situating men as legitimate bodies in sport as well as appropriate heroes. 35

The next chapter looks into depth into the social relations within Indo-Pak Basketball and corresponding leisure spaces to tease out the cultural practices of South Asian American masculinity. Accordingly, the next chapter examines how masculinity exists as a social construction and comes to realization through particular actions, discourses, symbols, and politics. Thus, it will look at how the particularity of cultural practices create masculinity and produce this cast of heroes while always in discussion with larger society’s racializing discourses.
Chapter 3

Ballin’ Indo-Pak Style: Pleasures, Desires, and Expressive Practices of “South Asian American-ness”

We didn’t play against, I am going to say, Desi [South Asian American] people, whenever we did, we were always better than them...I did not want to play against these local Desi kids cause anywhere we went we dominated them until we got invited to the Indo-Paks...this is a different level of basketball dude, these guys can play.—Mustafa (interview during summer 2006)

Nobody really wears their religion on their sleeves, you know you are respected...Everybody here is just cool...it is always about respect here...even in the heat of the game you would never think of fighting in these tournaments just because the atmosphere, the culture, it is more than just being a game.—K-Rock (Indo-Pak Basketball Player and Division II Collegiate Basketball Player; interviewed at 2006 Chicago Tournament).

The commentary by Mustafa and K-Rock, two differentially located individuals, point to the cultural ethos of Indo-Pak Basketball and how it relates to their subject positions as South Asian American men. Mustafa, Muslim Pakistani American, and K-Rock, Hindu Indian American, allude to two respective pleasures, competition and social intimacy, they encountered in Indo-Pak Basketball. Both of these South Asian American men point to a cultural specificity, cultural affects, and aesthetic modes of cultural representation in Indo-Pak Basketball. Thus, it proves important in analyzing areas of recreation as a means of understanding US urban culture (Bachin 2005). Ideas of self and “otherness” arises through conceptions of manhood in relation to and through social interactions with other men—South Asian American men and other racialized masculinities (Chauncey 1994); acts, affects, and movements play critical roles in underscoring the personal in such identity formation. I concur with Dudrah’s (2002: 378) examination of identity formation through bhangra dance forms: “The performance of identities is not always a straightforward replica of the social self, but a mobile exchange of bodily
movements, looks, gestures, feelings and personal constructions of social space.” Therefore, this chapter examines the construction of the self that is not a monolithic South Asian American self but rather a dynamic masculinity as it is constructed through cultural practices, social interactions, and conversations in Indo-Pak Basketball as well as in relation to other leisure spaces.

Indo-Pak Basketball is a ritualistic space through which participants aspire to certain masculine identities. Elaborate roles, conceptions of time, and productions of space arise through these ritualistic elements (Turner 1969). Similar to other ethnographies on basketball (Brooks 2009; May 2007), these young men play basketball not only to assert their masculinity and earn respect but as a means to engender desires, affects, and sensibilities not readily available in other social contexts. A critical analysis of the basketball practices in Indo-Pak Basketball and other respective leisure spaces situates gender in the matrix of pleasures, desires, and expressive practices. I argue South Asian American masculinity coalesces through expressive aesthetics whereby the sporting body “may be seen, not simply as a signifier of meaning, but as a subject actor in a larger drama of culture and power.” (Alter 1994: 24) These young men are agents who create, negotiate, and multiply notions of “American-ness” and “South Asian American-ness”.

The ritualistic practices in Indo-Pak Basketball and South Asian American basketball public-privates (I use this term to demonstrate its openness as a public to South Asian American men while it is private and forecloses opportunities to various “Others”) exist alongside experiences and marginalization in other basketball publics. Other multi-racial basketball leagues embody cultural values through intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, nation, and
sexuality which dislocate South Asian Americans from the American imaginary. These racial differences, as “Muslim looking” and “model minority”, are embedded in intersections of race, gender, and sexuality to produce social constructions of South Asian Americans as unfit for American sporting masculinity and abject to a normative white hegemonic masculinity i.e. citizenship—white hegemonic masculinity is uncritically made equivalent with citizenship (Hong 2006; Nelson 1998).

Harpreet, a Sikh American in Atlanta, when asked about his previous sporting experiences, provides examples that demonstrate his dislocation and production as an abnormal subject. These examples, I argue, solidify the cultural parameters of citizenship that locate South Asian Americans in the margins. He stated, “There were always stereotypes. I remember my first varsity baseball game as a pitcher, the umpire came up to the mound and loudly and slowly said ‘HAVE YOU DONE THIS BEFORE SON?’ Assuming my lack of knowledge for the game and for the [E]nglish language. I also remember constantly being called ‘SAND NIGGER’ at various basketball venues while on the free throw line.” Even though fluent in English and having the requisite cultural codes of belonging, sport in US society has contestations of belonging and citizenship often predicated on a simplistic Black-White racial binary. Pukh, a Sikh American, alluded to the difficulties in multi-racial leagues and states that there is “racism” that one had to deal with when playing outside of the South Asian community, “In other leagues there’s always arguments or racial comments.” White men and African American men marginalized South Asian American men in multi-racial leagues: white men by claims to normative masculinities in citizenship and in sport, while African American men by racialized claims to basketball. Mary, a white spectator dating an Indo-Pak player at the 2006 Chicago IPN, shared her thoughts that confirmed such racializing logic: “You associate basketball more
with the black population and, I think, people from India, Pakistan, and Southeast Asians have a
reputation for not being really athletic… I had a hard time believing Sean was Indian at 6’6”.5 Mary’s comments in conjunction with Pukh’s and Harpreet’s comments demonstrate how
ideologies together with cultural practices locate South Asian American men outside normative
basketball masculinities and outside normative US masculinities. Furthermore, Mary’s template
of South Asians projects particular bodies that are normative in non sporting contexts, she
constructs Sean as the abnormal South Asian subject.

Spectator Mary’s comments about South Asians having a “reputation for not being really
athletic” exists in conjunction with the racialized “model minority” discourse. Prashad (1999: 111) states that the “model minority” myth emphasizes that “Asians are all brain and no body;
blacks are all body and no brain; and whites enjoy an Aristotelian medium of body and brain.”

A process of racial castration takes place implicating gender and sexuality (Eng 2001) whereby
the hyperbole of intellectual, professional achievement diminishes claims to American manhood.
As racialized subjects, South Asian American men, with an overemphasis on “brain”, are not
afforded a tough, phallic-dominant masculinity associated with sport. Sanjay, captain of a West
Coast Indo-Pak team, pointed to this phenomenon and shared his points: “When I was in high
school… early 90s, there was no such league… you didn’t even think there are other Indians there
[basketball spaces], that’s kind of how it is… I was an aspiring young athlete when I was
younger, because of our culture… the athletic part of our genes, as you were saying earlier, is not
really expressed… you are an individual lost person in this large world of sports.” Rathi, a
female Chicago IPN organizer, when asked whether Indo-Pak Basketball gives participants a
new identity commented, “I’m not sure if it gives them a new identity, but I do believe it has
given another identity that wasn’t so dominant before. I think about 10 years ago or so, many
parents only wanted their sons to focus on their education and didn’t see a need to make time or have any interest in anything else, especially sports."

In similar fashion, associations between South Asians and sport either take the shape of US national Scripts National Spelling Bee Contest\(^6\) that racializes South Asian Americans as “brain” or takes the shape of cricket. The hyper-visibility of young South Asian Americans in the Spelling Bee contests foreground competition within the parameters of the “model minority” figure. The coverage on ESPN (premier sporting news network), Wall Street Journal, and other sources affirm such productions of these subjectivities. For example, the Wall Street Journal, in a June, 2010 article (see Appendix C for full article) gives title “Winning Bees Spells Glory for Indian Kids on the Ethnic Circuit” and argues that this is a source of pride and ways of belonging within US society—I contend that is produces these young South Asians as racialized subjects on the margins without full claims to citizenship.

Discussions that shift from the Spelling Bee to the sport of Cricket also do such marginalizing work. Pukh, a Sikh American, adds, “A lot of people say, ‘oh you know’ when you talk about Indians, ‘you guys are really good at cricket’…they don’t know that here in the United States and Canada we got a huge community of players where they actually play basketball.” Sanjay acknowledged similar experiences, he said that people asked, “Don’t you guys play cricket?” Questions such as this seem banal but tease out complex relationships between cricket, nation, and citizenship. Cricket masculinities and cricket-informed identities point to colonial and post-colonial identities (see Appadurai 1996; Burdsey 2008; James 2003) not easily mapped onto South Asian American basketball players. Basketball, in addition, carries different valences and is imagined differently in the US than cricket. Non South Asians
inquiring about cricket, I believe, fix South Asian American men in South Asia thereby ascribing masculinity outside the normativity of US citizenship.7

Through participation in Indo-Pak Basketball alongside other South Asian American basketball spaces, South Asian American men conjure a masculinity that simultaneously claims “American-ness” and “South Asian-ness.” The intimacies of basketball play and its pleasures consolidate, for participants, their belonging as ethnic Americans; it is an act of agency. Whereas African Americans have used basketball as a means to escape structural violence (George 1992; Kelley 1997), South Asian Americans appropriate aspects of “cultural blackness” and basketball masculinity to claim a space as “Americans”—it is a vehicle for cultural citizenship. These basketball spaces, as this chapter will demonstrate, provide one key site to reconcile athletic, sporting, basketball pleasures and identities as South Asian Americans.

*Spatializing South Asian American-ness through Place-Making*

South Asian American-ness emerges not only in relation to the specificity of team formations examined in chapter two but also with construction of social spaces and place-making—imbuing these arenas with meaning, and spatializing South Asian American-ness. “Spatial hermeneutics” (Farred 2007; Soja 1989), thus, are at play in identity formation. Giving meaning to space consists of one means to define places and own places in cultural terms (Basso 1996; Spradley and Mann 1975). Naming constitutes one such act of place-making, these acts of naming co-exist with other rituals (Basso 1996; Castles and Davidson 2000: 132). While always in dialogue with previous histories of such spaces (LeFebvre 1991), the act of naming creates new sensibilities and meanings to place of South Asian American basketball private-publics.
To add, the naming of basketball spaces as Indo-Pak Basketball consists of a deconstruction of space and articulation of new meanings associated with master narratives of belonging and citizenship. “Across a whole range of cultural forms there is a powerfully *syncretic* dynamic which critically appropriates elements from the master-codes of the dominant culture and *creolizes* them, disarticulating the given signs and rearticulating their symbolic meaning otherwise.” (Mercer 2003: 255) Using the term “Indo-Pak Basketball”, rearticulates the dominant narratives and contests normativities of white hegemonic masculinity as well as Black sporting masculinities. It is a way to reconfigure master narratives of citizenship and masculinity—both categories are arenas of exclusion—through the insertion of South Asian American acts of place-making.

Using the term “Indo-Pak” does stake claim as a South Asian American place but also falls prey to hegemonic discourses of South Asian America as “Indian” or “Pakistani.” As this naming opens up the space to South Asian American-ness, the spatialization of these identities through the narrow confines of “Indo-Pak” presents one such contradiction. “Spatialities represent both the spaces between multiple identities and the contradictions within identities.” (Pile and Keith 1993: 225) At the moment in which “Indo-Pak” interjects South Asia into the cultural fabric of “American-ness”, this limits those expressions of South Asian American-ness to “India” and “Pakistan”. As a result, it ignores those who imagine find “Indo-Pak” restricting and, rather, imagine Khalistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Bhutan. To add, it also limits the movement of diasporas whereby South Asian Americans might have ancestral ties to Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, the UK, and elsewhere—“Indo-Pak” might not be their point of identification.
Accordingly, physical spaces, like basketball courts, are not neutral spaces but rather spaces for South Asian American place-making that have contradictory politics. This space and its (re)presentation dictates who belongs and the politics of this belonging. Whereas Cricket players in CLR James’s work mark island politics and sensibilities through play (Carrington 1998 [Farred 1996]; James 2003), Indo-Pak Basketball players index South Asian American politics through place-making and play.

One element of South Asian American politics infuses class and belonging through South Asian American middle class respectability. Chicago organizers limited participation of teams figured as aggressive, hostile teams with the propensity for fighting. Therefore, Max mentioned to me that they did not allow teams to play that had great basketball skill but got into fights.

Another element of middle class respectability consists of philanthropy (Jackson 2001). In addition, they use the venue of IPN to advertise needs specific to the South Asian American community. As the social services and forms of assistance for South Asian Americans are limited (Abraham 2004; Rudrappa 2004), a vista emerges through South Asian American basketball publics for such messages and concerns. Chicago IPN organizers used the Indo-Pak Basketball circuit to encourage participants to donate bone marrow for South Asian American recipients. Max also has championed the Boys and Girls Club of Chicago as the recipients of all funds generated through the Chicago IPN, not a single penny goes in the pockets of the organizers. For twenty years, Max donated IPN funds to the local Boys and Girls Club. At the DC IPN, organizers donate money to a philanthropic organization that provides relief to “disaster
struck and socially-disadvantaged individuals and families in the poorer communities in the world.”

Another element of South Asian American politics stem from the location of “American-ness” and “South Asian-ness.” “American-ness” and “South Asian-ness” are collapsed into “South Asian American-ness” through deliberate “creolization” of physical spaces at Indo-Pak Basketball venues. Such configurations illuminate the contrapuntal practices that are the essence of “South Asian American-ness.” In 2006, Max, Charles, Rathi, and Jim\textsuperscript{11} coordinated Chicago IPN at a high school with histories in dialogue with basketball. The place-world they imagine constitutes one means of constructing their own social traditions, personal identities, and social identities. Naming\textsuperscript{12} alone limits claims to this space, the spatializing of particular racial, ethnic, gendered, and sexualized meanings refashion the physical spaces of basketball courts into meaningful South Asian American place-worlds. By specifically choosing the high school associated with NBA player Corey Maggette, Indo-Pak organizers imagine their basketball practices in dialogue with other racialized men and basketball stars.

In addition to associations between basketball spectacularity through the figure of Maggette, Chicago IPN organizers also configured the physicality of the gym to underscore South Asian American sensibilities. At the 2006 Chicago IPN, posters highlighting corporate sponsors contained English script transposed into Hindi stylistics. These cultural artifacts create affects of belonging through an amalgam of linguistic codes that incorporate English and Hindi simultaneously. Gaffney and Bale (2004: 37) state, “The senses of belonging not only to history but to a larger collective identity are vital components of the stadium experience.” One poster with the English script in Hindi stylistics stood in the background while at foreground stood a
photo of a South Asian American woman with gold jewelry, henna, and wearing a South Asian mid-riff dress—she marks South Asian femininity by association with tradition, heterosexuality, and “culture.” Although possibilities exist for various types of gazes, this poster indexes heteronormativity by underscoring a heterosexual male gaze through players and participants.

Data from games were kept by South Asian American volunteers, Max, Rathi, Charles, and Jim. Simulcast from the courts, there is spatio-temporal compression by which South Asian American practices in Indo-Pak Basketball is available without territorial limitations. Structuring the games with 16 minute halves differed from other collegiate style contests but the use of technology and officials maintained an aura of athletic professionalism and importance. Although players like Maggette and Michael Jordan symbolized urban cool, the spectacle at these social venues were the South Asian American bodies. African Americans played the role of officials but could not participate as players (this is further examined in chapter five).

Other kinds of spectacles nurture such contrapuntal practices of belonging. At Shree Shakti Mandir in Atlanta, built in 1993, Suleiman—captain of Atlanta Franchise and Pakistani Muslim American—organized an Indo-Pak Basketball tournament on June 23rd, 2007. Suleiman and others reconstructed this physical space by moving away all chairs, tables, and other items from the wide, cold, concrete floors of the Cultural Center. They then placed mobile basketball goals to create courts for play. A Hindu Indian space transformed, by the participants, into a South Asian American space. However, they did nothing to alter some of the cultural sensibilities already implicated in this physical space. Foremost, the Indian and US flags existed alongside each other. Instead of manufacturing dissonance and contradiction, multiple national flags nuance citizenship, belonging, and locality.
In addition to visual cues, audio cues transform these physical sites into one laden with South Asian American sensibilities. At the 2006 and 2008 Chicago IPN, players also linguistically mingle in complicated ways to incorporate South Asian linguistic terms in Punjabi, Urdu, and Gujarati alongside English vernacular. Linguistic switches from English to South Asian languages address the heterogeneity of this. The pleasures of “trash-talking” point to linguistic devices used to assert masculinity (Nylund 2006) and one up other men (see Kelley 1997). In this case, “The semantics of ‘street’ discourse involves the performance of a masculine identity.” (Kim 2005) Most of the trash talking and teasing comes from players in the stands who tease players on the court. For some who cannot compete effectively through physical skills on the basketball court, like one particular Toronto Khalsa player, teasing and trash talking allow for him to insert himself into this community while asserting his manhood.

Alongside these linguistic uses, hip hop vibrated through the massive gym at the 2006 and 2008 Chicago IPN. During intervals between games and during timeouts, young South Asian American men turned up the volume on the sound system and infiltrated the sound waves with hip hop. As bass tones and deep drums penetrated through concrete, metal, wood, and glass, heads bobbed up and down in synchronicity with the rhythm while cheers erupted when certain songs came through the speakers. Most of the hip hop songs consisted of mainstream dance music, party scene, and dance club hits. The links between basketball and hip hop culture are re-established in Indo-Pak Basketball. In Atlanta, several participants arrived to games blasting hip hop on their car speakers.

In addition to audio cues, smell and taste played a critical role in identity formation. Chicago IPN organizers offered a cornucopia of food that facilitates analogies between food,
ethnic-ness, and American-ness. Food provides valuable information on the production of cultural identity (Khandelwal 2002; Ray 2004). At the 2006 Chicago IPN, the organizers utilized the food stand within the premises of the gym to serve certain foods while using tables by the entrance to serve another category of food—these separate physical locations within the gym did not create dissonance but rather convergence of cultural products in affirming identities that multiply located (Shukla 1995). At the food stand, participants in the Indo-Pak Basketball tournament (fans, players, organizers, random spectators) could pick-up pizza, hot dogs, various sodas and Gatorade. At lunch time, tournament organizers brought in food that Max and Charles labeled as “desi” food. A local Chicago South Asian restaurant brought South Asian delicacies like naan, biriyani, chicken tikka, tandoori chicken, and saag paneer. Distinctive smells of the South Asian dishes mingled with the smell of pizza and hot dogs alongside the crisp artificial fruit smell of Gatorade. Such items and smells located multiply converged at this juncture to labor in South Asian American-ness or “desi-ness.” Therefore, pleasures arise from combining items seen as culturally divergent; they disrupt simple dichotomous identifications as South-Asian-only or American-only. Cultural practices resist singular location while underscoring cultures as always dynamic and situated in interconnected spaces (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). Identity, thus, comes about through these practices as multi-local, multi-vocal, and rich in contradictions.15

**Pleasures, Affects, and Desires of Place-Making**

Pleasures of claiming physical spaces of gyms as South Asian American places also exist alongside other pleasures. Mustafa alluded to one such pleasure in the opening quote for this
chapter. The pleasures of competition amongst fellow South Asian American men served as distinct from other basketball spaces within and without the South Asian American community. The court “is a player’s realm, where their physical superiority is publicly on display, a spectacle for consumption, desire, and vituperation.” *(Farred 2007: 7)* Max alluded to how the lack of competition and fair-play within the Malayalee sporting spaces informed his creation of Indo-Pak Baketball. Indo-Pak Basketball creates a peer group facilitated by homosocial pleasures of intense competition, on display consisted of one’s competitiveness and the potential to affirm it through wins or risk losing it through losses *(Wenner 1998)*.

As South Asian American religious-cultural institutions encouraged basketball, the pleasures of basketball competition arose in other venues. Harpreet mentioned, “College intramural sports were also a great experience in building rapport with people from all majors and other [I]ndians participating. It was the first time I ran into other [I]ndians playing sports as good or better than my skills. It was nice to experience that.” K-Rock, collegiate basketball player and Indo-Pak player, explained: “Our college was mostly Caucasian, so we don’t know that many Indian people…I was really surprised by how good the players were, growing up you’re always like ‘I’m the best Indian player around,’ that’s what everybody thinks cause you don’t know there are good Indian players around.” For Harpreet and K-Rock, such experiences allowed them to move beyond sentiments of exceptionality and normalize a sporting masculinity in their own community. Sanjay stated with joy, “The players get better every year.” Basketball skills, as a result, carried symbolic weight, it was “cultural/symbolic capital” *(Bourdieu 1984)*. Intense competition among South Asian American peers not only produced pleasures of trying to claim accolades as premier “desi” players but reconfigured racializing discourses that over-emphasized the “model minority” personhood.
Pleasure from such competitive forums exists alongside social interactions that make Indo-Pak Basketball, as an US phenomenon, different from quotidian activities in South Asia. Therefore, “popular culture creates its own micro-politics of organization, location, identity, and affiliation.” (Lipsitz 1994: 147) K-Rock alludes to this context specificity of South Asian American life when he states that in Indo-Pak Basketball circuits “Nobody really wears their religion on their sleeves, you know you are respected.” Other players voice these same pleasures that foreground an imagination of South Asian America different from other cultural spaces. Conflicts present in South Asia along various ethnic, religious, and national lines do not translate into the social relations in Indo-Pak Basketball. As a social space, Indo-Pak Basketball, although limiting with the term “Indo-Pak,” is at once multi-ethnic and multi-religious while affirming sameness as South Asian Americans. Some teams, as described in chapter two, are themselves composed of multi-ethnic and multi-religious individuals while the entirety of the social space of Indo-Pak Basketball incorporates South Asian Americans with various histories and trajectories.

Men, however, do not exist in this space alone. Although the basketball court centers homosocial relations, women occupy various positions within Indo-Pak Basketball. Indo-Pak players mentioned pleasures of socializing with co-ethnic peers (men and women) that normally proved unattainable during the daily routines of work and family. At tournaments hosted at the mandir in Atlanta, young South Asian American women worked the scoreboards and managed the clock. At the Chicago IPN, wives and partners of Chicago Untouchables helped in the running of the tournament—Chicago IPN held a special place in their lives. Rathi stated, “I am one of the Directors of the Chicago IPNBT, and my husband is the founder of the IPBNT.” She added,
I actually met so many South Asians outside of my community. I think that I was very limited to my community growing up because I always followed my parents around, and being a girl, my freedom was very limited. I started attending the tournament around the same time I went away to college, so both experiences actually introduced me to many new South Asians…I first heard about and began attending the Chicago tournament in the summer of 1994 just as a social event and a place to meet and mingle with new friends. Since 1998, I have been helping to organize and run the tourney.

Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments allowed socialities that were synonymous with Rathi’s ideas of South Asian American-ness that, in addition, celebrated South Asian American masculinity.

**Ballin’ and Stylin’: Donning Manhood**

As the physical layout of the gym, its respective social relations, and its manufactured sensibilities point to identity formation and acts of place-making, personal garb also prove instrumental in parlaying in ideas of cultural identity—cultural citizenship. Clothing is an empty cultural form that has its meanings inscribed by and upon its participants (Carter 2008). Like Turner’s (1969) examination of rituals with the Ndembu, Indo-Pak Basketball structures it own rituals through use of time and space—clothes mark gender, space, and time. Players marked the basketball court as distinct from their everyday lives as well as marking it as a distinct space from other physical structures in the gym. Clothing worn elsewhere, upon entering and spectating at the gym, is taken off to mark the cultural specificity of the basketball court. Entering the court for games, Atlanta Rat Pack, Atlanta Outkasts, and most other teams in this ethnographic project, would take out basketball shoes they stacked in their bags and put them on. Imran, of Atlanta Rat Pack, like other players, would arrive with athletic flip-flops. He then put on his athletic jersey and took of the flip-flops; the last step consisted of putting on his sneakers.
These actions marked time, space, and identity. Imran marked it as the time to put aside his comic side and bring a seriousness, competitiveness to the basketball space; he was now marking this as a basketball space and signified himself as a basketball player.

In this instance, clothing then becomes a venue to construct images of a personal and collective “self” (Berdahl 1999; Hendrickson 1995; Maram 2006). Despite the particular gendered and sexualized nature in which cultural Blackness is initiated with basketball style, cultural Blackness, through clothing style, still provides a window to expressing South Asian American masculinity. Such clothing style puts in position identities of masculinity in relation to other South Asian American men and other racialized masculinities. Having asked a female spectator her thoughts on basketball and South Asian American masculinity, her response foreground the key role of clothing, race, and masculinity in identity formation:

If I were to date a white guy for example, and taking Sean, a big Indian, he wears a lot of athletic wear, what you would see a black guy wear for example. If I were dating a white guy who’s wearing the same thing I wouldn’t like that because it seems inauthentic, I really don’t like it when white guys think they are another ethnicity, especially black. For some reason, when Sean wears or any other person in Indo-Pak league wears athletic stuff…it seems authentic to me, it doesn’t really bother me…these males adopted an urban identity, a black identity, and its working for them. I think they make it their own…it doesn’t seem inauthentic.

This statement elaborates upon how articulations of “authenticity” and “urban identity” depend on race and gender. South Asian American masculinity is in relation to white and black masculinities. Yet, one must not dismiss the racial logic from this spectator’s comment. Although not conflating African Americans and South Asian Americans, her statement does open up possibilities to think about complicated processes of racial identification. As racially non white, South Asian Americans utilize urban stylistics and Black aesthetics to simultaneously
explode the category of “American” and “South Asian.” It works against foregrounding practices of whiteness as a venue to claiming “American-ness”—cultural citizenship represents the means to claiming citizenship and this takes place through consumptive practices of Black aesthetics. This venue, in the spectator’s view, is open for people of color as an alternate mode of belonging.

Such elements of Black aesthetics and hip hop style required certain wardrobe elements. For example, shorts, considered as “basketball shorts”, consisted of smooth, shiny nylon material. A proportional relationship of length of shorts and “cool-ness” took shape. Indo-Pak Basketball players wore shorts that went past their knees. Shorts that went above the knee were seen by players as non athletic and outside a normative sporting masculinity. For example, at the April 4th Asian Tournament at Georgia Tech, Mohammed, Atlanta Rat Pack member, pulled his shorts up to his chest during the warm-up session. It consisted of a moment of jest that assured him his “coolness” and sporting masculinity as a result of this contradictory performance. With a few exceptions, the majority of players at the tournament wore Nike basketball shorts alongside Nike shoes. Mohammed utilized this performance as distance from the un-cool subject, it consisted of hyperbole as other players laughed with Mohammed. As soon as the whistle blew for the official game to start, Mohammed pulled his shorts back down to his waist and his shorts hung below his knee.

At Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments, although shorts worn by players on the same team contained similar colors, players had similar color shorts but not exact styles. In contrast, almost all teams purchased matching jersey tops. The color schemes have social significance (Turner 1969) and, in this case, index convergences of “cool” and “masculinity” as ethnic American
subjects. The present climate of cool in collegiate basketball and professional basketball consists of sleeveless jerseys in a nylon material with the same texture as the nylon shorts; Mustafa made the 2008 Atlanta Outkasts jerseys confirm with current basketball style that cost considerably more than the 1994 mesh-material jersey.

Jerseys synchronize ideas of cool and masculinity with local sporting cultures. Sport spectacles produces sporting cultures key to identity formation (Carter 2006). Certain Indo-Pak Basketball teams had expensive jerseys that were in equivalence with their respective city’s sporting culture. Toronto Khalsa had full matching jersey tops and shorts with orange and white in lines with NBA’s Toronto Raptors. Likewise, Chicago Rejectz wore a replica NBA Chicago Bulls jersey worn by Michael Jordan during his early years in the NBA. Dallas Bandits matched their colors with NBA’s Dallas Mavericks. Maryland Five Pillars stayed true to their experience with basketball by structuring their team logo in lines with the early NBA’s Washington Bullets instead of the present reincarnation—the Washington Wizards. 

In addition to jerseys, shoes represented emblems of cool and masculinity. Mustafa wore a pair of Nike’s Lebron James Basketball shoes (retails for over $120) on occasion and a pair of Air Jordan shoes (this particular one retails for $100) on other occasions. “The sneaker symbolizes the ingenious manner in which black cultural nuances of cool, hip, and chic have influenced the broader American cultural landscape.” (Dyson 1993: 72) As key members of Atlanta Rat Pack, Mohammed, Imran, and Amir coordinated outfits to wear black Nike shorts with black Nike’s Kobe Bryant basketball shoes. Donning on the basketball shoe signaled the moment where it was time to switch over to a serious “game-time” mode.
Inking Toughness: Tattoos and South Asian American Sensibilities

In addition to clothing as ways to reference one’s basketball style and sporting masculinity, tattoos consisted of another means to stress masculinity, ethnicity, and urban style. Whereas tattoos carry connotations of working-class politics and subversion of dominant society’s codes of expression (DeMello 2000; Pitts 2003; Sanders and Vail 2008; Steward 1990), tattoos also signify individually-owned pleasures and desires mapped onto bodies (Kelley 1997). Within the Indo-Pak Basketball community, tattoos serve to index South Asian America at the nexus of inter-South Asian American ethnic politics.

South Asian American men in Indo-Pak Basketball circuits utilize tattoos to embody their “American-ness” alongside marking difference within the category of South Asian America. Krush, member of Maryland Five Pillars, wore sleeveless jerseys during the 2006 and 2008 Chicago IPN. On one of his shoulders, a tattoo of Hindu elephant god—Ganesha—stood while the other shoulder had the contours of the Hindu religious iconography of the “Om.” At one of the 2008 pick-up games with Christian, Muslim, and Hindu South Asian Americans, Krush wore a sleeveless shirt to showcase the new tattoo on his other shoulder. With pride and joy, Krush showed his Hanuman21 tattoo that plays into a politics of South Asian American difference. A careful examination of the hyper-muscular characterization given to Hanuman highlights how Krush envisions his own masculinity and religious identity.

At the 2006 and 2008 Chicago National Indo-Pak Basketball tournament a Sikh player showcased the Sikh religious iconography tattooed on his arm through a sleeveless shirt. Similarly, Sanjeet, Atlanta’s Air Punjab/Hit Squad, also had the same tattoo on his right shoulder. The religious iconography, also represented at the Roswell Gurdwara near Atlanta, is
inked upon the shoulder of Sanjeet. Sanjeet’s tattoo consisted of two swords bending to touch whereby making a circle with a third sword in the center with flames in the background—this tattoo symbolized the “Khalsa warrior” thereby associating Sikh men with a toughness, aggressiveness, and hyper-masculinity. It is simultaneously a source of pride of ethnic, masculine difference within South Asian America and a means to claim belonging within the US cultural fabric.22

“Beat that shit!”: Movements, Gestures, and Acts of Basketball Masculinity

South Asian American masculinity does not alone emerge through clothing and tattoos.23 Gender, masculinity in this case, is not an expression of what one is but rather what one does; it is a series of bodily gestures, movements, and styles (Butler 1993, 1990). Accordingly, “Gender is not fixed in advance of social interaction, but is constructed in interaction.” (Connell, 1995: 35) Indo-Pak Basketball players emphasized various movements, acts, and gestures—creative dribbling, speed, strength, dunking the basketball, blocking the ball, trash talking, and various other movements—with and against their opponents as markers of masculinity.24 These movements take place in private spaces of Indo-Pak Basketball that induces a new South Asian American public.

This South Asian American basketball public provides a space whereby to articulate publicly identities through performance.25 Sporting events and rituals, like Indo-Pak Basketball, put on public display the body (Brownell 1995; MacAlloon 1984). Most mainstream articulations of South Asian American identity are located in racialized discourses of the model minority and the terrorist (Puar and Rai 2002), Bollywood (Gopinath 2006), and “exotic”
difference (Rudrappa 2004). Aesthetics and body movements examined in Indo-Pak Basketball spaces articulate a different identity in opposition to Multiculturalist spaces.26

These movements ranged across the wide spectrum of basketball activities including vernacular used by Mustafa—“beat that shit!”—to describe the act of blocking a basketball shot. In the case of Indo-Pak Basketball players, masculinity is seen as embodied in hypersexual, physically powerful bodies that speak in street/urban vernacular (see Kim 2005). Mustafa took opportunities to brag and take pleasure when he would come from behind an opponent and “beat his shit!” Particularly, Mustafa points to the act of forcefully blocking the shot—this involves a level of timing and physical ability. Such a movement showcases physical ability, timing, and is an act of domination. Similar to Maram’s work (2006) on Filipino boxers in early 1900s LA, “athletes legitimized a space for self-definition by defying the dominant society’s assumptions about race and ability.” (11) Forceful blocking of a basketball not only subverted racialized discourses of “race” and “ability” but affirmed through physicality pleasures of achieving a American sporting masculinity through such physical feats. Such aggressiveness and physicality, tolerated within the confines of basketball, receive valences of the “dangerous Muslim” in other public spaces.

As blocking stood as one such act of basketball masculinity by garnering cheers from spectators, various other elements of “tough” and “aggressive” masculinity arose through other basketball expressive gestures. Manhood in this respect is mimetic of professional basketball players: “based on imitation and incorporation of other men.” (Kim 2005: 120) One such practice involved creatively reconfiguring a lay-up: a lay-up consists of taking a shot after two steps to the basket. Certain players would embody this “toughness” and basketball masculinity
through various lay-up techniques that required strength and physical explosiveness off the basketball court floor.

Lay-up lines not only helped all players on the team get into the groove of game-time physical movement, it also helped restore muscle memory so that players would feel confident with their shots. The style of lay-up itself carried connotations of masculinity and cool. Mohammed, Khan, Amir, Usman, and Rama (a Hindu American student from the University of Georgia) would elevate after receiving the pass to shoot the ball at the pinnacle of their vertical jump. At the moment of release of ball, these young men would slap the backboard with their palm with which they shot the ball—this sound would resonate through the gym. Through their bodies, the performance embodies a tough sporting masculinity.

Other players showcased their basketball gifts by the creative manipulations of their bodies and vertical jump for lay-ups. Acts of creativity and appropriation are seen as masculine (Kim 2005; Trujillo 2000). Mustafa, Imran, and Ali as well as Abhijeet and Navreet of Air Punjab would reconfigure the basics of a simple lay-up into a creative enterprise. Instead of conducting a simple lay-up, they brought the ball on one side of the basket and floated across the goal to make the shot on the other side with one’s other hand. It also included swinging the ball in a windmill-like fashion in the air and then laying it into the basketball. Players would challenge each other with greater difficulty of movements and basketball skills.

One particular type of lay-up produced the greatest amount of appreciation and response from other players and spectators alike. One could hear the “ooo,” “wow,” and “damn!” coming from players on the court, players on the bench, and spectators upon seeing a dunk by a South Asian. Riad, Arab American, asked, “Why do desis get so worked up and excited about
dunking?” Acts such as dunking, especially and specifically, deconstruct racializing discourses; such vertical jumps and the forceful throwing down of the ball through the hoop displays power and athletic ability not associated with South Asian Americans. “Dunking on another player is very impressive because it is a notable physical feat, jumping and slamming the ball through a basket that is ten feet high, and it is also a show of dominance over someone.” (Brooks 2009: 31) Movements can simultaneously be profound and enjoyable (Taylor 1998); the men in my study enjoyed showing this athletic feat—they took pleasure in the responses they got from other participants. It presents a means to take pleasure in the “astonishing” while making it also seem “normal” (George 1992: 75)—it attempts to stabilize the South Asian American male subject within the normative parameters of US citizenship. Dunking stood as a template of one kind of American masculinity (George 1992).

Whereas dunking and blocking required connotations of “toughness,” creative dribbling and difficult passing of the basketball conjured up praise for stylistics congruent with basketball. This expressive improvisation and innovation provides forms of liberation from established structures of respectability within basketball (George 1992: xvi). “There are clear limits, however, for the improvisation of these movements, as they must be recognizable within the limits of a system of movements.” (Brown 2006: 164) Players receive attention from other players and spectators alike with dribbling skills (bouncing of the ball) that keep the opposing defender off-balance. Such movements recognized by participants and spectators as spectacular consisted of moves such as the “cross-over” (which involves crossing the ball across your body while bouncing it to change directions quickly), spinning around opponents while dribbling, and tight control of the ball while dribbling. Organic nature of creativity as a response to the movement of opponents produced the most praise from players and fans; it is the unexpected
creativity that produces a great amount of praise. It fostered a “call-and-response” (Malone 1996) social interaction where such spectacular actions initiated responses from those in the gallery; it engaged the player with the audience.\textsuperscript{29}

Particular moves with the basketball that confused the opponent by forcing them to go one way thus losing their balance while the dribbler went in opposite direction was known as “breaking someone’s ankle.” “Breaking the ankle” in this instance refers to such a shift in direction that the opponent loses balances and falls—this resembles someone that “broke their ankle.” All elements of dribbling style involve control of the ball, control of one’s body, and control of other players on the court—a figure of controlled masculinity. This stands in opposition to the positioning of the Muslim body in mainstream discourse where their bodies are produced and uncontrolled, hyper-masculine, and antithetical to order (Alexander 2004; Ahmad 2002; Burdsey 2007; Puar 2007).

Another element of style consisted of manner in which a ball was passed to a teammate for an easy score. In similar fashion to dribbling, players cherished those types of passes that involved intricate body movement, difficulty of execution, control of ball, and court vision.\textsuperscript{30} Accordingly, Ali maintained control of the ball and passes in ways that it always brought about applause from those watching him play. In particular, those passes through tight spaces with little margin for error excited spectators. Another component of difficult and spectacular passes like this by Ali, as well as K-Rock, involved a style known as “no-look passes.” A “no-look pass” constitutes a type of passing where the person passing the ball makes an accurate pass to a teammate while not looking at them. Skill of this sort requires convincing one’s opponent with one’s body language that something else is planned with the ball other than a pass to a particular
area—thus known as a “no-look pass.” Some of Ali’s passes were so fast and hard that Sanjeet missed several of the passes; Sanjeet blamed missing Ali’s passes as products of being a “father” and “having a little girl.” This showed the variants of skill that featured Ali as a premier player in the league while associating diminished skill—those of Sanjeet—with femininity. However, Sanjeet and other men could utilize the models of toughness and aggressiveness in other leisure spaces to stake claim to masculinity. The major Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments contain within the tournament format opportunities and vistas for partying at the local dance club scene. Some tournaments host after-parties. Thus, how these young men translate masculinity through these leisure spaces is of concern in the next section.

**Out of Bounds: Other Leisure Spaces and the Interconnectedness of Masculinity**

As ideas of domination, aggressiveness, strength, and creativity took shape in suturing a South Asian American sporting masculinity, these affects of masculinity travel to other social venues—these are always interconnected spaces. In particular, I examine how dance clubs, private parties, and exotic dancing clubs (strip clubs) constitute arenas where South Asian American men assure themselves of a heterosexual masculinity through elements of toughness and aggression. Unlike some of the events sponsored by South Asian American community leaders at cultural centers and mosques—such as the 3-on-3 Pannum tournament, there does not exist the same kind of surveillance in these South Asian American publics. Similar to the Indo-Pak Basketball scene mentioned above, dance clubs are peer-led social interactions where the peer group determines the structure and affect of relations. Furthermore, the desires and
sexuality denied in everyday lives are performed and legitimized in leisure spaces (Maram 2006: 109).

Masculinity, as this chapter will show, is affirmed through heterosexual feminine desire (Bolin and Granskog 2003: 20), notions of “toughness” and “aggressiveness”, and certain discourses (Nylund 2006). Whereas the previous chapter emphasized the arena of basketball as a key site in manufacturing masculinity, this chapter spills over and “out of bounds” of the basketball court to make sense of how masculine identity formation takes place through social intimacies and pleasures in other social venues—culture takes shape through interconnected spaces (Gupta and Ferguson 1997).

In the dance party scene, conceptions of “self” emerge for South Asian American males in relation to other South Asian American males, in relation to other racialized men, and in relation to other women. Masculinity, as a gendered identity, always exists with sexuality (Manalansan 2001) and does so in a much more explicit manner in the club scene. Similar to sporting venues where homosocial encounters inform ideas and practices of masculinity, homosocial intimacies in the dance party scene affirm gender and sexual identity in settings with women and other men. It is the homosocial bonding in these heterosexual contexts that address epistemologies and ontologies of masculinity.

Versions, performances, and values of masculinity vary according to the contexts, they are re-inscribed and contested. What is considered as an appropriate masculinity, embedded within varying regimes of respectability, differ based on spatio-temporal location; different locations produce varying types of bodily comportment. Thus, masculinity does not have the “same meanings and valences” in communities of color as they do in white communities; their
valences within communities of color diverge (Manalansan 2001: 228). This chapter examines how South Asian Americans recognize and configure masculinities, through politics of respectability (politics of Muslim respectability), in dance club scenes in opposition to community events with the presence of South Asian elders and regimes of surveillance.

Notions of masculinity are multi-vocal and multi-local; studying various leisure spaces through a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1999) best suited an urban ethnography that is not fixed on physical spaces but rather the movement of people across spaces. Accordingly, leisure spaces other than that of basketball present venues to examine acts, signs, gestures, and discourses of South Asian American masculinity that are in conversation with a sporting masculinity. The vignette below consists of one of those nights at a dance club in Atlanta with Mustafa and Mahmoud (both Muslim members of Atlanta Outkasts).

February 7th, 2009:

Mustafa invited me to a night out with he and Mahmoud; Mustafa requested that I dress up and not wear casual gear. Shortly thereafter, Mustafa arrived in his black SUV with bright rims and tinted windows. I noticed that Mustafa had shaven his face except for a little bit under his bottom lip (known as a jazz tee), wore dress pants with brown leather shoes, had a beige button down shirt, and had applied gel to his hair to create a shine. Mustafa informed me that we were going to a strip club; we stopped by an ATM to get money. This ATM was located on Buford Highway—Buford Highway is discursively produced as an “ethnic area” as a result of the numerous Latina/o and Asian stores. Across from the ATM in a strip mall housing a Korean restaurant and Mexican restaurant was “Shooter’s Alley” strip club. Upon entrance, hip hop music vibrated and resonated through this environment. Mustafa had a drink with hard liquor while I ordered a beer. With his head bent while sipping on his drink, Mustafa’s eyes covered the span of Shooter’s Alley leaving no female body unnoticed. During the course of our hour long stay at Shooter’s Alley, Mustafa took out money and got a dance from African American female strippers that he took a fancy to that night. After talking to one of the dancers, Mustafa looked at me and stated with pride, “Back in the day, me, Qamar [Mustafa’s older brother], and Ehsanul [Qamar’s friend] would have taken these girls home with us.”

We left Shooter’s Alley and joined Mahmoud for a night out in one of the dance club scenes in Midtown Atlanta. As we drove to Midtown Atlanta, conversations took place about women in their lives and the high powered, luxury sport cars that their friends own. Mahmoud’s Hindu friends and two of their female partners, whom Mahmoud had gone to high school with, came along but drove separately.
The place of choice was one of the trendy dance clubs with a large multi-racial clientele— it was called “Opera.” With an expensive entrance fee paid by Mahmoud which allowed us to claim “VIP” status, the young South Asian American men perused through the two-tier club that held multiple dancing rooms. Unlike Shooter’s Alley, with a considerable Latino and African American customer base, a large South Asian American, Asian American, white, and African American contingent existed at Opera.

Club Opera had several different levels and dance rooms. The main floor blasted hip hop music and catered to a multi-racial crowd. There was a salsa room with a greater ratio of Latinas/Latinos. Mahmoud and Mustafa went to the salsa room, navigated through each corner of the club, and the center of the hip hop area. Having purchased VIP passes, Mahmoud, Mahmoud’s friends, Mustafa, and I also walked through the VIP rooms on the second level of the hip hop area. All these spaces presented opportunities to gaze and mark female subjects. Each step consisted of not only looking in front but also looking around at the young women at this club. These young men also huddled together in the salsa room as well as in the hip hop room, there was very little dancing by themselves while Latinas danced by themselves or with other Latinas. These young men danced only when an opportunity to dance with a woman presented itself. When this opportunity presented itself, they danced the “bump and grind.” The sexual energy reached high levels in this club. Mahmoud had his eyes set on Latinas and white women. I asked if they were interested in any of the South Asian American women, Mahmoud replied with disinterest, “They are too easy.” The conversations centered on women in their physical vicinity. Mahmoud struggled to approach women and told Mustafa and I, “I got no game. But, if I can break the ice then I’ll fuck them!” Soon after these comments, the lights in the club were turned on signaling last call for drinks and also signaling that Opera will be shutting down soon. This beaconed Mahmoud and his friends to make one last effort to get “digits” (cell phone numbers) and see if they could pave the way for physical intimacy with young women. Mahmoud started talking and dancing with two Latinas and got their number. As we exited Opera, Mahmoud called the two young women and asked them to meet up for a late night snack at a 24 hour diner.

The vignette above demonstrates that leisure spaces are key sites for sexual pleasures and desires; spaces of leisure are also accompanied by opportunities for vice (Mumford 2001). In her in-depth analysis of the South Asian American (desi) party scene, Maira (2002: 58-59) states, “Desi youth turn to hip-hop because it is key to marking their belonging in the multi-ethnic urban landscape of New York City.” This racialized space allows for communities of color to interact while performing various expressions of masculinity and femininity not readily available in other South Asian American public spaces.
In the case of this night out with Mahmoud and Mustafa, both these South Asian American males underscored a sexual aggressiveness and a sense of competition through a heterosexual matrix. The ability to court women and produce opportunities for sexual intercourse received praise; securing women signifies masculinity as an act of domination. Such acts demand a different comportment and cultural style. Instead of wearing jerseys and sport gear, Mustafa and Mahmoud donned on clothing that was business-casual but urban cool. When going out with Mustafa to dance clubs, Mustafa would shave his face carefully to make sure to leave behind a little bit of hair underneath his lower lip as a sign of cool. Mustafa meticulously combed his hair and applied the right amount of hair products—gel—to create a sheen. These acts constituted attempts to parlay a heterosexual masculinity by which to then court women. Accordingly, by aspiring to a heterosexual masculinity, practices of masculinity in leisure spaces re-affirm the gender binary and “its perpetuation of heteronormativity of leisure” (Johnson and Kivel 2007: 94). Although possibilities exist for contesting gender and sexual orders, heteronormativity is not contested but rather solidified through the expression of binaries of male/female as well as straight/queer.35

One such act of masculinity that received praise from other males was the act of aggressively seeking to interact with women (see May 2007).36 In particular, the act of coveting women with the possibility of sexual relations and sexual intercourse initiated praise from fellow South Asian American males. With the case of Mustafa at Shooter’s Alley, his self-proclaimed masculinity about “having game” and “taking girls back home” consisted of a key ingredient of transitioning from boyhood to manhood. In the vignette above, this consisted of a heterosexual male gaze alongside the ability to act upon that gaze to trigger certain pleasures. The pleasures erupted through conversations and flirtations with women. Mustafa’s claims to “taking girls
back home” in the past alongside present-day actions of flirting embodied a masculinity fixed on “aggression” and “conquest” of women as simultaneously sexual subjects and sexual objects.

“Having game” consisted of courage, defined as “appropriately masculine,” to have close physical quarters with women with the aim of initiating conversations and finalizing with sexual intercourse; masculinity takes shape as acts of heterosexual pleasure (Pascoe 2006: 10). By entering into the physical spaces of women in the nearby vicinity, Mustafa’s aggressiveness along with creativity with which to initiate conversations symbolized the masculine. Masculinity, in this respect, materializes through “forceful and space-occupying ways” (Wenner 1998: 310) by which Mustafa approaches females.

For Mahmoud, who claims to have “no game”, recuperating his masculinity requires affirmation of his heterosexuality. Unable to forcefully occupy physical and conversational spaces, Mahmoud redeems his masculinity by his claims to sexual conquest: “if I can break the ice then I’ll fuck them!” At this juncture, with his masculinity questioned, Mahmoud solidifies his manhood by making visible his heterosexual desires through one element of domination of women. Male and female are constituted by Mahmoud and Mustafa as neatly ordered and natural categories. These bodies are then normalized in only heterosexual encounters.

Similar constructions of cultural identities along the axes of gender and sexuality took place on March 23rd, 2009 when Mustafa went to a popular dance club with Ahmed. Ahmed, who was 20 years old, could enter this club which required patrons are 18 years old or older.37 Mustafa and Ahmed had mentioned earlier that week that attractive young women patronized this club; they took particular joy in marking female bodies they considered attractive with an emphasis on Latinas at Club Pure.38 Ahmed told Mustafa, “There are fine honies here.” Ahmed
then asked me whether this was the right place to go dancing, he said this while making sure that we acknowledged his choice of this dance space as a place for “fine honies.”³⁹ In this instance, the use of the term “fine honies” represents urban vernacular with ideas of “cool” that also constructs a South Asian American urban community through communicative competence.⁴⁰

Mustafa also affirmed such sensibilities when describing Ahmed’s birthday party a month later. Specifically, a young man, in the US cultural context, is seen as coming to age upon turning 21 years old. With relation to institutional policies, this is also when a young man can legally drink alcohol. It often involves binge drinking as signs of masculinity in some contexts (see Wenner 1998). In relation to Ahmed’s 21⁰ birthday party, Mustafa expressed discontent with the early attendees being mostly young men. Mustafa then emphasized pleasure with the arrival of South Asian American young women that they could “freak.” “Freak” and “freakin” relate to dance forms incorporating the dance style “bump and grind”. This requires the frontal region of the male dancer makes contact with the buttocks or frontal region of the female dancer. This act then becomes the “bump” and “grind.” Even on February 7th, Mustafa did not turn his back to face the female dancers; the female dancers turned their backs and position their buttocks against his crotch. The movements constituted acts of penetration, even with clothes, that signified Mustafa as masculine and the South Asian American women as feminine.⁴¹ Connell (1995: 55) argues “These social relations of gender are both realized and symbolized in the bodily performances…The performance is symbolic and kinetic, social and bodily, at one and the same time, and these aspects depend on each other.” Whereas the interplay and physicality between bodies in Indo-Pak Basketball require certain boundaries and limitations on movement deemed as appropriate, the thrusting of hips is read masculine in this instance while it is read as outside the parameters of normality in basketball—whereas it produces the males as masculine in
the dance club scene, it produces the same males as feminine and abject if such actions took place on the basketball court through homosocial interactions. Bodily performances symbolize the act of sexual penetration with the man as the penetrator and holding the power to penetrate. Reversing such bodily positions and comportment produces the male as feminine—as the subject/object of penetration.

“Making it Rain!” Engendering a Concoction between Masculinity and Heterosexuality

Acts such as “bumping” and “grinding” also take place in other highly sexualized spaces but with an inversion of who gets to “bump” and “grind.” But, the male does not become, at any point, the penetrated. Rather, as this section will illustrate, the male client at strip clubs still penetrates but as an immobile phallic subject. At strip clubs, the exotic dancers provide the dancing while the male participants in my study play roles different from those enacted at dance clubs. Mustafa’s preference for Shooter’s Alley on February 7th, 2009 and “Follies” strip club on April 16th, 2009 pointed to gendered, sexualized pleasures. With Ali’s Christian wedding services taking place on the 18th of April, 2009, Mustafa and Abdul wanted to take Ali out drinking and possibly to a strip show. These are conventional practices in the US and serve as a “rite of passage” from bachelorhood to the subject position of “husband.” Ali contested this practice, found it incongruent to how he configured his own masculinity, and chose not to attend the strip club; Mustafa and Abdul chose to continue with the night while including me and the future brother-in-law, Bill.
Upon entrance into “Follies,” Mustafa picked a table and proceeded to find African American women to dance for us. Abdul quickly disappeared into a dark corner and paid a white exotic dancer dance for him. While Abdul folded deeply into his chair in a dark, private corner, the dancer penetrated his space by pushing her buttocks—while wearing a g-string panty—onto his crotch. She started to move her hips from side to side to resemble the “grind” while matching it up with forceful pushes—“bump”—of her buttocks deeper into Abdul’s genital area. Each sets of movements soon resulted with an item of clothing coming off her white body. Abdul’s gaze was constrained to this dancer and did not look anywhere else.

During our stay at Follies, another group of 5 to 6 South Asian American men came; these young men knew Mustafa and greeted him. When inquiring into his acquaintance with these Bangladeshi American Muslims, Mustafa responded that he met them during his younger years in the party/dance club scene in Atlanta. As the Bangladeshi American young men moved through the club, they took out clusters of dollar bills and threw it in the air above the exotic dancers’ heads. They also held their hands over the heads of the dancers and let the money trickle down their heads onto their bodies. During this act, they stated with authority, “Makin’ it rain!” The flow of paper currency looked like leaves falling but it also resembled, in their words, “rain.” The paper currency also acted as currency for their manhood by acts of domination by “making it rain”—these young men could purchase sexual pleasures and control the movement of females in this space.

Mustafa, Abdul, and other patrons could experience such sexual teasing and partake in this pleasure but this pleasure could not be translated into physical contact initiated by patrons—this could result in the security at the club physically assaulting them and tossing them from the
premises of the institution. As such, “restrain” constituted another element of projecting a desired masculinity. Whereas the garnering of sexual encounters and aggressiveness on the dance club/party scene received positive affirmation, a particular restraint highlighted “appropriate masculinity”. When the African American dancer giving Mustafa a “lap dance” left, Mustafa looked over at me with a big smile and said, “Her hands were down my pants…she…grabbed my dick.” He commented that he asked her to stop, Mustafa reasoned, “don’t touch my dick unless I am going to fuck you.” The key here is that Mustafa did not ejaculate; by simultaneously enduring the pleasures of such sexual flirtation without losing control of his penis, he told of his strength.

Roughing it Up: Physical Aggression and “Manning Up” in the Party Scene

Such heterosexual discourses and claims to masculinity also reside alongside other acts of hyper-masculinity. As working out in gyms become one means to transition from boyhood to manhood in US society and shed “effeminate and possibly homosexual identities” (Pascoe 2006: 3), manifesting that muscularity and materializing it through fist-a-cuffs symbolized one such embodiment of masculinity. Embodying hyper-masculinity is also a clear distinction from the feminine for such participants (Brown 2006).

Most intricate accounts of fighting came from conversations with Abdul, Mustafa, and Sanjeet. On the trip to the dance clubs on April 16th, 2008, before heading to “Follies,” Ali, Mustafa, Abdul, Bill, and I journeyed together in one SUV. At this time, Abdul and Ali reminisced about their younger days when they orchestrated pranks such as throwing a stink
bomb in the middle of a South Asian festival and the various fights they had. Burns (1980: 280) notes, “When young males are together, their conversations are filled with references to street fighting, acting ‘tough,’ and ‘being rowdy.’” Abdul narrated about one particular instance where a South Asian American young man had postured up to him; Abdul stated bluntly, “I punched that nigga in the face!” This act of male-on-male violence initiated more laughter from Ali, Mustafa, and Abdul.

Likewise, at the April 4th, 2009 Asian Tournament at Georgia Tech, Mustafa and Sanjeet shared their histories and badges of masculine honor during a lunch break at McDonalds. The topic of “clubbing” came out without much prodding; it was a topic they found so natural a topic of conversation, it was convention. Mustafa and Sanjeet told in detail of various fights and compared notes on the times they had been in jail. Each used their personal stories as vestiges of masculinity; fighting is seen as emblems of toughness and masculine character (Wenner 1998: 304). The physicality represents a source of pleasure that comes along with the act of dominating other men. Sanjeet joked about his trips to jail as a result of fighting, “Been to jail 12 times, my dad knows people. I never had to serve a sentence.”

On June 4th, 2009, I had a one-on-one interview with Sanjeet; he expanded in greater detail about his engagement in the dance party scene and the fights that emerged in those leisure spaces. Sanjeet alluded to the South Asian American parties (also referred to as “desi” parties by Sanjeet) in college as the site where he encountered members of TIB (The Islamic Brotherhood, a local South Asian gang) and got involved with fights. These fights were contests over masculinities in positions of dominance and subjugation within South Asian America—Muslim masculinities and Sikh masculinities. Sanjeet talked about these encounters,
I would take on these desi guys since I was much bigger. They would start shit and I couldn’t walk away, my pride and ego got in the way…these fights kept going since TIB couldn’t beat me and my friends. It got us respect with desi crews; it would always get a reward, desi girls wanted to hook up with us. People started to recognize us at desi events. Being Sikh, I didn’t back down. You can’t back down because you are going against your culture and religion…I had to stop going to clubs because of all the fights…it got worse as guns were brought out.

Violence of this sort brought “rewards” sexually with women while simultaneously bringing “respect” with other South Asian American men. Fighting constituted one means to define masculinity in relation to other men while simultaneously contesting the image of the “model minority” as passive, non physical masculinities. Although it treads upon the figure of the recalcitrant “terrorist,” these physical contests are not about inter-national masculinities but struggles as ethnic-American, intra-national masculinities.

Such hyper-masculinity, through sexual aggression and physical fights, exists in relation to the aggressive, creative, tough masculinity in basketball venues. However, various problematic arise through the conjuring of these masculine performances. The physicality and heteronormativity makes it also out of bounds for various “Others.” Although using gender and sexuality to contest racializing discourses, the normativities put into place by recuperating a tough sporting masculinity exclude women and queer subjects. As such, gendered and sexualized expressions of self are also political expressions. Therefore, the next chapter delves into how such resistance to US racializing discourses of South Asian-ness puts into place other acts of domination—it is an examination of how South Asian American masculinities inhabit positions of hegemony and marginality concurrently.
Chapter 4

Foul Play: The Inclusions and Exclusions through Leisure

“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.” –Audre Lorde

The quote from Audre Lorde, although widely and frequently used, embodies the complexity of cultural products (such as language) and cultural processes embedded in fields of power. I use Lorde’s mention of “game” doubly to highlight the limitations of counter-hegemonic projects through the vehicle of sport and to showcase how using gender and sexuality uncritically prove problematic. As agents, these young men also have the means by which to open up social venues or reinforce other inequalities. “For fundamental change to take place, it must take place both in the conception and in the pattern of relations.” (Wynter 1992: 67)

Accordingly, subversive acts within the social circles of South Asian American basketball and leisure, when done through problematic initiations of gender, pose new sets of hierarchies and power relations thereby disabling opportunities to bring about “genuine change” in the “conception” and “pattern” of relations.

Power shapes how discourses of gender are embodied (Brownell 1995); there are “gender politics” within masculinity and with relation to femininity (Connell 1995; Eng 2001; Kimmell 2005). As Butler (1993: 8) puts it, “the construction of gender operates through exclusionary means, such that the human is not only produced over and against the inhuman, but through a set of foreclosures, radical erasures that are, strictly speaking, refused the possibility of cultural articulation.” Activation of South Asian American masculinity and new parameters of South
Asian American-ness leads to various other erasures, silences, and foreclosures. Constant repudiation as a fundamental item of identity formation not only creates the abject subject at its own constitution but manufactures silences that exclude women and queer subjects. As racializing discourses in the US posit South Asians as feminine, queer foreign subjects, the utilization of gender and sexuality to accentuate a normative South Asian American masculinity, paradoxically, as forms of resistance and counter-point tends to marginalize women and queer subjects. \(^2\)

CLR James (2003) examination of cricket in the West Indies make clear such contradictory processes that highlight the dialectical relationship of power within the game. James (2003: xii) argues, “He [players] never forgets that this liberation exists only within the boundaries of the game, and then only for the gamers...Sport is no sanctuary from the real world because sport is part of the real world, and the liberation and the oppression are inextricably bound.” The spectacle of the South Asian American body, in leisure spaces, is one intricately tied to the operation of power in the world outside of leisure. As a result, the spectacles and cultural practices within South Asian American leisure spaces have the power to reinforce, reverse, and intensify social relations within South Asian America. \(^3\)

To situate Indo-Pak players as marginal masculinities in relation to white masculinities does disservice to depicting the operation of power and pleasure. I argue that Indo-Pak players contest normative hegemonic white masculinities as ethnic American subjects while asserting hegemonic positioning in the production of a heterosexist, patriarchal cultural boundaries of South Asian American-ness. As citizenship in the US utilizes operations of gender and sexuality whereby positing a history of excluding women and queer subjects, the forms of
resistance do not dismantle this operation of power. It reconfigures the operation of “race” in US citizenship through the insertion of the masculine South Asian subject, but sporting masculinities serve to conjure up new workings of power that displace other communities along the axis of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Carrington (2002: 29) explains that politics of heteronormative masculinity and its aesthetics fail to show other concerns and abandons other kinds of politics. This chapter examines the specificity of the “Other” kinds of politics within the category of South Asian America. In particular, I contend that cultural practices in South Asian American leisure publics utilize gender and sexuality to abandon Feminist and Queer politics—specifically, I look at how women and queer subjects (gay men in particular) are excluded from South Asian American-ness through recuperating South Asian American masculinity. Therefore, South Asian American men in my study occupy precarious situations in which they inhabit contradictory positions of dominance and marginality simultaneously—it is a dialectical relation of power.

**South Asian American Femininity: Who can Play?**

South Asian American-ness as a category depends on certain notions of masculinity and the relation of these masculinities to South Asian American femininity. How the young men in my study understand masculinity speaks to how they envision and imagine South Asian American femininity. Ali, in chapter 2, mentioned his disdain for women in basketball and this matched up with the little media coverage of South Asian American women in basketball. Madeleine’s experience with basketball addresses social constructions of an “appropriate” South Asian American femininity and its limited mobility—these experiences showcase the gendered, sexualized nature of participation.
Madeleine Venkatesh discussed her own anxiety when asking her parents whether she could play basketball; she intimated that her older brother had no such worries. Juxtaposing herself ambivalence with asking her parents to play basketball while her older brother had no such problems, Madeleine highlighted the gendered, sexualized nature of women in basketball as she pointed to the prevalence of South Asian American women in tennis which is gendered and sexualized differently as feminine. Associations with tennis produce women as appropriate femininities even with the presence of lesbian and queer tennis players. The gendering of tennis as appropriately feminine co-exists with heterosexuality. Movements, discourses, and physicality of basketball engender associations with toughness seen as antithesis to South Asian femininity.

When prodded further about what kinds of stereotypes limit South Asian American women from participating in basketball, Madeleine used the case of her own mother. She stated, “My mom was very subservient to my dad. My mom’s life revolved around her three kids, no hobbies of her own. Her own desires took back seat to family.” This South Asian femininity was in counterpoint to what Madeleine stated as the necessary traits to succeed in sport. Success in basketball, according to Madeleine, needs a different comportment and disposition. Thus, she says, “In order to participate [in basketball] you need to be assertive…cannot be meek or weak…need to take control…not sure how much of it is culture and how much is my own family.” Although women challenge these roles and ideas of passive domesticity every day, social convention indexes women as weak and passive while men are marked as aggressive (May 2007). With examples of her mom as symbolic of South Asian femininity that limits participation of South Asian American women in sport, Madeleine uses this positioning to locate herself differently within South Asian America as a result of her basketball interests and her own
dispositions. Madeleine informed me that as a result of not associating with many Indians while growing up and her interest in basketball, “I was not a ‘good Indian,’ I was not a typical Indian.” Distancing herself from the “good Indian” projects South Asian femininity as a domestic heterosexual figure with impossibilities for any other articulation or desire. Such ideological productions position South Asian American masculine practices as convention while disallowing women the same claims to belonging as heterosexual men. The discourse of the “good Indian” uses the abject subject of the “Lesbian/Butch” for its own coherence but also makes it a disciplining regime. While Madeleine disrupts such categories of a domestic, passive, and traditional femininity, these disciplining regimes take shape in various ways in the lives of my male South Asian American subjects.

This same ideological production of a “good Indian” arose in the lives of some South Asian American men in my study through their relationships to their female spouses and their expectations of South Asian American femininity. The spouses did not have the same opportunities to claim American-ness and South Asian American modernity through various US popular cultural realms—such as sport. South Asian American men, as a result of the racial formation “Muslim looking”, face certain elements of immobility in public spaces but act as the gatekeepers of South Asian American-ness. They hold hegemonic positions within the category of South Asian America and thus determine the cultural characteristics of masculinity and femininity. As Abraham (2000: 21) elucidates, “Rather than a self-defined image, a woman is subject to patriarchal perception of woman as defined in religious and cultural rhetoric.”

Mustafa’s and Abdul’s family structures allow a better understanding of how men establish the boundaries of South Asian American femininity. For Mustafa, conflicts with his
wife had escalated to a point that Mustafa’s wife, Fatima, wanted Mustafa to reduce leisure time and increase time spent with family. In particular, according to Mustafa, Fatima demanded he eliminate his basketball time. Such an assertion by Fatima and Mustafa’s refusal eventually resulted in Fatima moving back to her parental household. Fatima asserted her agency and moved out.

Mustafa described this turn of events as problematic positioned Fatima as not the same young woman he wed through an arranged marriage. He did not reflect on his own over-emphasis on sport, Mustafa failed to think critically of his own subject position and his expressions of hyper-masculinity. With antipathy in his voice, Mustafa said, “She is too Americanized now! She doesn’t even clean the house well, I have to follow up and clean…she is not teaching the Quran to our kids.” Statements like this refuse a possibility for Fatima to have a South Asian American sensibility. Rather, Mustafa’s emphasis on the problematic of her “Americanization” dislocates South Asian American femininity from the US—he establishes a polarity between South Asian-ness and American-ness whereby “good” South Asian American feminine subjects would not be able to claim both. As a result, South Asian American masculinity resides and moves through various cultural spaces—such ideas of modernity are inscribed on male bodies. Femininity, cultural authenticity, and South Asia are conflated whereas South Asian American masculinity is not foreclosed with American-ness. Thus, Mustafa’s agency in leisure spaces and claiming such elements of American-ness do not exist for Fatima; she can move through these social spaces only on Mustafa’s terms. Fatima resisted and left for her parental household.
For example, Jahm (an Ismaeli Indian Muslim American male whom I had met before at the gym and introduced to Mustafa) stressed his hyper-masculinity, aggression, and physical toughness which he utilized as categories of difference with South Asian American femininity. While working out at the gym on March 23rd, 2009, I ran into Jahm with his pectoral muscles and bicep muscles bulging out of his tight white “wife-beater” tank top. I use the term “wife-beater” intentionally not only as a means to stay true to my subjects voices and how they label these garments, but also to add poetic irony to the conversation that followed.

Jahm showcased his masculinity by bragging about women whom he “fucked”, whom he described by interchanging terms “whores” and “hoes”. When asked if this was in the past or in the present since he recently got married, Jahm stressed a difference between sexual relations with his wife in opposition to sexual relations with other females. This difference manifested itself in Jahm’s choice of words but also his body language. Jahm elaborated with softness in his voice about his wife, “You got to be gentle with the wife and respect her.” His voice rose, “You can’t do the things with your wife that you do with hoes…You need hoes to do other things you need.” Jahm’s muscles tensed up with his one hand cusped in like he was choking someone while the other hand positioned near his crotch mimics the act of slapping someone’s buttocks. Jahm went on to state, “The hoes at the club, I can choke the bitch when I fuck her! I can fuck her up the ass and cum in her ass…I can’t do this with the wife.” Such a discourse maintains a particular purity and social construction of the wife as a particular South Asian American femininity while tolerating the hyper-masculinity and aggressiveness of South Asian American men. Abraham (2000: 90) elaborates, “Masculinity in mainstream South Asian culture is defined to a large degree in terms of men’s power, visibility, and ability to control women’s morality and sexuality.”

Therefore, the maintenance of a “traditional” South Asian Muslim femininity is
embodied through discursive disciplinary regimes that associate female subjects with passivity, domesticity, purity, an object but not subject of sexual desire, and heteronormativity. Gopinath (1995) and Dudrah (2002) argue that heterosexual and patriarchal structures construct cultural boundaries whereby reducing women to reproducers of community in the roles of mothers, wives, and daughters. These roles essentialize South Asian American women while silencing their own desires. However, South Asian American women find their own ways for expression and ownership of these leisure spaces.

**South Asian Women in Indo-Pak Basketball: Expressions of Agency in Fields of Power**

To conclude no agentive powers for South Asian American women in Indo-Pak Basketball and other social contexts would be an erroneous assertion that only reifies constructions of femininity as passive. Although male participants might limit the articulations of South Asian American femininity and create cultural boundaries that limit movement across various spaces, South Asian American women are agents. South Asian American women claim leisure spaces differently.

Accordingly, a different set of pleasures arise through peer-group involvement that differs from social events organized by their community elders. I detail below how South Asian American Muslim men and women comported themselves, in the midst of community elders, at the numerous events structured into Ali’s wedding in April, 2009 that contrasted from the expressions and agency in leisure spaces. Several Pakistani Muslim cultural events preceded Ali’s wedding that Ali’s parents considered mandatory. These events consisted of the “dolki” ceremony, the “mehndi” ceremony, the traditional Muslim marriage ceremony—called the
“nika”—with an Imam, and the “shaadi” (which is a celebration of the marriage with a reception for the larger South Asian American Muslim community). This also culminated in a Christian wedding, which Ali considered the “American part” while the Muslim ceremonies were considered the “Pakistani part.” Interactions between South Asian American males and females proved different in these ritualistic events in the presence of Muslim elders.

What constituted acts of masculinity and femininity at the party scene and dance clubs differed from the intimacies, movements, and spatial manifestations of gender produced at Ali’s wedding rituals. The aggressiveness, use of vernacular English, and invasion of women’s personal spaces did not take place at the wedding ceremonies—these acts were not valued at the Muslim ceremonial events. South Asian American women and South Asian American men did not express their identities in the same manner. Unlike the dance club scene where various avatars of South Asian American femininity took place through body-fitting dresses, halter tops, make-up, and clothes signaling cosmopolitanism, at the community events the women wore traditional Salwar Kameez—a loose fitting garment.

At the “dolki” ceremony, Ali requested his close male friends accompany him for this mostly female-led event. Various cultural and religious practices took place with Ali’s mother taking charge of ceremonies with Ali’s fiancée—Susan. These men stayed in the front room of the house while in the main entertainment room and dining room, South Asian American women, from teens to 70s, welcomed Susan into their cultural community through rituals. The men acted as voyeurs and did not physically intrude upon this space. These masculine identities were always informed by the particular social context, thus there were “situational identities.”
In addition to refraining from invading feminine spaces, the linguistic switches also proved context-based. Where a prevalence of English vernacular and body language that asserted toughness occurred in spaces of leisure, linguistic switches took place between English and Urdu. These linguistic switches underscored politics of Muslim respectability whereby South Asian American young people transformed their body comportment and discourse in order to perform codes of respectability—they personified the traits of what they deemed a respectable, appropriate Muslim. Upon meeting an elder in the community, the voices of participants lowered along with their heads while saying, “Salaam alaikum, uncle” or “Salaam Alaikum, aunty.” The conversations would continue in Urdu with Muslim elders (women or men) leading the conversation; these young South Asian Americans waited patiently for their turn to respond. Unlike the exclusively English conversations and cigarette smoking with peers in the club scene, they did not smoke in the presence of elders even if one of the elders smoked a cigarette and used Urdu much more so than in conversations with their peers. Certain cultural dispositions and cultural symbols are activated to solidify their Muslim identities; the moral order consisted of values such a family first, deference to authority, and conservative gender and sexual norms (Dhingra 2007: 58).

The presence of community elders changed dramatically the spatial relationships between young Muslim men and young Muslim women. At the “dolki,” “mehndi,” and “shaadi,” the community of South Asian American Muslims attended the event with Imams and community leaders in attendance. Accordingly, dancing classic Bollywood favorites took place through spatio-temporal segregation. Ali’s mother demarcated such spatio-temporal dimensions and dictated when and who could dance. Upon Ali’s mother’s instance, women danced together while providing a welcoming space for Susan into Muslim womanhood through homosocial,
gender-segregated dances. Segregated dancing spaces were gendered masculine and feminine by the particular bodies in that space; temporally, men and women could never concurrently occupy the same space although they were always already in that space.

Similarly, during the Christian ceremony—discursively produced by Ali as the “American” ceremony in contrast to the Muslim ceremonies that he determined as “Pakistani”—the dancing space also consisted of a place for bodily discipline and for surveillance. At the “dolki” and “nika” some men wore salwar kameez, all the women remained in traditional South Asian garb such as saris and salwar kameez. At the “shaadi” and the “American” ceremony, almost all the men wore suits and tuxedos while the majority of women wore traditional South Asian dress. Women are asked to dress to authenticate their “South Asian-ness” while men wore Western garb to solidify their ethnic identity.

During the course of the wedding reception, very few South Asian Americans—men or women—took to the dance floor. As I danced continuously at the reception, only Mustafa would join me at moments but he would do so alone. Sharif, a queer Muslim, would dance freely through this space. However, Mustafa’s wife, Fatima, danced a few dances with Mustafa and seemed reluctant to enter that physical space unlike her spectactularity at the “shaadi.” As a co-ed venue, the body dispositions maintained various levels of gender segregation. Mustafa’s teammate’s Ahmed, Sultan, and Malik did not enter the dance floor but rather hovered around it while sipping on their drinks or finding dark corners to have a smoke. The only South Asian American women to take the floor consisted of Ali’s mother who danced with Susan and other white women. As the night went along and people filed out, the dance floor emptied. All “uncles” and “aunties” left the immediate area around the dance floor. At this
moment, Abdul’s wife requested Abdul to dance with her as Salim’s (original member of Atlanta Outkasts) wife made the same request of Salim. Affects of desire, passion, and pleasure surface in new ways after the departure of community elders—South Asian American femininity until then is held constant with tradition and purity while South Asian American masculinity is seen as ordered and in control.¹⁵

A few days later, I asked Mustafa why the young South Asian American contingent at the “Pakistani” and “American” ceremonies did not have comingling of young women and men. I had seen and heard of active participation of South Asian American women and men at the dance clubs, I wondered why it did not take place at this event. Mustafa laughed at what he considered to be such a banal question. He stated, “They won’t dance with uncles and aunties there, my parents were there and they want to be respectful.” Practicing a respectable Muslim masculinity proved pertinent for the young South Asian American Muslims at the wedding ceremonies, the same aspect of a proper Muslim South Asian American femininity were performed during these ritualistic events. Dance clubs and peer desi parties allowed for second generation young people to create spaces to escape the social control of community elders while performing their own sets of racialized, gendered, and sexualized affects.¹⁶ Therefore, the comportment and discourse differed at these events so as to assert gendered identities that were still heterosexual but with different sets of practices, acts, and gestures.

Through youth culture, peer-group activities, and agency in leisure spaces, these young people express desires, affects, and sense of self different from other social venues. In leisure spaces, both the dance club scene and Indo-Pak Basketball, South Asian American women and men partake in expressions of sexuality and pleasures—flirting, forming heterosexual
relationships, and possibilities for sexual intercourse—in explicit ways not viable in other cultural settings. Their pleasures and desires contrasted with ideological formations and interpellations of South Asian American women elsewhere.

At basketball venues, in the process of interviewing and observing desi women, scopophillic pleasures take place as forms of agency that center South Asian American male sporting bodies. At the Indo-Pak Basketball tournament at Georgia State University, young men of Atlanta Franchise teamed with members of Atlanta Rat Pack and Atlanta Outkasts to play Air Punjab in the finals. Several young Punjabi American women, ages 18 till 22, watched from the bleachers. When asking Guneet, age 18, her reasons for attending this tournament, she said, “to support my brother and see hot Punjabi boys.” Such a statement rings in synchrony with Maram’s (2006) analysis of the Taxi dance halls: “In many ways, the public culture in the dance halls legitimized the creation of desire and sensuality denied them in their everyday lives.” (109) South Asian American cultural centers and religious institutions do not open up venues for co-ed mingling and explicit heterosexual desires as do basketball tournaments organized by one’s peer-group. Yet, I am critical of the agency and open-ness fostered through heterosexual pleasure. “New female audiences of male sports and vice versa tend to draw upon and foster very conventional views of sexuality, bodily shape, and comportment.” (Brown 2006: 179) Although embodying femininities and masculinities denied in other venues, a foreclosure takes place through heteronormativity that makes homosexuality and queer subject positions antithetical to this normative space.

In addition, players do not constitute the only agents solidifying practices as masculine, rather those in the stands also have agency in ascribing masculinity to certain movements,
gestures, and acts (Gramuck 2001; Hobsbawn 1990). These female spectators are not separated from the spectacle of the South Asian American body but rather prove integral in its coherence. Women participate in many ways in Indo-Pak Basketball thereby expressing varying levels of agency.

At the 2006 Chicago IPN, tournament organizers invited the local South Asian community, as well as sponsors, to come watch the last day of play and take part in the festivities. One sponsor, an older South Asian American man with two teenage daughters, dressed in Chicago Bulls basketball jerseys and athletic warm-up pants, came to the last day of festivities. Unlike other women at the venue, after completion of all festivities, they disrupted the male dominated physical space of the basketball court by shooting a few shots. Their appearance on these courts took place as players and organizers dispersed from this space—it was an act of re-imagination and agency.¹⁸

Likewise, Chicago IPN organizer Rathi complicates South Asian American femininities in Indo-Pak Basketball. After the second day—July 18th, 2008—of Chicago IPN games, Max, Rathi, some organizers, and two other Chicago Untouchables team members along with their spouses met at Max and Rathi’s home. Two things then transpired:

1. They watched the videotaped games to review strengths and weaknesses of their team.

2. They discussed the plans for tomorrow’s games and playoff rounds.

Although the physical space of the basketball court in Indo-Pak Basketball presents opportunities for men to take pleasures in expressive practices, the family room in Rathi’s and Max’s home dictated otherwise. Utilizing basketball language, Rathi and the spouses provided insightful
commentary on the blunders, mistakes, and shortcomings of the team. Players, organizers, and spouses engaged equivalently. While basketball courts were male homosocial spaces, interactions otherwise with women were ones in which women like Rathí were seen as legitimate conveyers of basketball knowledge. Just the content and language of the conversations indicate the active role these women took in watching the games, directly players from the stands, and staking a claim in this space.

Furthermore, on game day, players, volunteers, and all those with questions approached Rathí. Rathí played a critical role in organizing Chicago IPN. She moved between the different courts; talked with scorekeepers and officials; made sure all players she met were enjoying their time, ordered food for officials, volunteers, and players; answered questions concerning the tournament; took on the role as key contact person; and provided a grand reservoir of Indo-Pak Basketball facts. Simply put, Rathí managed nearly all things taking place at Chicago IPN. While taking care of her work life, Rathí managed to take care of her two children and managed all the activities mentioned above. From 6am till 12am, Rathí, Max, and other organizers put work into ensuring the success of Chicago IPN.

The high visibility of Rathí at Chicago IPN, however, does not necessarily translate into changing the operation of gendering discourses. In the midst of conversations about the games and planning for playoff rounds, Max expressed his sadness concerning the organizational structure of Chicago IPN. His concerns also implicated me as I sought him first before I tried to interview Rathí. Unlike Rathí, Max’s visibility and disproportional attention on him took away from the feats of others like Rathí. Max fretted over how his iconicity within Indo-Pak Basketball made invisible the labor of important others. A women’s labor does not carry the
same value as that of men (Kingfisher 2002). Tariq (played with a Chicago Indo-Pak team) referenced Max as the “godfather” of Indo-Pak Basketball but did not mention Rathi in the social matrix of Indo-Pak Basketball. Max stated this adamantly, “I am getting too much credit when Rathi and Jake are the main organizers [of Chicago IPN].” By calling him “godfather”, the role of various others—women and gay men—undergoes elision.

**Materializing Homophobia: The Practices and Discourses of Exclusion**

As heteronormativity of leisure excludes women, these practices assure South Asian American masculinity at the expense of conservative views of queer subjects. Queerness is subjected to a regime of surveillance and exclusion. In chapter two, the interview with Sharif made real how spatializing gender also involves spatializing sexuality at the masjids in Atlanta. Here I explore the specificity of actions and discourses by informants that materialize such queer exclusions.

Sharif’s (self-identifies as a gay Muslim) pointed to the homophobia prevalent in mainstream leisure spaces—such as that of sport—that required gay-only sporting venues as safe spaces. During the course of this ethnographic project (that consisted of tournaments, leagues, interviews, and social outings at dance clubs, and strip clubs), various practices and discourses highlighted the heterosexism and homophobia prevalent in this community of South Asian American men that makes “gay” and “Muslim” (as well as South Asian American-ness) diametrically opposed. Such practices serve to exclude queer subjects, such as Sharif, through constant reiteration and persistence—it is only through such persistence that power surfaces as a
means of exclusion (Butler 1993: 9). The vignettes below consist of various ethnographic moments that highlight the normalization of heterosexuality through a manufactured distance from queerness.

**February 7th, 2009 Post Dance Club Night Activities:**

Sitting at the Waffle House, a late night eatery serving party-goers at all times of the night, Mustafa, Mahmoud, and I discussed the night’s activities and our lives. Only a few whites came to this particular Waffle House this night as all other customers were African American. Shortly after ordering our meals, a group of 4 or 5 African American men came in with their boisterous laughs and sat in a corner booth to the left-corner of us. Their body language, their outfits, and their discourses accentuated a queer subject position. One young man, in particular, had tight jeans with a vest-top tied around his ribs to expose his naval; he had not shirt underneath this top and accentuated his bare chest and small frame. Mahmoud grew a little uneasy and agitated by the sight of the African American queers. Mahmoud's expression changed and morphed into distaste. He motioned to Mustafa requesting he look at this group in the corner of Waffle House. Once Mustafa took notice and smiled at Mahmoud, the linguistic medium switched. Mahmoud no longer spoke in English but switched over to Urdu to talk about the African American queers who he marked as “Kallu chakkas” and “gandus.” Unfamiliar with these Urdu terms, I asked them the meaning of the terms. They said “chakka” and “gandu” were terms for gay people, they then proceeded to giggle—these labels contained negative connotations. Mahmoud switched back to English to inquire “why are they gay?” This question was directed at me and Mahmoud prefaced it by saying that I, as a scholar-in-training, should have some answers. It still was a rhetorical strategy and Mahmoud answered the question with a forceful question, “Why if god made legs to walk then would gays fight god and nature?” With heightened disgust in his voice, Mahmoud demanded with a strong tone, “Why can’t they just man up?!” Rhetoric such as this produced laughter and brought pleasures of amusement for Mustafa and Mahmoud while underscoring their unease with the presence of queers in the tight quarters of Waffle House. Finally, Mahmoud turned to Mustafa and told him not to ever become a “gandu” and stressed that he would not let Mustafa be gay. This served as a point of their intimate social bonding as friends. It was said in a manner in which there was no real doubt about Mustafa’s heterosexuality but rather served to affirm it. Mahmoud warned Mustafa, “I would have to beat you up if you were a chakka.”

This vignette contains the latter part of the night out with Mahmoud and Mustafa that I discussed in chapter three. As these young men use the club scene to play out “aggressiveness” and “toughness” through sexual encounters with women, club scenes present ripe vistas for examining how heteronormativity takes shape through the production of the queer subject. Heterosexuality and its respective practices by themselves do not solidify heteronormative frameworks; rather, the incorporation of the queer subject proves pivotal to manufacturing a
heterosexual masculinity. By defining masculinity through parameters of a heterosexual masculinity, Mahmoud re-inscribes a gender order by placing queers as feminine with their inability to “man up.” Simultaneously, he makes manhood a naturalized condition dictated by “god” but relegates “gay” to choice and inability to live up to the masculine condition. In the process, queerness is repeated and reiterated frequently as a means to affirm heterosexual masculinity through a strategy of relational opposition.

Using Urdu terms to illustrate his contempt, Mahmoud reinserts homophobic attitudes through South Asian American sensibilities that incorporate South Asian languages to describe a South Asian American landscape. These Urdu terms reinforce communicative competence between Mustafa and Mahmoud while reinforcing heterosexist contours of South Asian American community formation. Such diatribes by Mahmoud exemplify how South Asian American spaces can be violent, marginalizing, and uncomfortable terrain for South Asian American queers.

In addition to such linguistic devices that exclude queer communities, these cultural practices also act as disciplining regimes. In the vignette above, ideas of “manning up” not only served to mark queer subjects as inadequately masculine but also acts as disciplining discourses for young South Asian American men on the basketball circuits. It especially proved the case with Khan, the tall, lanky basketball novice on Atlanta Rat Pack. During the first summer session of league games in 2009, Khan played minimal minutes. When Khan did get to play, his body language and facial expressions did not relay the same confidence on the court as other players. When in the game, Khan could not hold on to the basketball tightly with physicality after rebounding missed shots. Khan also missed passes thrown his way. Mohammed, Imran,
Amir, and Mustafa would offer advice to Khan during games and in-between timeouts. Mohammed and Mustafa both re-enacted the act of catching a ball with two hands. These two young men did this while demonstrating the muscle movement involved in this action through which their own respective muscles bulged. Mohammed and Mustafa, at different points, requested of young Khan to “man up!” and be a “beast!” Discourses of this sort act as disciplining regimes that demand a masculinity and muscularity through “manning up,” they require distance from femininity and a queer masculine subject. Subjectivity is a medium through which power entrenches itself (Rose 1989: 142) and by which these men re-enforce particular versions of masculinity as archetypes and as the only possibility.

Khan’s inability to “man up” at times does not completely emasculate, opportunities are presented for Khan’s recuperation into an idealized version of masculinity. Queerness, in other instances, becomes a strategy to reinvigorate a normative heterosexual masculinity. The queer subject position, when taken up by these heterosexual men, serves to materialize their heterosexual masculinity at the very moment in which they perform queerness. The vignette below is one such example of this strategy of heterosexual masculinity.

March 22nd, 2009, Asian Ballers League:

Flying back from Philadelphia, I took my car from the Atlanta airport and drove with a sense of purpose to get to the Asian Ballers league game between Atlanta Rat Pack and Teddy Bears (an Asian American team). I got to the parking lot and noticed several teams conversing in the parking lot instead of playing indoors. Rat Pack players told me that gym official had not shown up to open the doors to the gym. At this point, Mohammed and Imran inquired about my whereabouts. I told them that I just flew in from Philadelphia where I had attended my post-engagement ceremonies. They congratulated me. With a smile on his face, Mohammed said, “Damn it, I can’t go out with Stan now.” It was not an act of sincerity but rather one of comedy, there were homophobic undertones here. I told him, “Hey, I was waiting for you to make a move.” I also was guilty of playing along instead of making this a teachable moment. Mustafa then interjected by saying, “I was trying to get with him too.” This only produced more laughs; such claims were hyperbole and stood to confirm Mustafa’s heterosexuality while making homosexuality the abjection.
Instances of male bonding and homosocial spaces, as that in the vignette above, demonstrate one such strategy by which masculinity emerges in relation to queer masculinities. Interpellation of abject gay status takes place and stands uncritically in opposition to a heterosexual subject (Butler 1990). By utilizing homoerotic phrases and assuming a gay subject position in passing, these participants do not allow for a South Asian American masculinity to also encapsulate queer-ness. Rather, they use queer-ness as a strategy by which to solidify their heterosexuality while maintaining the status quo through heterosexist practices.

Such imitation and usurpation of a gay subject position does not invite queer politics, but, rather, establishes distance from striving for such politics. Imitation of this sort is laced with mockery that initiating a jovial atmosphere that creates social bonds between these young men. Their social intimacy makes such actions those of jest instead of actual desires whereby alienating those who identify as queer or gay. Such homoeroticism does not translate into queer masculinity but rather makes concrete heterosexual masculinity. Furthermore, making the choice to take on such gay identities in jest shows how these male subjects understand gay lifestyles. While adding elements of femininity to such an identity, they also make it seem as a choice—something done out of free will, this rhetoric makes it seem that queerness can also be undone. Thus, through the imitation of gay-ness as choice, the young men also affirm themselves as those who follow the script of nature and partake in heterosexual masculinity instead of choosing to be gay. Heterosexual masculinity is made into a naturalized practice that can undo and shed queer choices.

As South Asian American masculinity stands in relation to queerness, it also stands in relation to other men. Thus, South Asian American masculinity and Muslim masculinity, as will
be shown in the vignette below, gain coherence through the intersection of queer masculinities and other racialized masculinities.

*June 20*th*, 2009 Chattanooga Asian Basketball tournament:*

*With time to spare before the next game, Imran, Amir, and Mohammed walked over to Mohammed’s car to get lunch. Mustafa, Riad, Kdol, and I walked over to Mustafa’s car parked on another side of the parking lot. With a limp caused by a severe ankle sprain in the first game of the tournament, Mustafa squinted his eyes to deflect the blazing sun and manage the pain. He had spent the majority of the tournament on the sidelines as a coach. Mustafa now walked in pain to drive us so we could get lunch before our next game. Getting into his car with his behind in first to ease the pain on his ankle, he sat on his car seat with his legs on the hot pavement outside. As Imran, Amir, and Mohammed walked over their cars on the other side of the parking lot, Mustafa shouted in jest, “Imran, come over here, I got a lap for you to sit on!” Imran laughed off the comment and did not want to respond to his elder Muslim friend. However, Mustafa then shouted while pointing at Riad, “do you want to sit on Riad’s lap?” Riad then requested, “I got a lap for you.” This produced laughs from the young men in the parking lot. Mohammed drove off with Imran and Amir to a different place for lunch. Meanwhile, Mustafa, Kdol, Riad, and I had to find an ATM to draw some money to pay Imran for the tournament cost.*

*As we drove around Chattanooga searching for an ATM, we only found broken ATM machines that would not dispense any cash. Mustafa drove on and stopped at a red traffic light. To his left, the speakers blared from a car’s sound system. Mustafa looked to his left and then motioned to Riad to look. The object of their fancy was a bright metallic-neon-green car with over-sized, massive, shiny rims. Mustafa drove a blood red sport sedan with fancy rims and tinted windows but this car caught his surprise. In a joking manner based his tone of voice, Mustafa asked Riad, “Want those rims on your car?” To this Riad replied, “I am not a faggot!” Mustafa corrected him and said, “You are not a nigger!” This brought about laughs from Mustafa and Riad.*

*This vignette above demonstrates the discursive productions of masculinity and the subsequent regimes of heterosexual, masculine discipline. In the case above, the complexity of interactions and discourses between these men illustrate how heterosexuality is shored up in relation to and in opposition to the abject gay subject and a racialized African American subject. Like the high school boys in Pascoe’s (2007: 157) work, a claim to masculinity was cemented by the repudiation of “femininity, weakness, and most importantly, the specter of the ‘fag.’”*
conversation between Riad and Mustafa simultaneously use homoerotic suggestions and homoerotic posturing to confirm heterosexual subjectivity through homophobic positioning.

The invitation to sit on their laps is not an innocent invitation for Imran but rather one that implicates power in masculinity construction. As these invitations act not as ambiguous homoerotic actions but rather as assurances of a hyper-masculinity for Mustafa and Riad while Imran’s masculinity is put in doubt. Since masculinity is multiply-inflected by other social spaces, I examine this invitation with regard to the bodily comportments and meanings at the strip club scene. Riad and Mustafa occupy positions of the heterosexual male subject as the ones, like the clients at the strip club, who have other persons sitting on their lap. Their body positions suggest that Riad and Mustafa penetrate while Imran becomes the penetrated. As the penetrated, Imran occupy positions of queer masculinity and femininity simultaneously. These jokes are also power moves that position heterosexual masculinity in positions of dominance.

The homophobic positioning that requires a distance from an imagined gay subject also adds value to other racial, gendered, and sexualized subjects. Although riding in Mustafa’s car that has fancy rims, dark tint on the windows, and personal car muffler that amplifies the engine decibels, Riad indexes the driver in the other car with bigger rims as outside an appropriate heterosexual masculinity. Riad’s act of distance and anger illustrate how their respective heterosexuality gets cemented by signaling homosexuality—as a negative connotation and marginal subject—to a lower class Black aesthetic and a working class African American. These casual conversations secure an identity as Muslims—that naturalizes and conflates heterosexuality and masculinity—by utilizing gender, race, and sexuality in creating a social distance from working class African Americans. To conclude, challenging one aspect of
heterosexual domination, as Brown (2006: 180) argues, is not enough to challenge this masculine domination, the entire symbolic order and symbolic domination must be challenged. The gender and sexual binaries, as well as the symbolic system that justifies them, must all be challenged.

Such challenges to the gender and sexual order must also include a challenge to the racial order. Configuring South Asian American masculinity through gender and sexual practices simultaneously implicates race—these are intersectional categories. African Americans play a key role in how South Asian American masculinity is conjured through not only the representation of the Black athlete but also how terms like “kallu” embody racialized discourses through South Asian American sensibilities. Therefore, the next chapter examines in depth the role of “race” in South Asian history in North America, the consumptive practices of “blackness”, aspiration to particular racial identities, how South Asian American difference manifests itself through racial categories, and how racialized linguistic codes surface through South Asian languages.
Chapter 5

Rebounding Through Black and White: Making Sense of the Racial Logic and Interrogating South Asian American-ness

Having played in a mixed-racial basketball league with Ali, we talked after the game had finished. In the sweltering Atlanta summer heat, night time provided relief; we stood by Ali’s SUV and discussed a variety of topics. When we got to the topic of his brothers, Ali made a clear distinction through racial categories that I had not expected. Ali considered his brothers, Mustafa and Qamar, as “Black” and proclaimed himself as “White.”

The comment by Ali demonstrates the complex nature of racial categories of “White” and “Black” in addition to the activation of such categories by South Asian Americans. Ali’s use of “Black” and “White” position these categories in a social nexus of that implicates gender, class, immigration wave, and sexuality. Although South Asian American, Ali’s use of these racial categories address the importance of “race” in identity formation and the ubiquitous nature of “Black” and “White” in identity formation for ethnic American participants (Cole 1996; Dyreson 1998; Yu 2000). In this chapter, I look at how South Asian Americans embody “race” and how certain racial terms in English and in South Asian languages are embodiments of “race.”

By interpolating these racial categories, I acknowledge that “race” is deeply embedded in cultural practices (Goldberg 1993); I examine the cultural practices in sport and leisure spaces to figure out how “race” materializes as signifiers of identity. These manifestations of “Blackness” and “Whiteness” play out in sporting practices in addition to the pedestrian activities of South Asian American life in the cultural terrain of the US South. The categories are not a means by which South Asian Americans claim Black and White racial identities but rather ways to differentiate and add particular cultural meanings to this racial logic. Furthermore, this
examination of “race” demonstrates how racial categories address South Asian American
difference through the language of race, sex, and masculinity. In concert with Kim (2005), I
believe that Asian American masculinity does not involve transcending the Black-White binary
but rather a direct involvement, reconfiguration of signification and meaning, and engagement
with such a racial logic. How South Asian Americans utilize the categories of “Black” and
“White” provides detail on how “race” is imagined; it tells the values South Asian Americans
ascibe to “Black,” “White,” and actual racial bodies of African American and Whites. Race
exists as a critical category with a long, disputed, contested relation to citizenship (Ong 2003);
thus, terms such as “Black,” “White,” and South Asian racial terms present a lexicon to interject
South Asian American-ness into the cultural fabric of the US while illuminating ethnic US
identity formation through such cultural practices of “race.”

The meanings of these racial categories, their respective contradictions, their complexity,
and their state of flux become apparent through a critical ethnography of sport. In particular,
this chapter delves into the use of these racial categories by respondents in Atlanta; I do not
discuss the North American Indo-Pak Basketball circuit in this case but rather the specificity of
the US South. Sport in Atlanta constitutes a key site for examining race—sport presents an
important arena for “racial formation” (Hartmann 2003; Omi and Winnant 1994). Hartmann
(2003: 265) argues, “Sport exhibits both progressive and conservative racial forms and forces,
that it is best understood as an empty cultural form (MacAlloon 1995), a social site where racial
images, ideologies, and inequalities are constructed, transformed, and constantly struggled over
rather than a place with specific and determined racial politics or ideals.” As such, a careful
examination of the US South presents opportunities to explore how racial logic predicated along
a white-black racial binary is reconfigured through South Asian American sensibilities to give meaning to South Asian American experiences in the US South.

**South Asian America and Race: Shifting Categories**

US history is laced with narratives of the shifting, contradictory nature of racial categories pertaining to South Asians in the Americas (Koshy 1998; Visweswaran 1997). Literature on South Asian America acknowledges the limitations of the Black-White racial binary in terms of identification by South Asian Americans as racial subjects (Dhingra 2004; Dave et al 2000; Kibria 1999; Mehta 1996). Furthermore, the dearth of scholarship on Asian American communities in the South only serve to further replicate the South as constituted through the Black-White binary (Dhingra 2007). Such a dearth of scholarship concerning “race” and South Asian American communities in the US South then play into simplistic articulations of “race” as applicable and pertaining to for only Black and White communities—this reinforces the Black-White racial binary. However, dismissing the racial categories of “Black” and “White” fail to account for how these categories play out in the lives of South Asian Americans—the meanings and significations are different. Likewise, the mistake of conflating “race” and “culture” must not take place (Visweswaran 1998); rather, I look at the cultural practices of “race.” Thus, I aim to explore how “race” sutures South Asian American life experiences as well as how they situate “Black” and “White” with their identities.

Hegemonic discourses of “race” make racial categories of tremendous relevance. Simply put, “without a racial identity, one is in danger of having no identity” (Omi and Winant 1994) in
the US cultural milieu. The subjects of my study use categories of “White” and “Black” in nuanced ways that speak to political economy, cultural capital, racialization of Blackness, and South Asian American difference. This chapter demonstrates that the evocation of such categories addresses how racial categories acts as a compass to navigate the cultural-racial terrain. The process of using racial categories allows ethnic American subjects to claim national belonging through an engagement with the racial constructs in US culture (Roediger 2005).^2^ Whereas ascription by mainstream media and state apparatus situate South Asian Americans as racially foreign, categories of “blackness” and “whiteness” speak to aspiration as differentially-inflected racial US subjects. ^3^ Racial identification, I argue, constitutes one critical venue to cultural citizenship.

The case of Bhagat Singh Thind illustrates how cultural parameters reinforced racial difference along the lines of race, ethnicity, gender, and citizenship (Jensen 1988; Hing 2004). Understanding the significance of Thind’s case warrants close scrutiny of Takeo Ozawa’s case a year earlier. With the case of Takeo Ozawa vs. US in 1922, US court denied Ozawa citizenship on the grounds that racial ground deemed him biologically “Mongloid” and not “Caucasian.” Thind filed for citizenship on the grounds that South Asians were deemed “Caucasian” by racial science (Lopez 1994). “Between 1907 and 1923, approximately seventy individuals, all of them educated professionals, gained citizenship on the grounds that they (as particular individuals) were members of the ‘Aryan race’.” (Mazumdar 1998: 30) On the contrary, the US judiciary denied Thind citizenship on grounds that although biologically “Caucasian,” Thind, according to the court, did not fit within the cultural parameters of whiteness as determined by the “common man” thus “not readily assimilable” (Singh 2002: 94). In lines with local legal regimes and immigration laws, the figure of the “Hindoo” was cast as culturally different, perverse (Shah
sexual antithesis to whiteness and citizenship (Koshy 2007; Leonard 1992), and, therefore, unsuitable for citizenship. As a result, those South Asians given citizenship on the ground of belonging to the “Aryan” race had their citizenship and rights to land revoked. Racial science and claims to “Caucasian” racial heritage represented means to claim citizenship—Thind did not seek the venue of “Blackness” to make such claims and illustrates the hierarchical nature of racial groups within the category of citizenship.

Basketball Masculinity and Cultural Blackness: Politics of Consumerism

The case of Thind vs. the US shows the use and value of “whiteness” for citizenship even though “Blackness” and African descent could be, at that socio-historical moment, used as a vehicle to citizenship. Thind’s decision to claim “Caucasian” heritage makes clear the discord between “Blackness” and full citizenship. However, the present temporal moment, elements of “cultural Blackness” is consumed by South Asian American participants and it represents one means, through popular culture and style, to claim cultural citizenship (see Maira 2009, 2002). To discard “Blackness” and the activation of “Blackness” in understanding claims to US citizenship in the present spatio-temporal moment would prove deficient of an analysis of this South Asian American community. In lines with such dissonance from “Blackness” as witnessed in the case of Thind, the particular consumptive practices of “Cultural Blackness” presently point to political difference as well as effects of late capitalism that illustrate how “Blackness” is activated differently in South Asian American communities in opposition to its activation in African American communities.
Figures like Michael Jordan articulate elements of “Blackness,” sensibilities of “cool,” aesthetics of masculinity, and performances of race. Cole and King (1998) state that sport in general and black athletes in particular have functioned in constructing images and ideals of race and masculinity in contemporary American culture. For example, one Chicago Indo-Pak Basketball team wears NBA Chicago Bulls jersey as their team jersey while many players wear the iconic number 23 of Michael Jordan. Michael Jordan emerges, through NBA, corporate, and media collusions as an “embraceable” African American male in opposition to other African Americans who are produced as “unembraceable” (Page 1999). Jordan, as an image and cultural text, becomes an “embraceable” figure of “cultural Blackness”, “his blackness and his image can be consumed uncritically and put to use in many, often contradictory, ways.” (Dyson 1992) Farred (2006) adds, “In tacitly discounting race and by distancing themselves from any and all forms of social injustice, Barkley and Jordan were, of course, also disengaging from any critique of racism foundational to American society.” (31) Jordan’s iconicity represents a cultural form that is embraceable and palatable as it takes the form of a commodity devoid of the political ember of cultural Blackness (Hooks 1994).

African American aesthetics and stylistics have historically provided sources of pleasure and counter-hegemonic spaces for marginal communities (Dyson 1992; Hartmann 2003; Kelly 1997). African American stylistics are commoditized—removed of political Blackness and African American bodies—to make it palatable for a white consumer public (Andrews 2000). According to Dyson, “Jordan also represents the contradictory impulses of the contemporary culture of consumption, where the black athletic body is deified, reified, and rearticulated within the narrow meanings of capital and commodity.” (1992: 73) Such ambiguity arises through the consumption of “desirable essences of blackness” (Kim 2005: 121) and not the complex
myriad of politics and identifications that is “Blackness” (see Patillo 2007; Kelley 1997; Vargas 2007).¹²

For Indo-Pak players, Jordan’s image serves to produce alternate conceptions of “American-ness” inflected by Black cultural style but performed through South Asian American sensibilities. Consumption of African American stylistics, movements, discourses, signs, and gestures, as elements of cultural Blackness, posit vistas to claiming “cultural citizenship” (Maira 2009; Miller 2006; Rosaldo 1989) as US subjects. Such acts of appropriation displace and trouble normativities of whiteness and citizenship. However, Blackness, in the context of Indo-Pak Basketball and South Asian American socialities observed in Atlanta, unfortunately, emerge through limited conceptions of aesthetic qualities and not actual Black politics.¹³ I argue that configurations of South Asian American masculinity and appropriations of “cultural Blackness” prove limiting, contradictory, and paradoxical.

The particular consumption of cultural Blackness and Jordan’s problematic iconicity introduces race through acts of displacement. Andrews (2000) acknowledges this: “Racial discourse is never transcended; it is in a Derridean sense, always already there [Smith 1994]. Jordan is not an example of racial transcendence; rather, he is an agent of racial displacement.” (Andrews 2000: 179) I supplement Andrews’s argument by adding that racial displacement occurs by incorporating the axis of gender, class, and sexuality whereby Jordan’s blackness exists in relation to other men of color.¹⁴ The South Asian Americans in my study also displace “Blackness” onto other African Americans, at the moment of mimesis, through oppositional techniques—involving gender and sexuality. Farred (2006) addresses this point in his examination of the figure of Yao Ming whose “foreign-ness” and “Asian-ness” arise by racially displacing “blackness” onto other African Americans. “The blackness that Jordan never owned,
that His Airness supposedly disposed of, is refracted through Yao’s ‘yellowness.’” (Farred 2006: 46) Reiterating Carrington (2002) and Farred (2006), increased presence of African American men as athletic role models does not necessarily translate into undoing racializing practices but rather presents different cultural texts and racialized bodies through which such racializing discourses reemerge. Carrington (1998) argues that increased prominence of African Americans and Blacks in media circuits has not engendered appreciation, understanding, and empathy to the actual struggles of Black people—Black men are reduced to spectacles and commodities. As a result, racializing discourses and “race” are displaced upon African Americans at the same time that African Americans like Michael Jordan, LeBron James, and Kobe Bryant are revered. This contradiction is further cemented through the consumption of “Blackness” that takes on the form of cool at the same time “Blackness” in basketball is seen as “animal,” rough, aggressive, volatile, and masculine; “White” is represented as controlled, decisive, and a mix of brain and brawn (Brooks 2009; Hylton 2009; King and Springwood 2001; Messner and McKay 2000). Such consumptive practices of “Blackness” exist through racializing discourses that affect not only understandings of race but also the social relations these categories foster—these acts displace racialized “Blackness” upon African Americans.

“Kallu”: Constructing Blackness through the South Asian American Imagination

One such act of displacing “Blackness” upon everyday African Americans takes place through a South Asian term, “Kallu.” Whereas the term “Kallu” means dark-skinned people and used to denigrate darker skin people in South Asia, South Asian Americans have reinvented “Kallu” as a racial category to identify African Americans. Although having origins in North
Indian languages, this term has become convention to mark racialized African American bodies in South Asian American communities. South Asian Americans whose family languages do not consist of North Indian languages still use “Kallu” to mark African Americans. The figure of the “Kallu” reconfigures race and racialization according to South Asian American sensibilities while complicating the black-white racial binary. “Kallu” embodies racializing discourses of African Americans. It serves to index Black bodies and provides cultural (racialized) readings of these bodies. Whereas multiple English racial epithets for African Americans exist, “Kallu” works in relation to racial epithets—such as the “N” word—but with different meanings, histories, and purposes. The “N word” takes shape in US history with regard to chattel slavery, segregation, and institutional racism. “Kallu” has a different valence from “N-word” and its meaning differ from their original meanings in South Asia; “Kallu” and “N-word” do not reference the same physical bodies and social contexts.

As a term not found in my South Asian language, Tamil, I first came across it at the 1994 Greenville Indo-Pak tournament when conversing with Mustafa and other Outkasts members. At this Indo-Pak Basketball tournament, Mustafa located two players with dark skin, robust athletic bodies, and tightly coiled hair. These bi-racial young men were Afro-South Asian. Mustafa looked over at me as said with a questioning tone in his voice, “Those are Kallus”. His questioning made these bodies “matter out of place” (ibid). Mustafa believed these two bi-racial young men were “Kallu” and thus discursively produced as fully Black. Discursive productions such as this reinvigorate racist ideologies of the past and give life to the “one-drop” rule that governed social relations in the US South. This presupposes the figure of “Kallu” as incompatible with South Asian American-ness as a result of Black blood in this multi-racial
As a result of phenotype and perceived characteristics, the bi-racial players are made racially and culturally black thus making it an impossibility to claim South Asian American-ness.

However, at an Indo-Pak Basketball tournament in South Carolina in 2000, Atlanta Outkasts played a Greenville team with another differentially signified bi-racial player. This young man with straight brown hair, a muscular physique, and light skin, a product of white and South Asian parents, did not raise any objections from Mustafa. That very exclusion of African Americans from Indo-Pak Basketball address processes of racialization whereby bi-racial individuals receive different valences—South Asian American imagination of Blackness (“Kallu”) is seen as unsuitable with South Asian American-ness via hyper-masculinity (see George 1992; Hoberman 1997), “brawn but no brain” (Singh 1999), while hegemonic white masculinities receive little discursive attention thus making “Whiteness” normative through its unmarking physically and institutionally.

This term, “Kallu,” surfaces frequently in sporting South Asian American communities, Mustafa’s use of the term is not an exception. As racializing discourses in US history often conflate communities of color, “Kallu” stands in as a category of difference from African Americans for South Asian Americans. The figure of the “Kallu” embodies race by using the body of African Americans to embody such racial difference. Ali added “it is used to describe race” and used by South Asians who are “sheltered.” Similarly, Sanjeet also found amusing my inquiry about the term as it is commonplace within South Asian American circles but code word in other social settings. At this point in the interview, Sanjeet acknowledged, “It is a very negative term, there is nothing positive about that term.” Sharif, whose queer identity and social activism enabled complex social relations, stated, “It is used to refer to black individuals. It is
racist and not acceptable…It casts broadly and that is not acceptable, it is used in a derogatory way to criticize somebody about behaviors seen as less than ideal.” Sharif elaborates upon how the construction of “Kallu” to signify subjects and behaviors seen as “less than ideal” illustrate the positioning of African Americans in South Asian American communities. Therefore the use of “Kallu” to mark African Americans situates African Americans—Black masculinity and Black femininity—as “less than ideal.”

Ali chooses not to use it as he has very close African American friends—these friends also happen to be middle class African Americans. Ali’s closest friend at his wedding was a middle class African American young man now playing overseas professional basketball. Sultan adds greater complexity and confusion to the use of this term. Sultan stated with ambivalence, “heard the term at home.” To add, Sultan said, “It is a derogatory term, desis are racist too. I don’t use the term and don’t get involved in race like that.” Yet, Sultan stresses, “I believe that it is used for humor and never any other malicious intent. Desis sometimes have a chip on their shoulder.” These contradictions surface in unexpected ways. At this point, Sultan justifies the use of this term by juxtaposing his own and “desi” experiences of marginalization in sport where African Americans have foreclosed those sporting spaces to South Asian Americans.

An example of the use of this term took place playing Monday night recreational basketball on April 20th, 2009, with Daniel, other South Asian Americans, and their white friends.

*The gym is located in a gentrifying part of Atlanta where the neighborhood participants are working class African Americans. As my South Asian American subjects arrived at this gym to begin basketball play at 7pm, six to seven African American youth (ages 8 to 12) were playing on the various courts. They had been playing for a while; these youth resided close by, this was their gym. The South Asian American participants started stretching out and shooting shots to*
warm up on the two major goals. With enough adults to begin the pick-up games, the court changed from a public forum to a private venue bought and reserved by the South Asian American adults and their friends. Not having known that this space became a private exclusive space at 7pm, the youth continued to play. One of the South Asian American players, Vivek, observed the presence of young African American boys on the court before the South Asian American men started playing. Vivek shouted with the purpose to stress his masculinity and provide humor, “make that little Kallu get off the court!”

Although meant as a joke by Vivek and to establish communicative competence within the South Asian American community, Daniel (Malayalee American) did not approve. After the games ended, I asked Daniel for greater detail about the term “Kallu” and why he objected to Vivek’s comment. Daniel responded to me in e-mail, “Kallu to me means colored / black / african american. The way it was said seemed a bit derogatory. I didn’t say the kid was too young to be kallu I just said that the kid was young. I would have preferred he just said make the little kid leave, no need for kallu to be used as all the other kids were black right.”

Daniel states that since all other young children there are Black, he did not see a need to use “Kallu” as a marker of difference. Therefore, Daniel alludes to the normal usage of “Kallu” in multi-racial settings to differentiate communities of color—African Americans and South Asian Americans. As racializing discourses in US history often conflate communities of color, “kallu” stands in to differentiate South Asian Americans from African Americans racially. A separation discursively and ontologically takes place under the linguistic, social control of South Asian Americans thus limiting possibilities for coalition building.

Sanjeet talked about the contextual specificity of the term which demonstrates reconfigurations of “race” and “racialization” through South Asian American sensibilities. He states that South Asian Americans “use that word [Kallu] rather than use the n-word in public. My friends who are all white know that one Indian word. If I use it in a sentence then I am
saying something bad.” Terms such as “Kallu” allow for public speech acts since other communities of color, African Americans, do not know this linguistic term. This term is not shared in conversations with African American men in mixed-racial leagues but rather used intimately within and among the South Asian American community as a point of difference from African Americans. Daniel elaborated, “I do think brown folks (us indians) are ignorant in the fact of using the word kallu, people aren’t stupid and will pick up on the word. Plus other indians telling their friends what it means.”

Using this term also shows the limitation and specific type of consumption of “cultural blackness.” The stigma of “acting too black” (Maira 2002) exists in this social space but little is done to interrogate whiteness. Players make the point not to conflate “cultural Blackness” with being “Black.” “Kallu” is a South Asian American construction of race that is bounded and limited by racialized knowledge; “Kallu” serves as a distinction from the physicality of Blackness while appropriating Black aesthetics.

These markers of difference carry meaning and determine social relations. Furthermore, South Asian Americans did not use “Kallu” to label all African Americans. Similar to the study by Jackson (2001), Patillo (2007), and Vargas (2007), the different class backgrounds that complicate and expand “Blackness” also emerge in this context. Mustafa used it strategically to differentiate among African American communities, “Kallu” signified African Americans of a lower socio-economic standing or it was used to mark African Americans with whom they had conflicting relations. Sanjeet replied, “My father would say ‘can’t trust a Kallu.’” Social intimacies with poor working-class African Americans, marked as “Kallu,” are thus limited and limiting. Therefore, although the prominence of the Black images and bodies has taken center
stage in mainstream media, there have not been an equal focus on the political economy faced by African Americans nor is there work done to build a space for progressive politics (Carrington 2002: 27).

Some of this animosity and anathema concerning relations with African Americans comes about during basketball play where the use of “Kallu” appears. When discussing his reasons for playing a lower rung—B-league—of intramural basketball in college, Sanjeet stated, “Those Kallus made it impossible to play ’A’ league.” He then went on to comment that only Mohammed continued to play in ’A’ league intramurals while most South Asian Americans at his college played in the ’B’ league. Such discourses imagine African Americans as not only physical specimens with innate, natural athletic talent but put in contrast to South Asian Americans. Even Daniel discussed his perception of bodily differences after pick-up basketball. Daniel underscored physical difference and how South Asians are not as muscular and thus not athletically gifted as African Americans. Daniel shared his example of working out at the gym where a novice African American weight lifter lifted as much as he did. He summarized, “Indians are not naturally athletic or have the genes to be good at sports. How many Indians are there in professional sports?”

African Americans are seen as racially exemplar in basketball, aggressive, and hyper-masculine along heterosexual lines—a threatening Black masculinity is then positioned against a controlled, normative South Asian American masculinity. Accordingly, Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments do not allow, for the most part, African American participation other than as officials. In this instance, “Black style travels more freely across racial and class borders than young Black men do.” (Maira 2002: 69). Charles (one of the Chicago IPN organizers)
commented that individuals of multi-racial (read as Black) backgrounds are thus not allowed to
play as they are culturally produced as irreconcilable with South Asian-ness. Charles also
mentioned how the Washington, DC tournament and the Chicago IPN are a bit looser with such
requirements while other major tournaments require those who fit the “Kallu” category produce
passports and evidence of their South Asian-ness. 21

The figure of the “Kallu” is oversaturated with an athletic masculinity that depicts
African Americans as a threat to the sanctity of the game thereby justifying such exclusions.
Through participation in Atlanta’s Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments, The Atlanta Latino League,
and the Asian Ballers league, South Asian Americans further affirm their racialization as ethnic
subjects—the “Other”—but with a cultural, racial distance from the corporeality of “Blackness”
and the figure of the “Kallu.” All three of these leagues do not allow African American
participation unless one can show by passport, identification, or through other measures that one
is multi-racial and not fully African American. Dave, an African American, played for a year in
the Atlanta Latino League with Mustafa. Dave proved himself an exceptional basketball player
and this brought about discontent from other participants. As a result, Atlanta Latino League
officials demanded Dave produce documentation identifying his “Latino-ness.” Since Dave
could not produce such documentation or showcase an ancestral link to Latino heritage, Dave
could not play in the league but would continue to come to games, watch, and socialize with his
peers. Mustafa, on the other hand, continues to play and even asked me to play with him.
Mustafa smirked and said with confidence, “You’ll pass, they won’t question you. Do you speak
a little Spanish?”
Whereas there is a policing and hyper-surveillance of Black bodies, the same kind of exclusionary measures are not set up for White bodies. White players are seen by some of my South Asian American subjects as hardworking, not athletically gifted as African Americans, cerebral, good shooters (this again emphasizes hard work and the mind), and good leaders. This proved especially true at the Asian Tournament at Georgia Institute of Technology on April 4th, 2009. In between games, members of Atlanta Rat Pack moved to another court to watch Atlanta Franchise play against another Asian American team. There were African American players on both teams. To this fact Mohammed looked at Mustafa and sarcastically said, “It must be okay to bring Kallus.” This provided commentary and humor—it located African Americans as unwelcome participants in this sporting space. Mohammed and Mustafa took notice of and marked only African American players—not officials—as “Kallu” thereby situating them as bodies out of place. I asked them about the White men on “Ballz of Fury” (one of the premier teams at the tournament) and Mohammed said, “Oh yeah, those guys shouldn’t be here as well.” Mohammed’s response had little affect in contrast to his view of African American bodies in this space, whiteness is not contested whereby creating parameters of community that invite Whites. Thus, the configuration of “Kallu” sets African Americans apart semantically, physically (biologically), and culturally from whites. “Kallu” is an embodied word used to manufacture difference. Racial difference is produced in relation to other racial communities (Hong 2006).

Similar to discourses about physicality, “Kallu” is activated to also talk about certain styles of basketball play. At the April 4th, 2009 Asian Tournament, sitting on the cold, metal bleachers watching Atlanta Franchise play, Mohammed shook his head in disapproval and stated, “they [Atlanta Franchise] play Kallu style of ball.” Nelson (1992) illustrates how certain flair and stylistics, associated as “schoolyard basketball,” changed the nature of basketball at all levels
but also had certain meanings associated with it. Accordingly, the NBA presents structured forms and rules of play in opposition to the “And 1” basketball tour which celebrates working-class Black playground basketball creativity (see Farred 2006). As such, Mohammed’s comment about “Kallu style of ball” references African American stylistics with connotations of inappropriateness, extravagance, and excessive associated with “And 1” basketball.

As the “And 1” tour centers creativity, style, and expressive basketball practices outside the norms of “fundamental basketball,” Mohammed made the same distinction with the use of “Kallu style of ball.” Although Atlanta Franchise had an African American, “Kallu” did not reference that physical body but rather a style of play and pace of game by Atlanta Franchise that carried less value for Mohammed—seen as “less than ideal.” When asked about his basketball heroes, Mohammed’s answer provides clues into his version of appropriate basketball in opposition to “Kallu style of ball.” Mohammed stated:

I have a lot of basketball heroes such as larry bird, isaiah thomas, magic johnson, charles barkley, and now lebron james. These are some of the players I tried to emulate while I was growing up. I respected the way they played with toughness and the physical way they played, as well as always staying in control of the game. They never really stopped playing. I also had an appreciation for the way they played because a lot of the moves they did they came up with such as the way Magic passed the ball. I also love how Magic and Lebron play TEAM basketball and get their teammates involved.

Atlanta Franchise players showcased their fancy ball-handling skills and tried to take on opposing teams as individuals. Mohammed found this fast pace type of basketball play as out-of-control, careless, selfish, and focused on the individual rather than team goals. He used “Kallu” not only to racialize African American players and their creative practices but also show his distaste for certain playing styles embodied by fellow South Asian American Muslims. “Kallu,” in this case, not only represents an adjective but also indicates how “race” manifests
itself through South Asian American sensibilities. As the term “Kallu” embodied racialized discourses of blackness, it was also in relation to South Asian American-ness. “Kallu” presented a marker of racial difference. “Black” and “White”, when used by South Asian Americans, do not index racial difference but, rather, represent the means by which ideas of race are activated by South Asian Americans to delineate difference within the category of South Asian America.

**Activating “Black” and “White”**

If “Kallu” represents South Asian American sensibilities and embodiments of US racial logic, what valence do “Black” and “White” carry in South Asian American communities? Although “Black” and “White” are used to mark respectively raced bodies—Black and White, they also function to complicate South Asian America. The use of “Black” and “White” foreground a metaphorical project by which to understand South Asian American difference while demonstrating the importance of “race” in national belonging (Goode 2002).

“Black” and “White” constitute different means to claiming “belonging” as South Asian Americans. When Ali, in the epigram, referenced himself as “White,” he also referenced other South Asian Americans as “Black.” This presents a complex social phenomenon of relational identity formation that is peculiar, I argue, to life in the US South. “Black” and “White,” serve as markers of South Asian American difference while simultaneously underscoring a reference to particular political economy that exists alongside how South Asian Americans imagine their cultural capital and social mobility.
When talking about his personal life experiences in opposition to those of his own brothers, Ali considered his brothers “Black” while locating himself as “White.” Mahmoud, also, used these racial categories to produce himself as “Black” and his brother and myself as “White.” Similarly, Daniel told of his past where he was “Whitish” and affirmed Malik as “Whitish and white-bred without a doubt.” Do these South Asian Americans consider themselves as racially “White” and “Black”? I argue that not the case but rather situate the use of these terms as part and parcel of life in the US South where the cultural ethos is infiltrated by idioms embedded in the Black-White racial binary.

For Ali, the use of “Black” and “White” are replete with deep historical meanings in dialogue with his own personal life history. Historical experiences constitute one modus operandi in order to talk about cultural differences (Lipsitz 1990: 156). Ali’s use of “Black” and “White,” although limited and embedded in racialized discourses, succinctly address the political economy afforded to Whites and African Americans in US history while translating those meanings into cultural capital for South Asian Americans. Race “operates to grant access to social and economic privileges, advantages, and opportunities.” (Naber 2008: 30) Referencing himself as “White,” Ali made visible his access to resources, with education and basketball, which brothers Mustafa and Qamar did not have. Mustafa’s and Ali’s father’s employment corresponded to post-Fordist shifts in production where manufacturing centers moved out of industrial centers—either outsourced abroad or moved to new locations in the US—to places like Houston to Nashville to LaGrange to Lawrenceville (Gwinnett County), GA, to Dalton, GA, and back to Gwinnett County. While living in LaGrange and Dalton, experiences of “race”—that Ali reminded me as etched so deeply in his memory—resonated to help make sense of “Black” and “White” as racial categories and also elaborate them into the South Asian American experience.
Ali, Mustafa, and Qamar understood their position in relation to African Americans through not only a legal system of segregation but also through discourses—individual and institutional. Their own racial position, as South Asian Americans, however, remained ambiguous (see Kibria 1998; Maira 2002; Mazumdar 1989).

Ali and Mustafa lived in LaGrange before the monumental changes taking place in 1991 when the city officially integrated de jure and de facto. While in LaGrange, Mustafa could play at either the white or the black gym; both Ali and Mustafa could move through segregated playgrounds while their African American friends could not. Although not white, Mustafa had privileges not afforded to African Americans—he could partake in certain types of Black aesthetics without the immobility endured by African Americans. In this instance, “Black” became synonymous with lack of access to sporting venues, educational facilities, and particular social immobility.

Thus, with historical implications imbued to racial categories, Ali considered his brothers “Black.” “Blackness,” in this particular case, represented not only the political economy of sporting places but also other major institutions. When narrating his family history, Ali emphasized his sporting basketball experiences in contrast to Mustafa. The move to Dalton, Georgia, Ali had made friends with whites who opened up a private church gym for Ali to practice and refine his basketball game. This opportunity did not exist for Mustafa, who after a failed try with Dalton State College basketball team, found the main sporting space in “Midnight basketball” program. “Midnight basketball” are programs in cities where “safe” places are provided on the basketball court for “at-risk” youth (read as African American) so as to avoid the dangers of other public spaces and get them “off the street” (Depro and Hartmann 2005).
Whereas Ali and his white friends had an entire basketball court to themselves to master basketball movements, Mustafa competed with African Americans at a public recreation center. Mustafa informed me in 2006 that these “Midnight basketball” nights helped him play tough and “take it strong to the hole [basket].” “Playground ball overlaps with the culture of the street. Boys learn that aggressiveness, toughness, and fearlessness are valued.” (Brooks 2009: 46)

However, unlike Ali, Mustafa could not have a gym all to himself. If Mustafa lost in any of the pick-up games, he waited considerable periods of time to get back on to play.

In addition, as a result of visibility in these white spaces, Ali would join basketball clubs and organizations early and get the necessary basketball resources, advice, and mentorship. Organized basketball of this sort involves social capital as well as financial capital. Pick-up basketball is seen as an uncontrollable and unregulated masculinity (Nelson 1992). The different trainings of the body, the disciplining regimes, and the acquisition of skills through organized basketball versus pick-up basketball address the intersection of race, class, and sexuality. Brooks (2009: 25) distinction between organized leagues such as the Blade Rodgers League in Philadelphia and recreational playground ball sheds light on how these distinctions also manufacture “White” and “Black”: “It [Blade Rodgers League] is a big break from street ball and how basketball is played on the playground and in other leagues. Play is more formalized, requiring a different set of skills, discipline, and understanding of the rules. Games are structured, recorded, and regulated like college and professional basketball. Audiences include not only peers, but also high school and college coaches.” Both styles of basketball vary in how they are structured, what meanings are ascribed to each, and how they are valued.
Such elements of cultural capital also proved true for education. Ali contrasted his social encounters at a highly regarded, mostly-white public high school in Gwinnet County in opposition to brothers Mustafa and Qamar who attended poor public schools when their father was shifted to post-industrial centers with working class populations. Mustafa and Qamar fought young white men to secure their safety and their manhood. “Blackness” in this respect constituted the fears of conflict and fights. Ali mentioned the numerous fights with white men that Mustafa and Qamar endured. Mustafa reaffirmed Ali’s narrative by stating that “white guys always want to start something” and thus Mustafa did not attend places sporting a white aesthetic. Not having to deal with the materiality of racism through physical attacks, Ali projects “Black” to give voice to the racism faced by his brothers while associating it with a particular toughness and physicality. His brothers carried guns as means of protection but also as emblems of masculinity.

In opposition to Mustafa and Qamar, Ali went to higher class white public high school where he got safe learning spaces, the resources, friendships, and opportunities to succeed. As a result of his basketball opportunities through this school, Ali got scholarship offers from small colleges. Therefore, whiteness meant “that athletes were not linked with crime, drugs, physicality, or educational failings” (Hylton 2009: 97); these adjectives were put upon the category of “Black” and those deemed as “Black.” Furthermore, although Ali got offers and possibilities for a college education, he took up employment immediately after high school. White, as in the case of Ali, complicates political economy in that it does equate whiteness with success. Thus, Ali’s life history and his own emphasis on his “whiteness” deals with resources and access he had in contrast to his brothers.
Other South Asian Americans also used these racial categories to underscore South Asian American difference. “Whiteness” was associated with privilege and other people's labor while “Blackness” represented unappreciated labor. Mahmoud alluded to his younger brother and me as “white” while locating himself as “Black.” Using myself and his brother as a contrast, Mahmoud state that his younger brother engenders respect as a result of his subject position as a graduate student. On the other hand, working non-stop with little time for leisure, Mahmoud felt that he performed the labor that allowed his brother to succeed. Mahmoud managed several gas stations and also utilized creative enterprises in the underground economy. For Abelmann’s (2009) informant, Mary, the categories of “white” and “Black” are laced with class sensibilities to embody Korean American heterogeneity and multiplicity. Abelmann’s interlocutor, Mary, ascribes “whiteness” to her brother who garners success as a result of not having to partake in employment to support the success of the family unit. Mahmoud stated, “I am putting him [brother] through school!”

Although making considerable money, Mahmoud voiced his frustration with South Asian families hesitating and refusing to accept him as a potential groom. Blackness pointed to a certain forced distance between Mahmoud’s subject position and hegemonic ideologies—via “model minority” rhetoric—of South Asian American-ness. “Whiteness,” in this sense, meant a middle class sensibility with levels of acceptance and social clout irrespective of labor performed by Mahmoud for his brother. Mahmoud’s income and consumer patterns could not produce the middle class sensibility valued within his community, education alongside financial success equated to middle class identity. It also referenced those financially affluent and socially mobile South Asian Americans who have symbolic capital as a result of their education. Blackness represented hard, unappreciated, and differently signified labor that makes whiteness possible for
others. Those participants classified by others or self-classified as “Black” also consisted of young men whose parents arrived after 1980 and did not have the same professional status as the earlier waves—this meant lack of access of resources.

What does whiteness mean and mark other than greater social mobility and access to resources? Daniel’s use of “whitish” references ideas of whiteness similar to Ali’s envisioning of “whiteness.” During my February 5th, 2009 meeting with Daniel, he said, “I am as white as white can get…I’m whitish but slowly migrated to brown.” In particular, Daniel mentioned how he was not in touch with his cultural identity as Catholic Malayalee American until after college when he delved into the South Asian American community. The emphasis on “White” points to “American-ness” as assimilation and loss of ethnic, cultural traits.

Loss of an ethnic cultural anchor and distancing from one’s cultural, ethnic background is seen as “White” or “acting White” (Koshy 2006: 110). Likewise, Ali did not pray and partake in Islamic and cultural rituals with the same frequency as Mustafa thus seeing himself as “white.” However, white does not mean full citizenship as white Americans as racializing discourses continue to dislocate them as South Asian. Daniel states, “People perceive me as Indian but I consider myself Indo-white.” Similar to early non Anglo Saxon whites who claimed whiteness through their jobs, their ethnic organizations, incorporating into the racial cultural logic, and distancing from blackness (see Guglielmo 2005; Roediger 2005; 1991), “white” in the case of these South Asian American subjects implies loosening the moorings of ethnic identity alongside cultural, racial distancing from African Americans.

Yet, associations of “Black” and “White” do not mean simply “White” politics or “Black” politics. In fact, the contradictions arise whereby Mahmoud considers himself “Black”
but uses “Kallu” to describe African Americans. Furthermore, Mahmoud’s work puts him in contact with working class African Americans and this does not necessarily facilitate community building. Mahmoud creates a distance from “Kallu” and Black politics. Ali, although considering himself white, has close African American friends of middle class background. Ali’s and Mustafa’s basketball skill level has allowed greater intimacies with African Americans and opened up venues for social bonding. Therefore, these terms, “Black” and “White,” are contradictory and multiple—they showcase the complex, paradoxical nature of racial identities. This section shows how essentialist tropes of “White” and “Black” fail in cultural practice to accommodate the complexity of identity formation.

**Racial “Cool”: Reconfiguring Racial Epithets and Politics of “Cool”**

“Black” and “White” represents respective historical experiences then materialized to address South Asian American difference. These terms are not evacuated of their meaning but rather differently valenced and embodied by different racial subjects. Likewise, as popular culture contains within it many possibilities and many readings, racial terms that might have signified a certain body is given new meanings by South Asian American men through consumptive practices of popular culture. Racial terms, such as “Nigga,” were used not in the same manner as used by African Americans; rather, it served to index South Asian American masculinity. The vernacular racial term, “Nigga,” as used by some South Asian Americans, address intimacies and refer to other South Asian American men. The use of “Nigga” and not “N-word” took place by some South Asian American men to reference their South Asian
American peers. In addition, the use of “Nigga” and “Niggaz” point to consumptive practices of urban vernacular alongside hip hop expressive practices to situate South Asian American-ness.  

South Asian Americans who identified as “Black” or were identified by other South Asian Americans as “Black” used “Nigga” in their discourses with other South Asian Americans. These South Asian Americans whose parents arrived through the family reunification acts, post 1980, use “Nigga” as a way of referencing their working class community and underscore a tough, working class, cool masculinity. I heard it used in 1994 when I first encountered Mustafa, Qamar, and Ali. Another instance took place at the June 23rd, 2007 Indo-Pak tournament, when Suleiman (Atlanta Franchise) came to Mustafa visibly agitated as evidenced by his body language and his tone. In this case, Suleiman came to Mustafa and said, “I’m going to beat that Nigga! I am going to take him outside.” This statement took me by surprise but did not unnerve Mustafa. Suleiman had come with some Black friends but did not reference his Black friends. As Suleiman vented to Mustafa it became clear that another South Asian American man had initiated a dispute that Suleiman expected to resolve with a fight.

Mahmoud and his Hindu South Asian American peers also referenced their South Asian American friends and South Asian American adversaries as “Niggaz.” Mustafa, Mahmoud, and I drove together to Midtown Atlanta’s party scene at which time Mustafa and Mahmoud talked about their lives and their South Asian American compatriots—Mahmoud referenced South Asian Americans as “that Nigga,” “those Niggaz,” “this Nigga.” They marked South Asian American men as “Nigga” although “Kallu” signified African American men and African American women. This term receives resonance within these intimate moments and creates
intimate socialities—it produces boundaries of community through urban vernacular thus spatializing South Asian American identity within urban, American popular cultural confines.

As African Americans have appropriated the “N-word” to give new meaning to such a pungent, potent, historically powerful term, “Nigga” has taken hold in the lexicon of nonprofessional South Asian American men. Using “Nigga” usurps the politics of “cool” associated with African American use and gives urban cool to South Asian Americans, who in the mainstream stream discourses, are located as non urban, foreign subjects. However, the subject of reference receives different meanings. Although this term contests the status quo and hegemonic discourses within South Asian American, it is a term caked with power relations. This usage conjures up images of men—read as African American—who are less than ideal and unsuitable characters. Boyd (1997: 127) states, “The bad nigga is really an exercise in the politics that define lower-class Black masculinity.” This proved true when I asked Mahmoud, “Do you know any of the guys from TIB?” He laughed and shook his head, “No one knows who those niggaz are, they are all over. I don’t know those niggaz.” In reference to a South Asian American gang in Atlanta, The Islamic Brotherhood (TIB), Mahmoud uses urban racial vernacular to locate these South Asian American men.

The use of “White,” “Black,” “Kallu,” and urban vernacular demonstrates an active engagement with US society by South Asian Americans. The South Asian Americans in my study deconstructed the meanings of these terms and used it to refer to their communities, their relationships, and their experiences. Through such an intimate engagement with popular culture and spaces of leisure, South Asian American men make sense and define their masculinity, sexuality, and race. However, anxieties, hopes, and unfulfilled dreams arise out of these
contexts—I examine this in the concluding chapter. In addition, the next chapter explores how the global flows of ideas, identities, material, and people facilitate and meditate on South Asian American masculinity.
Chapter 6

Conclusion: Searching for Yao Ming?

This project demonstrated the dialectical relationship of power, produced through affect, desires, and pleasures for certain South Asian American communities. Pleasure, resistance, and dominance co-exist in these cultural settings through intersections of gender, sexuality, race, class, and ethnicity. Through the paradigm of South Asian American masculinity, I have shown the uneven terrain of power through which masculine identity formation takes place. However, with a Women of Color Feminist perspective and a Queer Diasporic Critique, these acts of identity formation have taken place in relation to other communities, contain elements of contradiction, shift through space and time, and are laced with power. While deconstructing some normativities, South Asian American masculine practices reinforce its own sets of normativities within the matrix of ethnicity, race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Responding to racialized discourses involving gender and sexuality, South Asian American participants in my study have contested racializing discourses by reconfiguring sexuality and gender in asserting South Asian American masculinity. The categories of gender and sexuality are utilized alongside race to create different social arrangements with the US and within South Asian America. Yet, these social arrangements and their respective relations prove problematic. Instead of creating possibilities for dismantling binaries, the re-articulation manufactures acceptable racial, gender, and sexual arrangements that consolidate gender, sexual, and racial orders in different ways.¹

As sport is often constructed as a site free of politics and based merely on merit, the formation of masculine identities demonstrates both the political nature of sport and the
dynamicity of masculinities. Sport is fraught with contradictions and is established through various normative regimes; Indo-Pak Basketball contests the normativities of “citizenship” and “belonging” at the very moment it produces its own heteronormativity.

As my subjects complicated, through their masculine practices, normativities associated with citizenship and “belonging”, they also induced visions of “belonging” in a near future that implicated other spaces. As cultural identities come about through multiple locales and multiple voices (Gupta and Ferguson 1997), ideas of South Asian American-ness is simultaneously a local and global project. Ideas, people, goods, capital, and technology all travel and complicate “origin” and ideas of “authenticity” (Appadurai 1996). Thus, two thematic notions of “belonging” surfaced during my interviews and conversations with Indo-Pak Players, organizers, and participants that added a global dimension to make sense of their dreams, aspirations, and visions for the future. One concerned the present situation of basketball and South Asian America. The other dealt with a vision of the future and what Indo-Pak Basketball organizers strive for with regards to the cultural parameters of South Asian America.

Play Ball? The Present Climate of South Asian America and Indo-Pak Basketball

Max fretted about the state of South Asian America with specific emphasis on the community in Chicago. At the dinner table at a local Italian restaurant after the 2006 Chicago IPN, Max, Charles, Rathi, Jake, and volunteers (mostly Malayalee Christian Americans) discussed the state of affairs with regard to the tournament and particular absences. With frustrated in his voice, Max asked, “Why can’t we get the community out there? I know a few
uncles and aunties came. But, why aren’t there more uncles and aunties in the stands? You should be getting your parents out here.” This statement worked alongside other statements made during the 2006 Chicago IPN as well as at the 2008 Chicago IPN. Particular patterns of social change witnessed during the Chicago IPNs also raise important questions about the state of affairs in South Asian America in general and Atlanta’s South Asian American community in particular. With Chicago IPN being institutionalized within a basketball sporting South Asian American public, the occupants of the gyms during the tournaments consisted of mostly volunteers, a few spouses supporting their partners, and players watching their opponents play. The concerns for Max consisted of the larger South Asian American public not recognizing this with the same kinds of values and importance as the participants and their partners. Max specifically mentioned the absence of community members other than those in the very intimate sporting community.  

This was also coupled with recognition by Max, Rathi, and John (organizer of Dallas Indo-Pak tournament) that “the youth” do not come anymore. With those concerns, Chicago IPN organizers sent out notices to incorporate an under 18 tournament for young South Asian American men. However, other than a team from North Carolina headed by a former Indo-Pak Basketball player, all the teams were local teams from Chicago. The fear of a disappearing tradition points to certain social processes that Khandelwal (2002) addresses in her work. Khandelwal’s work on New York City illustrates how increased immigration from South Asia changed the contours of South Asian America by exploding the concept to address the heterogeneity. Instead of a need to form a broad category of South Asian America—such as that in Indo-Pak Basketball, the increased population stimulated greater ethnic specificity instead of meta-narratives of South Asian American-ness. At the moment in which increased population
led to multi-ethnic interactions, it also led to divergent patterns of community formation on stricter ethnic lines. Thus, Indo-Pak Basketball does not attract the flow of young people who subscribe to the idea of South Asian America but rather greater ethnic and religious specificity takes place. Charles, in 2006, alluded to the changing, dynamic, and shifting contours of South Asian American-ness. The membership for the year-round, local Indo-Pak Basketball league in Chicago, according to Charles, changed to incorporate new persons. Charles stated, “All the same teams were playing each other. We were not getting better. We did not compete well at the Indo-Pak tournaments. We allowed Asians to play, this brought in new blood.”

In Atlanta, the local Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments mostly produce a younger generation of South Asian American men. The established teams of higher basketball caliber play in the Asian Ballers League locally and in the Asian Baller’s Tournament nationally. However, as of Fall 2009, Kdol decided to shut down the Asian Baller’s league thus removing one key venue of competition for these South Asian American men. These measures also point to another social phenomenon transpiring in the US South—South Asian American movement and concentration in other cities in the US South, mainly places in Florida such as Orlando, Tampa, and Miami. Whereas the 1996 Atlanta Olympics positioned Atlanta as an emerging economic and political power, a possible “global city” (Sassen 2002), recent events and heightened immigration control have changed the demographic and cultural ethos of Atlanta.

Dr. Said highlighted the powerful negative products of racial profiling following September 11th, 2001. He stated unequivocally, “The growth of Muslims in Atlanta is proportionally low in relation to other communities because of immigration barriers and there is less inflow of new blood. This will have an impact in ten to fifteen years.” There is thus an idea
of stagnancy within the community. Such stagnancy impacts also the sporting public within the Muslim community in Atlanta. Atlanta Rat Pack travels to North Carolina as well as to parts of Florida for their Indo-Pak Basketball tournament, Asian tournaments, and Muslim tournaments.

The main South Asian American players in my study do not attend to the Indo-Pak Basketball circuit in the same manner as they did in 2006, Atlanta’s Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments do not occur as frequently and have been usurped by Asian American tournaments. In fact, Suleiman, who coordinated a few Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments in the past, set up and orchestrated the April 4th Asian Tournament. Is there a specific process taking place here in Atlanta similar to Chicago? Similar to Charles’s account of the changing parameters of local Chicago Indo-Pak Basketball leagues to incorporate Asian Americans, Atlanta’s South Asian American basketball community of study also shifted from Indo-Pak to Asian Baller’s League. What will this cultural identity look like in a constellation that involves Asian American community? These socialities with Asian Americans are very interesting and a subject of further research. Similarly, with the conclusion of my research period, Atlanta Outkasts, as a team, also faded into the background. As demands of family, job, and movement to other cities, Atlanta Outkasts is an unstable, constantly shifting entity that no longer has its original nucleus. Such a dynamic shows the changing social relations. Younger men, such as Ahmed, maintain close social bonds with Mustafa and often take on the Outkasts aesthetic. However, Mustafa plays with Atlanta Rat Pack in Indo-Pak and Asian tournaments; he also continues to play in the Atlanta Latino League.

With the disbanding of various leagues and teams, other phenomenon continues to exist. New leagues have formed with such strict adherence to ethnic or national ties. Just at the
moment in which Indo-Pak Basketball and its respective basketball venues produce complicated notions of South Asian American-ness, other venues present exclusive ethnic or religious identities. For example, as the Asian Baller’s league struggled to produce players and teams for the second half of the 2009 summer session, the 3-on-3 Muslim tournament had a large turnout of young men. Mustafa also mentioned a particular occurrence and split within the Muslim community. This split corresponds to the ethnographic work conducted by Khandelwal (2002) where the increasing heterogeneity of South Asian America leads to splintering along ethnic and religious lines—there is community formation around micro-politics instead of macro-politics as South Asian Americans. Mustafa referenced the existence of an Ismaeli-only Muslim league across the US. Likewise, on a national and North American level, Sikh only basketball teams continue to operate. These contradictions need consideration in the future.

Charles’s statement corresponds with Max’s fears as well as with the social phenomenon in Atlanta that young South Asian American men no longer exclusively sought out a socio-cultural sporting institution like Indo-Pak Basketball. Yet, Charles and Max long for and desire South Asian America to parallel culturally the South Asian Vancouver community. The Vancouver team is discursively produced as fourth generation South Asians in North America—the generational component posits an identity category that the second generation South Asian Americans desire. Carter (2008: 16) underscores, “It is through sport that emotions such as nostalgia are evoked…sport is central to the creation of community and place.” They project their aspirations to South Asian American-ness through their discourses about Vancouver’s Indo-Pak Basketball teams.
“I want to find the Yao Ming in India”: Imagining the Future and Rethinking Vancouver

Krush, member of Maryland Five Pillars, along with Atlanta Rat Pack player, Mohammed, spoke to the greatness of the Vancouver players and attributing it to a generational constituency. Lipsitz (1990: 13) states, “All cultural expressions speak to both residual memories of the past and emergent hopes for the future.” This is an imagination and aspiration to a “place.” In this sense, South Asian American participants in Indo-Pak Basketball showcased a particular cosmopolitanism and modernity with “an openness to adopting global perspectives and ideas” (Carter 2006: 208 [Hannerz 1996]) by referencing Vancouver as explicitly tied to their aspirations of individual and communal self. Similar to Lozada’s (2006) examination of Shanghai sports and the utilization of global sport as a means to accentuate a cosmopolitan Shanghai (Chinese) identity, the subjects of my study use Vancouver and the consumption of Vancouver’s Indo-Pak Basketball cultural ethos as a means to stress both their cosmopolitanism and their hopes. By stressing a difference between South Asian Canada and South Asian America, Krush and other South Asian Americans construct Vancouver through their cultural repertoire. Their desires for a community similar to Vancouver’s South Asian community demonstrate the simultaneously local and translocal component of these desires.

In reference to the Vancouver Indo-Pak Basketball tournament, Krush emphasized, “They [fans in Vancouver] pack the stands, the community comes out to watch. It’s loud.” As Basso’s (1996) examination of Native American communities addresses how looking into space allows for a re-imagination of the past, participants looked into the present space of South Asian American basketball to simultaneously engage the past, present, and future. There is a temporal assumption that with time the South Asian American community will match the South Asian
Canadian community—this is what is hoped for by South Asian Americans. As Vancouver has a different history of South Asian community formation, I argue that the cultural parameters vary with the US and cannot be simply translated as the determined future of South Asian America. These imaginations of the future through creative work and reworking of popular culture do not always account for all structures of power and do not make visible all struggles (Lipsitz: 1990: 16). What exactly would this constellation of a Vancouver template of South Asian America look like? How does the cultural milieu operate in Vancouver?

Another temporal frame is of an affective dimension. The means by which Indo-Pak Basketball celebrates figures like Parambir also leaves room for other longings for mainstream South Asian basketball heroes. When interviewing Charles during the 2006 Chicago IPN, Charles desired a figure of greater mainstream recognition, “There must be a huge desi basketball crowd in London, we need to get them here [Chicago]. I also want to go India. I want to find the Yao Ming in India.” Celebrating Parambir does not suffice in how Charles desires for an Indian Yao Ming. Parambir appears in the celebrating discourses in a South Asian American basketball public but not in the larger mainstream discourses. These young men envision greater public visibility and institutionalization through the NBA would be a way to get “respect” and normalize a South Asian American sporting body i.e. normalize South Asian Americans as Americans. Yao Ming is imagined as a template of the South Asian hero who can undo racializing discourses in the US as participants imagine he has done so for the Asian American community.

Yet, such desires do little to unravel the complexity of Yao Ming’s figure globally and in the NBA—his politics are made invisible again through consumption of his iconicity. Although
Asian Americans have celebrated Yao Ming as “one of them”, Yao Ming claimed explicitly that he is Chinese and not Chinese American. As such, Yao Ming underscores a difference that makes him a culturally different subject from Asian Americans; Asian American politics are not the same as his. Furthermore, the iconicity of Yao Ming does not thwart the racializing discourses posited against Asian Americans. Rather, Yao Ming’s fame points basketball promise to China and not Asian America. In addition, Yao Ming’s presence in the NBA does not overturn racializing discourses but rather invigorates the production of new racializing regimes that posit a difference between Asian subjects, white US subjects, and African Americans.

Likewise, seeking a “Yao Ming” in India does not do away with discourses that posit South Asian Americans as “forever foreign.” The figure of “Yao Ming” and “Indian Yao Ming” will differ in content and valence from the figure of Michael Jordan, Lebron James, and Kobe Bryant.

As these South Asian American men yearn for an Indian Yao Ming, institutional powers also seek an “Indian Yao Ming” but for different reasons. The NBA office has set up office in India and has looked to initiate basketball academies. A representative from the NBA office now works in India with the aims of finding “Yao Ming.” This NBA representative worked previously with the NBA in China and now guides the Chinese branches affiliated with the NBA while making sure to increase the NBA consumer base in China. In a conversation with him, he stated, “There must be over a 100 seven footers in India.” He inquired as to whether through my research I knew of any of these persons in India. The NBA sends men, as scouts of talent and as purveyors of basketball, to find new talent in new markets. Through this search for Yao Ming in India, men are normalized in sport again and also justified as those best equipped to find talent. This elides the numerous women and queer basketball figures. Men and male bodies are sites of NBA strategies for colonization of the body. According to Farred (2006: 44), “Within the
racialized history of the NBA, there is always ‘something afoot,’ some other time in play, something other at work than what is being executed and observed now; a time, a history, now stretched by globalization, now linked by capitalist expansion, to other places.”

To echo Farred’s (2006) investigation of Yao Ming and his iconicity, there are histories and other power projects (such as colonialism and imperialism) that one must account for when studying basketball in Asia. One must also not err to assume equivalence between basketball in Asia and Michael Jordan’s iconicity. This NBA representative stated, “Look forward to any info you can send me. I need all the help I can get to grow hoops in India!” Accordingly, the NBA has partnered with a large Indian company, Mahindra Group, to establish a new recreational basketball league. It is a transnational project with collusion between corporations and state governments. On www.nba.com/global, one can find this information, see Figure 6, where one sees clearly the partnership between corporations and states. While the subjects of my study see “Indian Yao Ming” as a form of cultural capital and a site of corporeal resistance to racializing discourses, the NBA has other plans. Thomas (2010) demonstrates how the intrusion of the NBA into Brazil, under the auspices of philanthropic efforts through “NBA Cares”, is not simply a matter of encouraging basketball. Rather, similar to the baseball academies in the Caribbean, it is a means to recruit and train cheap, exploitable labor. Unlike baseball, the move to establish leagues and academies in India, like Brazil and China, is not simply out of goodwill but rather as a means to create a large consumer base. The NBA wants to find the “Michael Jordan of India” as a means to sell NBA goods to that particular demographic, Yao Ming might not hold the same appeal to Indians as Michael Jordan did globally. Furthermore, the drive for profit and increased consumerism also involve usurping local sporting cultures and silencing local voices.
The aims to “grow hoops in India” and NBA expansion are also historically inaccurate. Like Farred’s (2006) discussion of basketball in China, basketball has existed in India long before Michael Jordan’s iconicity. The assumptions by my informants about basketball as organically nurtured and grown in the US do a disservice to the spread of basketball long before the emergence of the NBA. The NBA icons such as Michael Jordan cultivated a greater appreciation for basketball but the game existed long before the arrival of the NBA. Like Maram’s (2006) examination of the multi-locality of Filipino boxers, Christian missionaries spread sport such as basketball as a means to train the proper Christian body abroad. Although basketball did not capture the Indian imagination at all times, one cannot assume that basketball did not exist till recently. Yet, the NBA uses missionary Christian rhetoric to highlight their intrusion into the Indian market. In Figure 7, the interview with Dwight Howard (NBA player and icon) demonstrates clearly the “mission” of Dwight Howard as an evangelical force aimed at a new type of conversion of the “heathen” masses—conversion to a particular consumerism. Using Dwight Howard as a figure for this project raises interesting points as he sells himself a “good Christian” that is also an oppositional figure from other African Americans. This image of the “good Christian” is used to justify the conversion of Indian consumerism to basketball from cricket. When asked in this interview about the possibility of an increase in NBA in India, Howard responds, “I do. That’s the goal here is to do that. We understand it’s going to take a lot of time. It’s barely the number-four sport here right now. This is a long-term goal by the NBA, and I’m just happy to be a part of it.”

To add, searching for “Yao Ming” presents an interesting point in how South Asian Americans locate Yao Ming in addition to locating themselves. The figure of Yao Ming presents
different meanings than the African American basketball icons. The allusion to Yao Ming presupposes equivalence between South Asian basketball players and Yao Ming. This equivalence is one of type: a particular classed masculinity. As the rhetoric around Yao Ming’s iconicity situate him as a controlled, team-oriented, self-less player, it also produces notions of middle class respectability that differ from the working class Black aesthetics in basketball. Reference to Yao Ming consists of claims to respectable masculinities as well. Yao Ming’s figure is a particular gendered, classed, and raced cultural text.

This discourse of “searching for” and “finding” the next Yao Ming also points to how South Asian American imagine the role of the NBA in India and the role of India in the NBA. By situating India as ripe for the cultivation of such talent, India is seen as fertile ground in need of cultivation by the Western subject—be it the NBA or South Asian Americans. This posits a paternalistic relationship that makes South Asia infantile while ascribing a particular adult masculinity to South Asian Americans. Thus, movement in this case comes out as from the West to the East instead of seeing global flows that complicate linear movement.

Whereas the NBA intrudes into India with the hope of finding an Indian “Yao Ming” within the subcontinent, Indian basketball authorities look both within India and at the large Indian diaspora. As a result, the Basketball Federation of India (BFI) came to New York in 2008 to hold tryouts with the South Asian American communities with hopes of recruiting South Asian Americans to play in the BFI. In addition, a strong women’s basketball circuit materialized in India whereby the feminine South Asian subject articulates multiple subject positions. However, a women’s circuit has yet to take solid form in the North American Indo-Pak Basketball circuit. Movement, in a modernist frame, cannot be seen as the Western ideas
making way to the “Orient” and determining the shape of the Orient but rather as complex structures of unpredictable, uneven global flow.\textsuperscript{6}

\textbf{Contributions and Interventions}

Popular culture presents a paradigm by which to understand an active engagement between communities of color and mainstream US society. Sport, therefore, underscores not only identity formation among South Asian American men through hyper-masculine figures like Michael Jordan but also how such basketball practices expand, disrupt, manage, and reconfigure South Asian America. Whereas cultural centers (Rudrappa 2004), religious institutions (Joshi 2006; Kurien 2002), places of work (Dhingra 2007), and collegiate social organizations (Maira 2002) play instrumental roles in identity formation, sport is implicated at these various institutions and occupies an important place in South Asian America.

To conclude, this research project adds to the literature in Anthropology of Sport by accentuating how cultural practices take place in fields of power at the intersection of gender, race, and sexuality. The ethnographies on sport in the US have elided the presence of South Asian American communities; my work adds to this literature by demonstrating how sport presents instrumental venues for claiming racial, gendered, and sexualized identities in the US. Similarly, whereas the delve into popular culture in the lives of South Asian Americans emphasizes “Bollywood” and “bhangra/dance party scene,” my research situates sporting spaces as a part of the cultural fabric of some South Asian American communities. Sporting spaces of basketball also give valuable information to the performance, materialization, and construction
of South Asian American masculinity—scholarship on South Asian America has not sufficiently studied “Masculinity” as a venue of analysis of South Asian America. Furthermore, this research project adds to the literature on Asian America popular culture by inserting basketball practices of South Asian Americans to understand how “American-ness” is appropriated and constructed by subjects otherwise produced as problematic, abject subjects in the US imaginary. In the process of comprehending these practices of identity formation, other elisions arise. Thus, my scholarship adds to the emerging literature on masculinity in South Asian American studies and demonstrates the contradictions, elisions, and erasures. Such contradictions are not only present in how gender manifests itself in the lives of participants or in theorization of masculinity, contradictions and limitations surface through “experiential ethnography” as methodology.

**Rethinking “Experiential Ethnography”**

My qualitative research project entailed ethnographic research through standard ethnographic practices as well as through “experiential ethnography” (de Garis 1999; Sands 2002). When studying carefully the actions, movements, and comportment of the body, training of the body proves critical to understanding affects linked to gendered identities. However, “experiential ethnography” of this sort contains limitations that Sands (2002) does not account for in his work. Training the body, as Susan Brownell (2001) has demonstrated with such complexity, does not simply correlate to opportunities to train with one’s subjects. There exist limitations to this form of experiential ethnography, limitations of body and limitations of subjectivity.
Training with the participants is a critical enterprise but limited in some ways. Although such “experiential ethnography” illustrates, through engaged bodily participation and training, the values put on the body and the practices of training, this method must also account for the limits of engaged participant participation. A researcher’s own body, knowledge of the sport/activity, and the level of competition pose various challenges to this methodology. For example, in his section on risks, Sands (2002) falls upon racialized logic that situates risk in certain neighborhoods and in the context of drugs and crime. This, however, does not do enough work to interrogate risk as posed by the researcher to the community under study. Sands poses “risk” as something of concern to the research and the researcher’s health. The body and health of the research contains the possibility of risk and detriment to the community of study.

As a person suffering with back problems recently, the risks of experiential ethnography upon my own body and the community of study proved itself on a couple of occasions. Playing physical contests did put a considerable amount of stress on my back and limited the kinds of participation with my subjects on the court during the Asian Ballers tournament in August, 2008 and at various other times during the 2009 research year. However, the risks to the communities of study also proved important to examine. By playing in a physically limited capacity, the researcher has the potential of negatively impacting contests where one’s presence could be detrimental to the success of a team. In addition, this research experience made me meditate upon the question of actual physical risk to other subjects as a result of a researcher’s physical limitation. For example, the researchers active presence in sporting spaces, if in an insufficiently skilled manner without a properly trained body, throws into disorder the movements and actions of others in playing arenas. Bodies not in health corresponding to particular activities and unknowing of sporting etiquette could harm the physical health of other individuals. In
particular, the physicality of basketball play produces opportunities for physical contact and possibility of injury. These injuries, of key sporting personnel, affect not only a certain team but also the family and community of the injured player.

Another issue of concern and interest consisted of actual play and the abilities to take field notes. This critical aspect of ethnographic research is compromised in ways during intense sporting competitions that require myopic focus. While partaking in activities as a full participant, shifting focus to take into consideration the social dynamics at play can jeopardize the team with the researcher on board. Competition requires attention to various moves made by opponents and one’s team members, paying attention to such play allows the researcher to stay true to the team’s goal of winning games. As such, I found it difficult to take mental notes of social configurations and discourses. As a former athlete at the high school and collegiate level, the pleasures of intense competition meant total involvement in the flow of matters in games. Such claims of objectivity and grasping truths in absolute manners prove nefarious. I could not stray from the game at hand, stepping back while in the midst of heated competition to observe puts the team in jeopardy of losing. Therefore, “experiential ethnography” produces valuable information about how to train the body and certain pleasures associated with such training. However, this methodology must be interrogated to make real the problematic structuring of ethnographic practices. As a result, I took myself out of active league participation during the final period of my research in 2009. Accordingly, I could observe the dynamics and discourses as a person removed from the flow of the game. While this research project demonstrated the ways South Asian American men contest and solidify various normative regimes, the particular methodology must also be influenced by a Women of Color Feminism and Queer Diasporic Critique. These theoretical frames allow for an understanding of the limitations of experiential
ethnography as both contest normativities within methodologies and insist upon difference with regard to the researcher and participant.
Appendix A (Cast of Characters)

Team Atlanta Outkasts

1. **Mustafa**: He is captain of Atlanta Outkasts and still the main figurehead for this team. Mustafa’s parents, Amin and Asma, came to the US from Pakistan via Canada—they are part of the major waves of South Asian immigrants to the US through the Family Reunification Act. Mustafa went to a two year college, lives in Duluth, GA (more affordable housing), and works with Information Technology. He also sells used computers on the side as a means to make money. He considers himself a devout Muslim. Mustafa is married to Fatima and has two children, he considers himself to be the children’s path to Islam. Having only one source of income, Mustafa is lower-middle class. He is 35 years old.

2. **Ali**: Ali is the youngest in Mustafa’s family. He did not finish a two year college but had opportunities to do so. Ali got the most training and guidance, institutionally, with basketball. Unlike Mustafa, Ali went to esteemed white public schools. However, he has gone into sales and has also worked as a manager. Ali is married to Susan, a white American, and does not practice Islam with the same dogma as Mustafa. He holds a managerial job that makes him middle-class. He is in his early 30s.

3. **Qamar**: He is the oldest sibling in Mustafa’s family. Qamar did not attend a four year college and lives in Canada. Qamar did not have a passion for sports like Mustafa and Ali, his main passion was going to parties, picking up women, and getting into fights. He is not a self-proclaimed observant Muslim.

4. **Malik**: He is Pakistani Muslim American and has a younger brother, they both were born in the US. Malik’s father is a well-known and affluent businessman in Atlanta and one of the founders of Al-Farooq Masjid. Malik is also one of the original members of Atlanta Outkasts and usually plays with only them. He is a contentious figure who does not get invites to play with other teams other than Atlanta Outkasts. He is 6’2” and also plays football. Unlike Mustafa and Mustafa’s brothers, Malik went to an elite university in Atlanta and is now in the business world. He would be upper-middle class. He is 35 years old.

5. **Ehsanul**: He is one of the original members of Atlanta Outkasts and close friends with Qamar, Mustafa’s oldest brother. Ehsanul played in only the 1994 tournament and would come to support us at other tournaments. His passion was partying. Ehsanul is Buck’s older brother.

6. **Sultan**: He is the second child in a family with four sons. His father, Dr. Said, came in the early 1965 waves and is a doctor. He is upper class and went to a prestigious four year university in Atlanta. He started playing with Atlanta Outkasts since the late 1990s. He is almost 30 years old and is unemployed. Sultan stays with his parents and has not pursued with vigor graduate school or a job. Thus, he struggles for money even though his family is very well off. He is a Pakistani Muslim American. His friends make fun of him because he is very light skinned and mistaken for white.

7. **Mahmoud**: His parents arrived in the US post 1980. He did not attend college but is upper-middle class as a result of his income and not his professional standing. Mahmoud is a Muslim Pakistani American who owns several convenient stores and gas stations. He plays on Atlanta Outkasts.

8. **Ahmed**: He turned 21 years old during the last stage of my research. He played with Atlanta Franchise and is Pakistani Muslim American. His parents moved here after 1980 and own a gas station. He works and is at a two year college. He has played for Atlanta Outkasts and is good friends with Mustafa. His family is lower-middle class.
9. Salim: He is one of the original members of Atlanta Outkasts. He was with the team till 1998. Salim is a Muslim Indian American and is middle class. He is in his early thirties.
10. Bucks: He went to a four year university and played with Atlanta Outkasts from late 1990s on till 2002. Bucks had a fall out with his peers and is not part of that social community, he has been exiled. He struggled financially. He is in his early thirties.
11. Little Sheik: He also went to a four year university and is a middle class person. Little Sheik introduced me to Mustafa and is a Muslim Pakistani American.
12. Kumrain: He is a Pakistani Muslim American who attended a major four year university in Atlanta and is a professional. He is middle class. Kumrain is one of the original members of Atlanta Outkasts and played in just the 1994 tournament.
13. Faisel: He is a very observant and religious Muslim Pakistani American. He is in his mid thirties and is an upper class businessman. Faisel originally played on a religious Muslim team but then started playing with Atlanta Outkasts from 1998 till 2002. He is considered a religious elder in the community. Faisel no longer plays basketball.
16. Riad: He is a Muslim Lebanese American whose parents arrived post 1980. His dad worked at a car dealership and Riad is attending a four year university. Although in his mid 20s, Riad has not been able to finish college as he has had to work. He played high school basketball and played some in college as well. He initially played for Atlanta Franchise and met members of Atlanta Rat Pack and Atlanta Outkasts through Atlanta Franchise.

**Atlanta Rat Pack**

17. Imran: He is the youngest in the family and one of the founders of Atlanta Rat Pack. His father is also Dr. Said. Imran spends time with his older brother, Sultan, but that is only through basketball and video games. He is 21 years old and is finishing up a business degree at a four year university in Atlanta. He also plays football.
18. Mohammed: He is 5 years older than Imran and was good friends with Imran’s brother. Mohammed played on his high school basketball team and is a tall, muscular person. He went to a four year university and is working in the business sector. His parents came in the waves after 1965 and are professionals. He is upper-middle class. Mohammed is a Pakistani Muslim American who was born in the US. Mohammed started up team “Camel Jockeys” when in college and then became a part of Atlanta Rat Pack.
19. Amir: He is a childhood friend of Imran and plays on Atlanta Rat Pack. Amir is also a Pakistani Muslim American and attends university with Imran. He is also 21 years old.
20. Khan: He is a Pakistani Muslim American and joined Atlanta Rat Pack in summer 2009 but has also played with Atlanta Franchise. He is a novice to the game and is the youngest at 19 years old. He was born in the US and his parents came in the early post-1965 immigration waves.
21. Khalid: I first encountered Khalid in 2003 at a 3-on-3 Indo-Pak Basketball tournament. He is older than Imran from Atlanta Rat Pack but younger than Sultan, he is the third born son in that family. Khalid went to a four year university and no longer plays basketball. He is married and involved with business. Khalid is one of the original founders of “Camel Jockeys” along with
Mohammed. Unlike Mohammed, he did not choose to play with Atlanta Rat Pack and his younger brother Imran.

22. Afzal: He is the older brother of Amir from Atlanta Rat Pack. He attended a prestigious four year university and is training to be a professional, he is currently in graduate school. Afzal played for Camel Jockeys and were one of their original team members. He does not live in Atlanta anymore. When he visits, he comes to play in the pick-up games.

23. Kashif: He is in his early twenties and originally played with Rat Pack. Kashif is a Pakistani Muslim American and his parents arrived in Atlanta through the early waves. After Atlanta Rat Pack did not want Kashif on their team, Kashif formed the team “Sand Brothaz.” He is middle class.

24. Rama: He is a Hindu Indian American who is in his early twenties. Rama has known other members of Atlanta Rat Pack through the Indo-Pak Basketball circuit in Atlanta. Rama plays with Atlanta Rat Pack now and is at a state university in Georgia.

25. Sanjeet: He is a Sikh American born in India but family moved to the US in the early 1990s. Sanjeet’s father created his own sales business and is one of the more prominent members of Atlanta’s business community. Sanjeet attended a four year university and has taken up his father’s business. He is upper class and is 28 years old. He founded the team “Air Punjab” and “Hit Squad.”

26. Navreet: He is a Sikh American whose parents came to Atlanta post 1980. Navreet is twenty years old and is in college. He plays for Air Punjab/Hit Squad and attends the same Gurdwara as Sanjeet.

27. Anhad: He is Navreet’s younger brother and is in college at the present moment.

28. Abhijeet: He is a close friend of Sanjeet’s and they attend the same Gurdwara. He is also in his late twenties and plays for Air Punjab/Hit Squad. Abhijeet also attends the pick-up games as he got invited by Sanjeet.

29. Siddiq: He is a Muslim South Asian American and is in his early thirties. He has played with Mustafa in other leagues. Siddiq became acquainted with Sanjeet and plays on Air Punjab.

30. David: He is a good friend of Sanjeet’s and they have known each other for years. David does not have the same middle class background as other Malayalees and is a Christian Malayalee unlike all the Punjabi Sikhs on Air Punjab. He is the same age as Sanjeet.

Team Air Punjab/Hit Squad

31. Khuram: He is a South Asian American Muslim whose parents moved to the US in the 1970s and he was born here. Khuram works in the financial world and plays recreational ball on Mondays and Thursdays.

32. Amit: He is a Hindu Gujarati American born in Georgia and his parents were the early wave of professionals. He is also in the financial world and is upper-middle class. Amit also attended a four year university.

33. Paul: He is one of the founders of the pick-up basketball on Monday nights and Thursday nights. He is a Malayalee Christian American and is upper-middle class.

34. Karthik: He is a Hindu American born to professional parents who were part of the early wave of South Asians to the US post 1965. He is in the financial world and went to a major four year university. Karthik plays recreational ball but used to play in Indo-Pak Basketball and is originally from Tennessee.

Recreation and Pick-Up Basketball
35. **Vivek**: He grew up with Amit and is also Gujarati American. He also attended a four year college and is in his mid twenties. Vivek is upper-middle class.

36. **Joe**: He was born in the US and his parents are part of the early waves. He is a Christian Malayalee American whose mom was a nurse. He is in the financial world and plays recreational basketball. He is upper class.

37. **Daniel**: He is a Malayalee Christian American in his mid thirties. Daniel’s mom was a nurse who first moved to the US before bringing his father. Daniel was born in Atlanta and is in the financial world. His parents are that early wave of South Asian immigrants post 1965. He is upper-middle class. Daniel organizes the pick-up basketball nights. He is married with a child.

38. **Abdul**: He is very close friends with Ali and they grew up spending time together at Al-Farooq Masjid. Abdul is a professional and is upper-middle class. He plays recreational basketball to lose weight. He is in his early thirties and is married with three kids. His father was a professional who arrived through the early waves.

39. **Vincent**: He is one of the white young men who come and play recreational basketball. He is affiliated and works with some of the South Asian American men.

40. **Louis**: This young white man is not affiliated with any of the South Asian American men but is good friends of Vincent. Vincent brings him to play basketball.

41. **Harpreet**: He played against us in the 1994 tournament and grew up here although his parents arrived here in the 1970s. Harpreet attended a prestigious university and is a financial professional. He is upper-middle class and was one of the founders of the pick-up basketball nights. Harpreet is a Sikh American.

42. **Jasphal**: He is a Sikh American and arrived in Atlanta around the same time as Harpreet. He and Harpreet are some of the original founders of the pick-up basketball nights.

43. **Vikram**: Hindu American whose parents arrived in the earlier immigration waves. He attended a four year university and works in the financial world. He is upper-middle class.

44. **Siva**: He is a Hindu American whose parents arrived in the earlier immigration waves. Siva came to pick-up basketball through Daniel, they had met at a gym.

45. **Eugene**: He is a Christian Malayalee American who is in his early twenties. Eugene is Paul’s brother-in-law and has been attending pick-up basketball nights for a while. His parents arrived through the early immigration waves.

46. **Monty**: He is a white American who works in the financial sector with several of the South Asian Americans who play pick-up basketball. As a result, he attends these recreational events.

47. **Mark**: A white American that Daniel and early founders of pick-up basketball have known for some time.

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**Gatekeepers, important persons, and other South Asian Americans in Atlanta and US South:**

48. **Dr. Said**: He arrived through the early professional wave and is a doctor. Dr. Said has four sons—oldest son whose name I do not know, Sultan, Khalid, and Imran. He was one of the founders of the Al-Farooq Masjid and is a well known elder in the Muslim community. They are upper-class and live in an affluent Atlanta suburb.

49. **Madeline Venkatesh**: She played Division I collegiate basketball and has been coaching for numerous years in Atlanta. Madeline was born and grew up in Alabama and her parents are Christian Malayalees who came to the US in the 1970s. Her parents were not professionals like many others who came at that time, her father came to study in the US and get involved with the church.
50. **Sharif**: He is a Muslim South Asian American. His parents came through the early waves and was born in the US. Sharif is a professional with undergraduate and graduate school training. He is upper-middle class and is his mid thirties.

51. **Mr. Mathew**: He is one of the original Indo-Pak grocers in Atlanta and his shop is one of the biggest in the US. Mr. Mathew is a Christian Malayalee American who arrived in the US after 1980 and is upper-class. He is one of the gatekeepers for the Malayalee community in Atlanta.

52. **Asif**: He grew up with Southeast Asian Americans in Gwinnett County and plays with the Southeast Asian American basketball teams in the Asian Ballers League. He is a Pakistani Muslim American and knows Mustafa well. Asif played with Atlanta Outkasts in a tournament or two but his loyalty was to his Southeast Asian American friends. He did not attend college and is in his early twenties.

53. **Prashuad**: He is from the Caribbean and part of the Indian diaspora in the Caribbean. Prashuad considers himself Caribbean and not “Indian.” He played with Asif’s team but did not talk to the South Asian Americans at the gym.

54. **V Patel**: He played with an all Gujarati team at the Chattanooga Asian tournament. V Patel’s parents arrived in the US after 1980 and they own motels and hotels. He is upper-class.

55. **Yasmin**: She is an African American Muslim from Atlanta with a four year university degree. Yasmin is very active with Muslim youth and social justice. I was introduced to her through a Muslim South Asian American friend.

56. **Abda**: Mustafa’s daughter.

57. **Asma**: She is Mustafa’s mother and a key figure in the Muslim community. Asma is very active in the Muslim community and a religious person. She attended most tournaments and supported her sons.

58. **Amin**: He is Mustafa’s father and an engineer who arrived after 1980. Amin played field hockey competitively back in Pakistan and has nurtured sport for his sons.

59. **Kdol**: He is a Cambodian American who grew up in the US and played high school basketball. Kdol saw a need for an Asian American basketball space and put together the Asian Ballers basketball circuit. He did not attend college but aspires to coach.

60. **Guneet**: Female Punjabi Sikh American spectator at an Indo-Pak Basketball tournament in Atlanta. She was 18 years old.

61. **Duncan**: One of Ali’s closest friends and is a middle class African American. Duncan plays professional basketball overseas and is trying to play with a NBA team.

62. **Fatima**: Mustafa’s wife and was married to Mustafa when only 18 years old. She did not attend college and does not work.

63. **Kavi**: He is a Hindu convert to Islam and very active in the social justice circles. Kavi works with Muslim youth and issues of suicide, abuse, and depression. He also teaches at a two year college in Atlanta and wants to pursue graduate school.

64. **Susan**: She is Ali’s wife and attended a four year university. Susan is white and Christian. She is in her late twenties and works.

65. **Bill**: He is Susan’s younger brother and Ali’s brother-in-law. He is currently in college.

66. **Jahm**: He is an Ismaeli Muslim South Asian American. Jahm is from India and works out. He is a formidable physical figure.

67. **Maria**: She is Daniel’s wife. Daniel is one of the founders of pick-up basketball. Maria is a Christian Malayalee American.

68. **Suleiman**: His parents arrived in the US post 1980. He is a Muslim South Asian American and founded team “Atlanta Franchise.” He attends college presently and is in his early twenties.
Organizers, Players, and Persons from the Chicago IPN Tournament

69. Max: He is the founder of Indo-Pak Basketball in Chicago in 1989. Max is a Christian Malayalee American. He is a professional who has attended a four year university system. He grew up in Chicago and is upper-middle class. He is 40 years old. He plays for Chicago Untouchables.

70. Rathi: She is Max’s wife and the product of a Punjabi and Malayalee union. Her parental household practiced both Christianity and Hinduism. She is a professional with years of academic training as well. She is a product of the post-1965 waves of professionals, her mom was a nurse.

71. Charles: He has played for Chicago Untouchables but also started playing for other teams such as Chicago Domenators. He is a Christian Malayalee who was born in Chicago and is in his mid 20s. He went to a four year college and is a professional.

72. Abid: He is Pakistani Muslim American and plays for Chicago Pak-Attack which is an all Muslim team. Abid has grown up in Chicago and played only for Pak-Attack.

73. Tariq: He played for Chicago Pak-Attack for several years. He did his graduate degree at a major university and is middle class. He is a Muslim Bangladeshi American.

74. Usman: He attends a major four year university in Atlanta and is a Pakistani Muslim American. Usman originates out of Chicago and played with Chicago Pak-Attack. While in Atlanta for college, he played with Atlanta Rat Pack during the 2009 Asian Ballers League.

75. K-Rock: He is a Hindu American in his early twenties. He played Division II collegiate basketball in the US and plays on an East Coast team for the Chicago IPN.

76. Pukh: He is a Sikh American in his late twenties and is middle-class. He went to a four year university and grew up in the US. Pukh originally played in Sikh leagues in the US and Canada before playing at the Chicago IPN. He plays for the original NJ/Cali Soormay Franchise.

77. Sanjay: He is a Punjabi American who attended a four year institution and is middle class. Sanjay has played in Indo-Pak Basketball for some time and plays with a team from California.

78. Vijay: He is a Jain American who grew up in Houston. He plays for a Houston Indo-Pak Basketball team that has Hindus, Jains, and Christians.

79. Aadil: He is the founder of the DC Indo-Pak Basketball tournament that has taken shape since 1999. Aadil is a Muslim South Asian American who is upper class and lives in Maryland. He is also the organizer, captain, and coach for team “Maryland Five Pillars”. He is 36 years old.

80. Aafiya: He is the younger brother of Aadil and is their on-court captain. Aafiya is a teacher and coach at the high school level.

81. Krush: He is a Hindu American who original played for Maryland Cobras which eventually disbanded and joined up with Maryland Five Pillars. He is middle class and works for the US state. Krush is pursuing graduate school now.

82. Sean: He is a Christian Malayalee American and close friends with the original members of Maryland Five Pillars. Sean played with them till the 2006 Chicago IPN when tensions and demand for playing time created a rift between Sean and his team.

83. Jake: He is one of the primary organizers of Chicago IPN and has known Max and Rathi for many years. He volunteers his time and invests in the tournament. Jake is white American and in his early forties.

84. John: He is a Christian Malayalee American who lives in Dallas and is a professional. His parents were part of the early wave of South Asians to the US. John put in place the Dallas Indo-Pak Basketball tournament and is active in expanding the Indo-Pak sporting community in the US.

85. Andrew: He is a Christian Malayalee American and captain of team “New York Balloholics.” His team took part in the 2006 Chicago IPN and have traveled to other Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments.
86. **Parambir**: He is a Punjabi Sikh Canadian who played Division I collegiate basketball in the US. Parambir is considered a South Asian masculine hero for many of the participants.
Appendix B (Program for Al-Farooq Masjid Quarterly Symposium)

AL-FAROOQ MASJID OF ATLANTA
QUARTERLY SYMPOSIUM
SPEAKING OF ISLAM
WHAT MUSLIMS AND NON-MUSLIMS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT ISLAM

Sunday April 18th, 2010
10:00 am to 4:00 pm

The Basics:
How to talk about beliefs and practices of a Muslim

(Presenting the fundamental beliefs and practices of everyday Muslims in a concise understandable language promoting the understanding of Islam as a comprehensive way of life.)

Mufti X - 10:15 am – 10:45 am
(Imam: Masjid Abdul, Graduate of Deoband)
Moderator: Mufti X

Misconceptions about Islam
Moderator: Dr. Said

(Common misconceptions about Islam tend to negatively impact the image of Islam as a religion of equality, peace and dignity for all mankind. The speakers will present the actual Islamic teachings on these most commonly misrepresented topics and enable everyday Muslims to address these issues in a polite dignified manner.)

Status of Women in Islam
Sister X - 10:50am – 11:20am
(Renowned Speaker on Women in Islam)

Jihad
Dr. Qasmi - 11:25am – 11:55am
(Professor of Political Science Georgia State University)
Terrorism
Mufti Farooq - 12:00pm – 12:30pm
(Imam: Al-Farooq Masjid, Graduate of Deoband)

Status of Jesus in Islam
Dr. Sajid - 12:35pm – 1:05pm
(Educator at Al-Farooq Masjid)

Break: Lunch & Salah
1:05pm – 2.20pm

Islam in America (Discussing the diversity of Muslims of the world and its reflection in the American Muslim population.)
Imam Saleh - 2:20pm to 2:50pm
(Graduate in Islamic Studies Abu Noor University)
Moderator: Dr. Hakeem

Commonly asked Questions about Islam – An interactive Session
(A workshop on how to answer the most commonly asked questions by visitors to the Masjid. A “must know” for every Muslim.)
Amin X and Dr. Said - 2:50pm – 4:00pm
(Amin X: Asst. Dir. Masjid Omar Bin Abdul Aziz, Member Board of Directors Islamic Speakers Bureau)
(Dr. Said: Dir. Education and Outreach/Interfaith Programs, Al-Farooq Masjid)
Panel: Bilal Mahmud, Mufti Farooq, Mufti X and Dr. Hakeem and Dr. Qasmi
Appendix C (*Wall Street Journal* Article on Spelling Bee)

Winning Bees Spells Glory for Indian Kids on the Ethnic Circuit

South Asian Program Churns Out Champs; One on One With Shaquille O'Neal

By JEAN GUERRERO

LOS ANGELES—Eleven-year-old Sivateja Tangirala leaned into a microphone, spelled out the word D-I-A-T-R-I-B-E and earned his shot at fame.

Sivateja and his family had driven seven hours from Chandler, Ariz., to participate in the Los Angeles regional championship of the South Asian Spelling Bee last month. The cutthroat competition is a stepping stone to the national South Asian Spelling Bee, where children of immigrants from India and neighboring countries do battle by spelling out words such as osphresis and biloculine.

After dominating national spelling bees, South Asian Americans have started their own leagues. At the regional South Asian Spelling Bee in Los Angeles, children competed for a chance to move on to the finals. WSJ's Jean Guerrero reports.

"I wanted to win this so badly," he told television cameras during a post-bee interview, clutching his winner's plaque, adorned with a bumblebee, to his chest.

American kids from all walks of life like a good spelling bee. But for thousands of Indian and South Asian children in the U.S., spelling, not soccer or basketball, has become the game of choice.

Competitions catering just to South Asians have sprung up across the country, some with big-name sponsors and hefty cash prizes. Spelling bees are carried live on Indian-theme satellite stations and are covered by Indian newspapers.

In Sivateja's family, top Indian spellers are household names. His whole family gathers around the television to watch the annual Scripps National Spelling Bee, the nation's most established competition, which attracts kids of all backgrounds. They also record it so they can watch it again.

"It's basically like watching the Lakers play," Sivateja says. "If one of our favorites gets out, we get a little depressed."

Among his idols are Sameer Mishra and Kavya Shivashankar, two recent Scripps winners. "I really like their techniques," he says.
Though Indian-Americans make up a mere 1% of the population, they have come to dominate the American spelling-bee circuit. Eight of the past 12 Scripps champions have been of Indian descent—including the last three in a row.

Sivateja Tangirala

"The winners of spelling bees are like Nobel laureates," says Upendra Mishra, publisher of India New England, an ethnic bimonthly based in Waltham, Mass. "This is what it is equal to."

He says his paper is ramping up coverage of the South Asian Spelling Bee this year, covering various regional competitions leading up to the finals on Aug. 14, in North Brunswick, N.J.

The 2002 documentary "Spellbound," which followed eight teenagers as they prepared for and took part in the 1999 bee, helped put Indian dominance on the map. That year, the $40,000 grand prize went to Nupur Lala, an Indian-American girl who correctly spelled "logorrhea" in the final round.

In the coming season of the ABC reality TV show "Shaq vs.," in which Shaquille O'Neal challenges top athletes at their own sports, the winner of last year's Scripps National Spelling Bee, 14-year-old Kavya Shivashankar, will be shown competing in a spell-off against Mr. O'Neal in the fall.

For all their success, Indian-Americans have only recently become the masters of competitive spelling.

In 1989, Ratnam Chitturi, founder of the nonprofit North South Foundation, which stages regional and national academic contests for Indian-American children, noticed that in standardized tests Indian-Americans were consistently performing above average in every subject but English.

He set out to change that by creating a spelling bee pitched just to Indian-Americans. The first competition was held in 1993, and it has since spread to 75 locations throughout the country. Today, about 3,000 children, ranging from 1st to 8th grade, participate each year.

When Ms. Lala won the Scripps bee in 1999, tales of her bravado, fanned by the Internet, quickly spread through the Indian-American community.

Rahul Walia, an advertising executive who lives in New Jersey, was watching the Scripps National on TV that year. The success of the South Asian participants caught his eye, and he sensed a business opportunity. He launched the South Asian Spelling Bee in 2008, figuring that allowing South Asian kids to go head to head would make it extra competitive.

Because "South Asian kids are stereotyped as being nerdy and geeky and you know, always studying," he says, the bee would be a way "to vent out in an almost sport-like manner."
Sivateja Tangirala, 11, wins first place at the Los Angeles regional of the South Asian Spelling Bee.

About 400 kids under 14 compete at the nine regional South Asian Spelling Bees. At the finals, the winner claims a $10,000 grand prize.

Companies such as insurer MetLife Inc. and Indian travel site Yatra.com help underwrite the competition.

While the kids prepare, MetLife gives their parents a presentation about financial planning for college. At the Los Angeles regional, parents took notes and raised their hands to ask questions.

John Derbick, assistant vice president at Global Brand & Marketing Services for Metlife, says the company decided to sponsor the bee after its research indicated how much Indian-Americans value education. And parents are enthusiasts of the approach.

"Our tendency is if we detect something that could lead them to excel, we keep pushing them and pushing them in that direction," says Radha Subrahmanyan, the mother of Mayank Ganesan, who competed but did not place in the San Francisco regional of the South Asian Spelling Bee.
Appendix D (Figures 1-7)

Figure 1: http://www.dhs.gov/files/immigration.shtm
Figure 3: http://www.dhs.gov/files/immigration.shtm
Figure 4: http://www.dhs.gov/files/immigration.shtm
Figure 6:

**New India Recreational Basketball League**

**FIVE ON FIVE LEAGUE IN INDIA**
The National Basketball Association (NBA) and the Mahindra Group, one of India’s largest and most respected companies, announced a partnership to launch a new multi-city community-based recreational basketball league.

The new league for boys and girls ages 14 and up will tip off in Bangalore, Ludhiana and Mumbai in collaboration with the Basketball Federation of India (BFI).

The league starts on 17th April and registration is limited so, sign-up now!

**Sign-up | Press Release**

![NBA Challenge Logo](image)

E-mail photo|Buy photos

The National Basketball Association and the Mahindra Group, one of India’s largest and most respected companies, announced a partnership to launch a new multi-city community-based recreational basketball league.
Howard on a Mission to Promote the NBA Across India

Posted: Thursday, August 12, 2010 11:47 ET
By Scott Stanchak, NBA.com India

Spread the word. That’s the mission Dwight Howard is on right now. He just happens to be doing it nearly 8,000 miles away from his home in Orlando, Fla. The four-time NBA All-Star is on a five-day ambassadorship visit to India, helping promote the NBA and even offer some on-court advice. In a phone interview from Delhi, Howard spoke about expanding the NBA and basketball globally and the potential for growth in India.

How were you approached by the NBA regarding this ambassadorship trip to India?

“My assistant asked if I wanted to go to India. I was like ‘yea, of course.’ I always wanted to go. So I’m here.”

In your opinion, how well received is the NBA in that country right now?

“It’s crazy. I’m surprised by the big fanbase we have here. I just got out to the lobby and there are a lot of fans around and a lot of people waiting to take pictures. It’s great here.”

Is that crazy to go somewhere so far away from the United States and people still recognize you?

“It is. It’s very crazy. It’s something that basketball players wish could happen one day, to go across the globe and people all the way across the world recognize you. It’s a blessing and an honor to be here. It’s an honor to be one of the guys that’s recognized.”

Is the NBA fanbase there larger or less than you expected?

“I didn’t know what to expect to be honest with you. I’ve been to China a bunch of times and every time I went there I kind of knew what it was going to be like. I didn’t know what it was
going to be like here. I was just shocked to see how everything has been going so far.”

**What was it like training with India’s Senior Men’s National Team?**

“Oh, man. It was great. Just teaching those guys and trying to help them so they’ll continue to grow as good players. It was a lot of fun.”

**You also had the opportunity to show off your coaching skills with a clinic there. Do you think you’ll be bringing any tips back for Coach Van Gundy?**

“I’ll let coach do his job, but I feel I do a pretty good job training kids and working out guys and trying to motive them so that they can play better. It’s a good opportunity for me.”

**What type of questions are they asking you as a coach?**

“They were asking basic questions: How to position themselves on defense to get rebounds and how to guard bigger guys. They were all really very good questions that at first I didn’t know if they were going to ask. They just asked a lot of really good questions, including how to block a shot and get around bigger opponents.”

**You arrived in India from China. That was a country in the last decade that has had a boom in NBA fans. Do you see that as a possible scenario in India?**

“I do. That’s the goal here is to do that. We understand it’s going to take a lot of time. It’s barely the number-four sport here right now. This is a long-term goal by the NBA, and I’m just happy to be a part of it.”

**Cricket is the number-one sport in India. Have you been able to try your skills at it while there?**

“No, I haven’t gotten the chance to play. I would actually try to play it though. It seems like a very cool sport.”
Introduction Endnotes:

1 His emphasis.
2 In lines with Naber (2008), I do not consider 9/11 as a “starting point” of racialization but rather a turning point in how everyday individuals and the state engaged with racialized discourses.
3 Therefore, popular culture, through basketball sub-cultural practices, is a terrain of identity formation, struggle, domination, and contradictions (Lipsitz 1990: 16-17).
4 Carrington (1998: 32) underscores “meaning as produced in the very process of reading cultural texts [rituals], rather than it being an inherent element of texts themselves.”
5 “Culture always contains within it polyvalent, potentially contestable messages, images, and actions.” (Kingfisher 2002: 14)
6 To tease out these contradictions, this research project situates South Asian American masculinity in a particular social, economic, and historical matrix with careful attention to not essentialize South Asian America. The “in process” (Hall 2003) elements of identity formation and its incompleteness (Clifford 1986; Nayak 2006: 413) work alongside multiple contradictions that I aim to illuminate.

Chapter 1 Endnotes:

1 It is a site of many contradictions through which dialectical relations of power surface, it also centers consumerism and “consumer desire” as critical to human existence (Lipsitz 1990: vii).
2 Sport is “an arena in which the complex interplay between ethnicity, ‘race,’ nation, culture, and identity in different social environments is most publicly articulated.” (Ansari 2004: 29)
3 Fink (2004) and Tarasawa (2009) highlight the growing numbers of Latinos in the US South. Tarasawa’s work on race and education is an important text to see how educational systems work with the shifting racial demographics. Furthermore, Tarasawa also admits that the growing Asian American population is still dwarfed by the increasing Latino presence.
4 Pringle (2006: 268) states, “Sport ‘cannot be understood purely as conformity or rebellion’ (Lenskyi 1994) but that it may act ‘as a contradictory and complex medium for masculinity making’ (Fitzclarence and Hickey 2001).”
5 Cultural practices take place in differential fields of power (Brown 2006; Bourdieu 2001; Connell 1995) whereby sets of exclusions appear.
6 Abelmann and Lie (1995) examine how the various quotidian activities of Korean Americans enter their observational gaze once gatekeepers are established.
7 “People understand the world narratively, through the stories they tell themselves and others about their experiences, and the cultural stories that are told about them.” (Bruce 1998: 8)
8 Found in Bolin and Granskog (2003: 12).
9 The discourse on the body emphasizes the “body as subject in dynamic interaction with the world (Merleau-Ponty, 316).” Bodies are “intersubjective fields” that interact with others in a shared historical context. “The sporting body exemplifies many of Bourdieu’s conceptual ideas around how the body acts as a mediating entity, linking individuals to the broader socio-spatial processes of power, reproduction, and change.” (Brown 2006: 163)
10 “Pick-up” basketball consists of loose recreational play at gyms. Some gyms require signing up on a sheet to play while others have players pick teams. It often has a structure of play dictated by the number of people present and the facilities present. For example, I have played full-court 5-on-5 with my informants while at other times it has been limited to 2-on-2. It does not always take place with individuals and participants that either my subjects or I know.
11 See Dworkin (2003) and de Garis (2000) with regards to the gendering of physical activity centers and the meanings attributed to particular physicalities.
12 Gramuck (2001) provides a compelling examination of how masculinity is conjured for youth through baseball; she looks with detail at how those spectators play a key role in the ritualistic elements of organized sport. Carter (2008) does incredible work on Cuban baseball fans and how ideas of Cuba and Cubanidad are imagined.
Jermaine Dupri’s song “Welcome to Atlanta” also features Atlanta hip hop artist and actor Ludacris.  

Key persons involved with the Olympic movement in Atlanta included former Mayor/ambassador Andy Young, media mogul Ted Turner, and corporate leader Billy Payne. I speculate that Andy Young served as the symbolic force and figurehead by which the Olympic games campaign could re-imagine the South. Andy Young’s role in the Civil Rights Movement and close associate of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. put him in a strategic role to sell the South as the new South.  


This team took this name at the April 4th, 2009 Asian tournament.  

Upon examination of Homeland Security database, one finds an increase in South Asian immigration to the US through the Family Reunification Act; Mr. Mathew came through this act as his brother-in-law lived here in the US.  

It is a Hindi term to mean “of the country.” Maira (2002) and Prashad (2000) discuss in depth the origins of this term and how it plays out with social relations and the US imaginary.  

Malik, member of Atlanta Outkasts, also grew up in Doraville. During an interview with Sultan, one of late additions to Atlanta Outkasts in the late 1990s, he informed me that South Asian American men living in or near Doraville would meet at the Doraville Arena to compete with a multi-racial demographic. Sultan also emphasized that Doraville in the early 1990s started changing from a mostly white community to a multi-ethnic community.  

See December 14th, 1995 issue of the Atlanta Journal Constitution.  

See Atlanta Regional Commission website for more information.  

Atlanta Journal Constitution reported on Pakistanis in Atlanta in their December 28th, 2007 issue stating: “Atlanta's Pakistani community is estimated between 12,000 and 15,000 with many living in Lawrenceville, Decatur, Lilburn, Norcross and Marietta. About 4,850 Pakistanis in the metro area's 10-county region are foreign born.”  

I do not maintain the confidentiality of this person as his name is on public record and was located in a major newspaper archive.  

See Atlanta Journal Constitution March 11th, 2004 issue.  


Dudrah (2005) highlights the experience of South Asian Brits facing the scrutiny of racialized policy and terrorist discourses at airports, it is one heightened source of surveillance. Naber (2008:2) also posits the airport as one of the key arenas for state surveillance.  

See May 24th, 2002 issue of the Atlanta Journal Constitution.  


Gopinath (2007: 161) states, “This discursive hypervisibility of South Asian women’s bodies starkly contrast the literal effacement and invisibilization of South Asian men’s bodies as they are increasingly being ‘disappeared’ by the state.”  

As this person’s information is public record and there is a social movement emerging for his freedom, I post his information in full for social justice. One can find more information at www.freeshifa.com. Movement to End Israeli Apartheid (MEIA) posted this information about him on 12/11/2009 : “Ehsanul “Shifa” Sadequee is an American born US citizen kidnapped from Bangladesh at 19 and detained unconstitutionally in solitary confinement since 2006. He has been subjected to a physical assault to his head, denied medical care, and has suffered psychological abuse at the federal prison in Atlanta, GA. Shifa endured punishment and torture for over 1100 days (3 years) in solitary confinement before the trial began. For a long period, Shifa was denied access to information on the charges or evidence against him. The so-called “evidence” used to convict him consisted of on-line chats, visiting & taping tourist sites, and translating and publishing scholarly religious texts from Arabic to English. His First Amendment rights to religious beliefs, translation and publication of scholarly and academic literature, free speech, and debates have been violated. Shifa Sadequee was convicted on August 12 on four counts of conspiracy and attempt to provide material support to foreign terrorist organizations. The evidence is flimsy and the laws are all based on “pre-emptive prosecution” to convict people before a crime has been committed. This case is part of a larger strategy from the Bush era of targeting Muslims for detention and discrimination – through policies of torture,
illegal wiretapping and detentions throughout the U.S. and at Guantanamo. We must work together in this new era of hope to end these unjust policies and to remember individuals like Shifa who are still suffering the consequences.”

19 See http://www.ice.gov/pi/dro/facilities/stewart.htm for more information. See also www.businessofdetention.com and http://theleastofthese-film.com/

20 See Atlanta Journal Constitution July 19th, 2007 issue, October 13th, 2005 issue, as well as various articles on the ACLU website concerning civil rights issues concerning the operation and conduction of “operation meth merchant.”

21 At a South Asians for Unity meeting, I met with a Sikh American elder who shared the concerns of his Sikh community who considered putting a banner on their Stone Mountain Gurdwara stating “we are not Muslims.” This Sikh elder objected to this point of difference and told me that his congregation worked towards rather helping their South Asian compatriots. South Asians for Unity is an organization of mostly elder South Asian Americans who were part of the early immigration waves to Atlanta in the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. Their conversations, when I participated in their meetings in 2002, often involved discussions about the Pakistani-Indian conflict and often framed issues in Muslim-Hindu binary opposition.

22 Mustafa, one of the Muslim Atlanta Indo-Pak Basketball player, and his brother, Ali, played cricket only a couple of times, according to them, at the local mosque with elders. In addition, Mustafa’s dad told me that he played field hockey at a national level back in Pakistan.

23 Although players alluded to the skepticism their parents have with young men playing basketball beyond high school and college years (seeing it as specific to a stage of life), these young men incorporate basketball in the pedestrian events and spectacular rituals.

24 This information came from an activist organization in Atlanta called “Movement to End Israeli Apartheid-Georgia” (MEIA Georgia), they organized to support this local mosque.

25 These quotes come from MEIA and their archiving of quotes from TV news from the local CBS station as well as the Gwinnett Daily Post newspaper.

26 Malayalees are an ethnic group from the Southwestern state of Kerala in India. They speak Malayalam which is part of the Dravidian Language Family. There are Hindu and Christian Malayalee Americans in my study but the majority of Malayalee Americans in Indo-Pak Basketball are Christian.

27 Max is a product of parents of Evangelic and Church of South India religious background. He married Rathi whose dad is Hindu but mom is a Malayalee Syrian Orthodox (known as Jackobite).

28 Rathi, Max’s spouse, states, “Max’s dad is Evangelic and Mom is CSI, but the family predominantly practices the Evangelic side. My dad is Hindu and my mom is Syrian Orthodox (Jackobite). We attend an American contemporary non-denominational church.”

29 Dallas hosts one of the big four Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments. The organizer of the Dallas tournament is also a Malayalee Christian American like Max. The other sites for national Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments are Washington, DC (it is specifically in Maryland close to DC) and California (San Francisco). One other tournament takes place in early summer in Vancouver, British Columbia.

30 Jainism is a branch of Hinduism concentrated mainly in India and have their religious principles centered on non-violence and vegetarianism.

31 In the late 1960s and even early 1970s, the mosques in Atlanta were primarily African American. Of these, there exist mainstream African American Muslims and Nation of Islam African American Muslims. When I visited the mosque in LaGrange, Georgia (population 25,000), the African American Imam told me that the mosque and Muslim community had been there since 1975. This Imam now had a congregation that was no longer mostly African American but rather a large number of South Asian Muslims who now worked in the expanding industrial park in LaGrange.

32 Highway 285 loops around Atlanta; OTP (outside the perimeter), common vernacular in Atlanta, referred to places of white flight and hostile to people of color that could be physically located outside the Highway 285 perimeter loop. Kruse (2005) illustrates the creation of Atlanta suburbs and white flight that made such areas outside Highway 285 hostile to African American communities.

33 This became the first international mosque and Dr. Said estimated that membership comes from Muslims from 45 different countries.

34 This was Dr. Said’s emphasis.
The new mosque houses a clinic, an academy for pre-Kindergarten to eight grade, a cemetery, School of Quranic memorization (there is a computer-based home schooling component to this as well), and a self-contained brother mosque known as Omar Masjid (it is a neighborhood mosque while Al-Farooq Masjid is the central mosque). Al-Farooq’s expansion is also tied to the demographic and architectural changes made to the area surrounding Georgia Institute of Technology for the 1996 Olympic Games. As ACOG and city authorities demolished the public housing and made invisible the poor black occupants around that area with the building of a consumer haven in Atlantic station, elders at Al-Farooq Masjid had wanted to keep their new facility modest but pressure from within and outside the Muslim community to keep the architecture in lines with the decadent surroundings of Atlanta station led to the creation of this grand facility. It has three levels and the minarets can be seen from the main highway as one drives through Atlanta on Highway 75/Highway 85. One of the members of Atlanta Outkasts bragged about how much the mosque has changed and grown. He took pleasure in telling me that one could spot it from the highway.

There are, according to Dr. Said, over 40 different mosques that are neighborhood specific and also ethnically specific as a result of location and residential patterns.

See http://www.hindutempleofatlanta.org/ for more information, this website provided me with this historical data.
See http://www.ambajiusa.org/ for information about this temple.
Sikhs are a religious minority in India who have faced state persecution, most also identity as ethnically “Punjabi” since they come from the state/region of Punjab. The Sikh diaspora has a long history in North America; see Axel (2001), Leonard (1992), and Prashad (2000) for more information.
Sanjeet emphasized that they stayed in Atlanta because “Atlanta was booming in 1995 because the Olympics were coming.”
Membership does take place along class lines in Indo-Pak Basketball as well as along other categories. Like organizations whose financial dues limit membership, the cost of playing in Indo-Pak Basketball tournaments can restrict access to all South Asians. Dhingra (2007) illuminates the economic differences within the category of South Asian America; he states that 10% of South Asian Americans live in poverty which is higher than that of whites. This restriction due to capital constraints operates both on the North American Indo-Pak Basketball circuit and the local Atlanta South Asian American basketball scene. For the Chicago IPN, teams travelled from cities across North America; their costs included airfare, hotel, food, and fees for post-game parties at local dance clubs. Some teams received waivers while local Chicago teams had to pay the tournament fees: $500. Sean, a member of Maryland Five Pillars, did not have this kind of disposable income and thus managed to play through financial assistance from team-mates. In Atlanta, the leagues cost $550 per team while the local tournaments cost $250. In addition, the pick-up basketball nights required a fee of $5 for every week. For Mahmoud, the demands of the workday limited basketball activities. The same proved true for Ahmed whose work hours constrained his ability to play basketball more frequently. Such time and money for basketball also brought about discontent from spouses: Mustafa’s wife and Daniel’s wife both expressed their dissatisfaction with the sporting activities of their partners and said that these activities put a toll on their respective relationships.
This is also a pseudonym.
3-on-3 basketball reconfigures the space of basketball games by limiting it to participation by two teams of three. Instead of using an entire court, only one goal (half court) is used. It is not often regulated with the same stringent sets of rules and play as 5-on5 organized basketball.
Considered a tournament with lesser talent and players with little knowledge of basketball etiquette (hard fouls and danger to one’s physical body), members of Atlanta Rat Pack did not attend this tournament. Instead, they went on to play a 5-on-5 Asian Ballers tournament. Only Sanjeet and Abhijeet from Air Punjab played at this 3-on-3 tournament, no other Indo-Pak Basketball teams from Atlanta chose to play in this Muslim tournament.
My emphasis.
Sanjeet’s emphasis.
Sikhs are an ethno-religious minority who were persecuted in India and there is a large Sikh diaspora in Canada and the US. There is a Sikh presence in Atlanta with five different Sikh places of worship (Gurdwaras). These forms of discipline and surveillance creatively weaved into South Asian American appropriation of basketball cultural practices are met by various points of resistance. Sanjeet iterated,
“I thought it was a little inappropriate to talk that much about their [sic] religion, especially since there were a lot of younger kids' there that were not Muslim. I don’t [sic] think their [sic] parent's knew that they would do that so they should have at least [sic] respected that. What they should have done is do it separately not in the middle of the gym and have all the games stopped so that everybody has to listen. I did learn a little bit about Islam and actually made my belief in my religion that much stronger.”

A religious session embedded in basketball language served to only augment Sanjeet’s embodiment of a Sikh masculinity. To add, Sanjeet also remarked that he will have pleasure encouraging his infant daughter to “play basketball and other sports as she grows up.” These moments provide spaces for players to rework and to add their own valences, pleasures, and desires to these events.

49 See Manalansan (2003), Shah (2001), and Gopinath (2005), I use their understanding of queer as not just simplistic means to identify homosexual identities and practices. Rather, in line with their use, I use “queer” as anti-normalizing practices and identities that question heteronormative practices. In addition, I use “queer” to interrogate and question practices and identities sustained as normal. It is a move against normativities.

50 This is Sharif’s emphasis.

51 Roy (1998: 171) states, “We [South Asian American queers] need smaller groups for the personal support and larger groups for the political muscle.”

52 He offered details that the when Sharif’s father passed away that that was the only time he saw “people like Sharif” in such great numbers at a Muslim ritual. This became a means to assert Muslim spaces as frequented by heteronormative subjects excepted on rare occasions.

53 Sharif also alluded to Raksha, a South Asian Women’s domestic abuse shelter, as a useful ally for LGBTQ South Asian Americans.

54 His emphasis.

Chapter 2 Endnotes:


2 The binary of "India" and "Pakistan" in addition to "Hindu" and "Muslim" are rethought through the team formations in Indo-Pak Basketball.

3 Popular culture “is an arena where diverse groups find common ground while still acknowledging important difference.” (Lipsitz 1990: 157)

4 Although two Toronto teams attended Chicago IPN in 2006 and 2008, points of difference are accentuated with specifically Vancouver in mind.

5 Leonard (1992) does detail the mostly Punjabi communities that settled in California in the early 1900s and the ways this community has sustained. However, those Indo-Pak Basketball players and teams I met at Chicago IPN are not products of the inter-racial Punjabi-Mexican communities in California.

6 Another point of difference relates to affects, desires, and pleasures of nostalgia. Whereas my Hindu American and Christian South Asian American informants spoke of visits back to the “homeland”—India in this case, this process does not transpire or contain the same valences for all Indo-Pak Basketball players. Muslim Indo-Pak Basketball players did not talk with the same affect and tone about Pakistan, India, or Bangladesh. As a result of increased state surveillance through a state sponsored “war on terror,” these Muslim players do not have the same mobility to travel. According to Maira (2002), “Notions of ethnic authenticity and performances of nostalgia…always relate to the material experiences of immigrant communities and particular moments in time.” (9) Muslim players in Atlanta rarely mentioned trips back to South Asia; Mustafa discussed an upcoming trip to Pakistan in November 2009 by his daughter—her second time—and said, “Abda’s been to Pakistan more times than me.”

7 “Panth” is a term used to reference “community.”

8 I encountered the Vancouver team as a player with Atlanta Outkasts at the Chicago IPN in 1998 but have not met with them during the course of my research thus not providing any more detail about them other than through player narratives. They won the Chicago IPN in 1998 and their name was "Donkey Riders." This team was named as one of the greatest teams during the 2008 Chicago IPN.
Punjabi is part of the Indo-European language family and stretches from parts of Pakistan to north India. It is spoken predominantly in the Indian state of Punjab. This language is also a term of ethnic identification as those speaking Punjabi are known as Punjabis.

Whannel (2007: 10) argues, “Sport has the appearance of being that which unites men; yet it is also a practice that divides men.”

Sanjeet’s emphasis.

Such distinctions led to tensions whereby a fist fight at an Athens, Georgia, social club spilled over into the basketball courts during a game in the “Asian Ballers League.” When Air Punjab and Sand Brothaz met the day after the fight on May 10th, 2009, parents of Navreet and his brother showed up to make sure fights would not breakout again. Sanjeet put it succinctly, “Parents know their kids.”

Sanjeet answered in a survey about household income and one’s class status that his family had a household income over $500,000 and that he considered himself upper class.

While shooting baskets and warming up, these respective groups would still cross over and talk, greet, and exchange pleasantries with each other. Although envisioning themselves as “South Asian Americans” and “desis,” the camaraderie on the court did not always translate to the same kind of socializing after games. For example, when Ali lost his job in early 2009 as a result of the adverse economic climate and company buyout, I asked him if he had spoken to Monday night pick-up players about job opportunities. He simply said, “desis don’t hook you up.”

Diesel is used to talk about muscular men; it can also be a point of self reference. For example, Shaquille O’Neal is a well known professional basketball player who is 7’2” tall and weighs over 300 pounds—he calls himself “Diesel.”

At that point they had not taken on the team name “Atlanta Outkasts.”

Muslim Student Association (MSA) and Pakistani Association did not exist at Emory University in the early to mid 1990s when Kumrain and Little Sheik attended Emory University. Thus, the hegemony of India and Hindu consumed Muslim Pakistani American bodies into this Indian cultural organization.

I am a Christian South Asian American originally from South India. Lower castes and “outcastes” were often the original converts to Christianity in India.

As a result of post-9/11 hysteria, an expired green card led to Bucks’ older brother being deported back to Pakistan and thus have not had the opportunity to get family histories of Bucks or his brother. Bucks, struggling financially, according to Mustafa, made choices that have alienated him from other Outkasts members. I could not reach Bucks either to get an interview.

However, after the 1994 Greenville Indo-Pak Basketball tournament, Little Sheik and Kumrain no longer played or were asked to play with Atlanta Outkasts.

Faisel now attends Abdullah Masjid in Gwinnett County as it proves closer to his work and home. Mustafa also attends Abdullah Masjid when near the Masjid during praying times.

Whereas his older brothers, Mustafa and Qamar would attend parties and go to dance clubs, Ali would stay and home and he just worked on his basketball skills on their home basketball goal.

In particular, at Ali’s Muslim wedding rituals, none of the members of Atlanta Outkasts were asked to stand in as witnesses for the wedding in order to valorize it. At this point, Sultan looked at me and said, “Always an outkast.” He then proceeded to laugh.

These are counties with the biggest populations in Metro Atlanta and seen as containing more of the affluent members of Atlanta’s citizenry. They are given meanings very differently from Gwinnett County that is seen as poor and multi-racial.

College, as mentioned by most of my subjects, was a key point of co-ethnic socialization and intimacy. Abelmann (2009) explores the instrumental role of college in identity formation, struggle, and lived experiences of Korean American college students.

Mustafa would not socialize with these young men of Rat Pack in spaces other than that of basketball except for two occasions—a dinner I hosted and one Friday night of pick-up games at Imran’s house. Over the span of three summers of ethnographic research in 2006, 2007, and 2008, in addition to research from January 2009 till August 2009, Mustafa, Imran, and Amir interacted in other social spaces just these two times. In addition, through Mustafa’s recommendation, Atlanta Rat Pack would include other young men whom they would not have otherwise included such as Ahmed and me.

The Washington, DC and Maryland Indo-Pak Basketball team, known as the Maryland Five Pillars, points to an immigration history different from the new immigration waves. Calling themselves the Five Pillars and using the
imagery of the former NBA team, the Washington Bullets, indexes a knowledge and appreciation of a team that has disappeared from the NBA milieu. The Washington Bullets were replaced by the Washington Wizards on May 15th, 1997 and recent South Asian immigrants would not necessarily know this fact. Maryland Five Pillars inserts into mainstream ideas of masculinity and cool by reconfiguring the image of the Washington Bullets to stress their Muslim identity and sensibilities. "Five Pillars" references the five major tenets of Islam. Furthermore, their jerseys contain the dark green to underscore Muslim aesthetics.

In addition to former Maryland Cobras, several mainly Hindu teams exist in the North American Indo-Pak Basketball circuit. California Bad Boyz consists mostly of Gujarati Hindu Americans from the San Francisco Bay area. Likewise, California Shockwaves also has Punjabi Hindu Americans on their team. Other than quick interviews with Bad Boyz and Shockwaves, there is limited information on these teams.

Other young Muslim South Asian American men played with Mustafa in tournaments but not as Atlanta Outkasts. One such person was Asif who played with an Asian American team composed of mostly Southeast Asian Americans—mainly Filipino and Vietnamese Americans—who lived in Gwinnett County. Although Asif talked with and maintained cordiality with all members of Atlanta Outkasts and Atlanta Rat Pack before Asian Ballers league games and before tournaments, he chose to play with this Southeast Asian American team. When asked about why Asif does not play with Outkasts or Rat Pack, Mustafa said that Asif identifies as Muslim but chooses to play with the Southeast Asian American team because "Asif grew up with all of them in Lawrenceville, Gwinnett County." Similarly, Prashuad also played with this team as a result of close ties to the Filipino Americans and Vietnamese Americans on the team. Prashuad did not identify as South Asian but rather as Carribbean since he grew up in the Caribbean—his parents are linked to the South Asian diaspora in the Caribbean (see Khan 2004). Identifying as Caribbean did not prevent Prashuad from playing in the Asian Ballers League that limits play to those claiming ancestry in Asia. Prashuad did not know anyone from Air Punjab, Sand Brotz, or Atlanta Rat Pack nor did he establish any close ties with these groups except for Asif.

Through surveys and interviews I gathered information pertaining to whom Indo-Pak players idolized, the names listed are just the main names of NBA stars mentioned by respondents.

This works against Agarwal’s (1991) claims that the second generation lack role models.

Ali expressed his discontent with racializing discourses during the interview on May 30th, 2009: "I was letdown not getting offers from big Division I programs…I went to all-star camps and played against Vincent Yarbrough, Saul Smith, pro players like Shane Battier and Jared Jeffries…I got an offer from Piedmont College and I was killing them during a scrimmage."

Rai (2003) and Mannur (2003) underscore the internet as a key site to understanding how "locality" (Appadurai 1996) materializes apart from actual physical territory; locality emerges in the semantic framing of "community" on websites.

See Halberstam (1998) for a discussion of how masculinity, as a social construction, should not be seen as embedded in male bodies but rather as a shifting social identification. Halberstam demonstrates how masculinity is taken up in complex ways by women.

See Brown (2006) and Butler (1993) for a discussion of utilizing binaries of masculinity and femininity without complicating these terms only reinforce the gender order and limit social relations.

Chapter 3 Endnotes:

1 Desi is a South Asian term to refer to "native," "Country man," or those of the country." See Agarwal (1991), Maira (2002), or Prashad (2000) for more details.

2 I use Rick Bonus’s definition of location as “the position of an individual or group in a particular condition in a given time and space, and against historical structural forces that have left their marks on that condition.” (2000: 10)

3 I use South Asian and South Asian American while my subjects utilize the term "desi." I use South Asian American as a way not to directly reference religion or nation and allow for alliances that cross national boundaries. See Shukla (1995).
Harpreet answered some of my questions in person in an interview and others through e-mail. He gave this response back over e-mail and put his own emphasis through capitalizing.

Sean is an IPB player of South Asian origin; the non South Asian spectator is currently dating Sean.

The sports network, ESPN, hosts this Spelling Bee contest and this was one of the few images of South Asians and sport other than a story on two Indian army men who were trying to make it on the Major League Baseball roster as pitchers. The Spelling Bee contest only plays into consolidating a masculinity linked with model minority status that overemphasizes academic gifts. It overemphasizes the “brain” in opposition to the overemphasis of “brawn” with African Americans (see Andrews 2000; Burdsey 2007; George 1992; King and Springwood 2001). Neither of these masculine figures are seen as compatible with a normative white US masculinity.

See Castles and Davidson 2000 for a discussion of citizenship and manners in which it is gendered.

Shukla (2003) provides a compelling examination of place-making and spatialization of South Asian-ness across nations and diasporas. She shows how identity is not fixed in territory. However, whereas Shukla emphasizes South Asian-ness through her examination of diasporic spaces, I look at how South Asian America is spatialized.


Whannel (2007) stresses the link between masculinity and morality determined, in this case, through ideas of middle class respectability. This is a disciplining regime limiting the participation of certain others.

Jim is a white American who has known Max and Rathi for years and helps each year with organizing the officiating crew.

"With words, a massive physical presence is fashioned into a meaningful human universe.” (Basso, Page 40)

See Gopinath (2007, 2005), Abraham (2000), Rudrappa (2004), and Dasgupta (2007) for work on how a South Asian femininity is made synonymous with tradition and culture. This is itself a disciplining regime.

See Rai (2002) for work on the internet as a key site of constructing and imagining communities.

Therefore, “Identity emerges as a dynamic process without primordial fixity.” (Bahri and Vasudeva 1999: 1)

Burdsey (2007) and Kaur and Kalra (1996), like Khandelwal (2002), offer an analysis of South Asian Brits that rings similar undertones to South Asian American community formation in Indo-Pak Basketball:

new identities are underpinned by a plethora of factors that transcend ethnic, cultural, generational and national boundaries...a growing ‘imagined’ distance between their lives in Britain and their relationship to the subcontinent; the influence of Western commodities and new patterns of consumption; and a desire to construct a multilateral social identity that simultaneously emphasizes their British citizenship, ethnicities and multiple identities as ‘Asian,’ ‘Bangladeshi,’ ‘Punjabi,’ or ‘Hindu.’ (Burdsey 2007: 98)

Fezzell (2003: 33) notes, “Perhaps the aesthetic element plays an important role in the fan’s love of the game...In the world of the aesthetic object we are taken up by an alternative context of meaning and significance, so much so that these very involvements seem to give us not only a momentary reprieve from the ordinary world, they also help give sense to our lives.”

Consumptive practices of these nylon jerseys required capital not always available or preferable to some players. Instead of getting professionally made jerseys to depict team pride, some teams would make jerseys of their own out of cotton t-shirts. Accordingly, players would then write on their team name and their playing number with permanent marker on the front and back of the t-shirt. These shirts do not carry the same weight in “cool” as the professionally made jerseys. In order to add style and stress masculinity through muscularity, Imran, Amir, and Mustafa cut off the sleeves on their red t-shirts to showcase their muscular shoulders and arms.

LeBron James is one of the main images of the NBA alongside Kobe Bryant, both these young African American men are iconic figures with great mass audience appeal. Mohammed described how much he appreciated LeBron James’s basketball play.

Kobe Bryant is an African American basketball player who has gained star status in the NBA. He plays for the Los Angeles Lakers; Nike shoe company has made a version of basketball shoes that market Bryant’s iconicity.

One of the aides to Rama—an incarnation of God—in the Hindu epic, Ramayana, and is in the form of a monkey-man.
However, it is important to account for those men within this South Asian American community who chose not to use body ink—this itself represents a political (non) marker of identity. Particularly, Muslim South Asian Americans don the clothing, the slang, and other items associated with urban cool but refrain from tattooing. Rather, refusal to use tattoos signals a foregrounding of Muslim respectability and difference within South Asian America.  

Masculinity is not just what people have but rather what people do with the resources available to them (Whitehead and Barrett 2001: 18).

Fans are critical in appropriating and producing meanings to these spectacles.

See Bonus’s (2000) examination of the possibilities for identity formation through ethnic spaces, he underscores not vocal articulations of identity.

The Atlanta Journal Constitution, Atlanta’s major newspaper, used news coverage that situated South Asian Americans in the Multicultural matrix as sterile “exotic” others through a hyper-publication of culture shows, South Asian restaurants, and South Asian festivities. This was juxtaposed with “honor killings” that conjured up images of the dangerous, uncontrollable Muslim man.

Asian Ballers is a league organized through members of the Cambodian and Vietnamese American community in Atlanta that has incorporated other Asian Americans, including South Asian Americans. Asian Ballers league takes place throughout the year and is for any persons of Asian heritage including multi-racial individuals. They also hold a national tournament in August for the entire country. Organizers of the Asian Ballers National Tournament have tried to reach out to the large Asian American basketball community in California and Hawaii but have not been successful in enticing them to appear at the national tournament in Atlanta.

Rama is a Hindu American who plays in the Asian Ballers league with Atlanta Rat Pack and also goes to a couple of tournaments with Rat Pack.

Malone (1996) explores black cultural forms and their persistence as texts—dance and music are two such cultural forms.

Court vision consists of the ability to chart out a play before it has even materialized. Those players with considerable basketball experience are known to have greater court vision. This also involves not looking at the ball while dribbling but rather the control of the ball by which to continue looking up to pass and shoot without worrying about losing control of the ball.

These identities are always caught and form at the intersections of class, gender, sexuality, and race.

It is through masculinity that men construct their sexuality and, through that sexuality, confirm their gender identity.” (Fracher and Kimmel 1998)

See Maira (2002: 60-62) for a description of how the homosocial bands of knowledge shared in masculine subcultures of the dance/party scene affirm ideas of masculinity.

This club, “Club Opera,” also was one of the clubs in Midtown Atlanta with a large population of South Asian Americans. Dance clubs in this area of Atlanta had greater numbers of South Asian Americans than places that were simply bars for socializing and drinking without dancing.

Such heteronormative spaces always present other readings and queer possibilities. Gopinath (2005) describes the means in which to reread these social venues and allow for other subjectivities. I was limited in the abilities to contest these spaces but hope that contesting such normative practices and making them visible as social constructions can foreground a queer methodology.

In his ethnographic project, May (2007) illustrates the link between an athletic, aggressive masculinity and a propensity to covet sexual favors from young women. May’s subjects underscored sexual acts and the ability to secure sex as badges of masculinity. Furthermore, “masculinity is marked by physical aggression and heterosexuality.” (May 2007: 108-109)

The Club Opera, like most other clubs, requires that its patrons be 21 years old or older. Clubs that accept patrons who are 18 years old and not yet 21 do not permit underage drinking.

There are discourses present here that situate and interpellate a Latina subjectivity with a hyper-heterosexuality as objects of sexual desire.

In conjunction with such acts and discourses, Ahmed would not leave Mustafa’s or my side to talk to women without including us. This also proved the case for Mustafa. When asked about such a practice, Ahmed said calmly and simply, “homeboys before hoes.” The close physical quarters here differed from the production of physical
space and its corresponding meanings in other spaces. For example, on January 25th, 2009, Mustafa and I went to watch a movie and no other male peer could join us. Upon purchasing the tickets, we entered the theatre to watch a science fiction movie “Underworld: Rise of the Lycans”. With few patrons there, seats presented themselves to us without a fear of not finding a space. Mustafa and I had a row to ourselves. However, instead of sitting seat to seat, Mustafa chose to sit with an empty seat separating us in a dark movie theatre. In this case, the social space between two men would have to be produced and lengthened to maintain a particular heterosexuality. The absurdness of two men attending a movie together could also produce ideas of homosexuality that were displaced by the presence of an extra seat.

41 See Brown (2006: 171-172) for an examination of certain body movements are gendered and made coherent with particular gendered cultural artifacts such as clothing and language.
42 The actual bodies in play, their movements, and their social context are key sites for the workings of discourse of masculinity and its relevant power structures (Foucault 1983; Pringle 2006).
43 Women attend these strip clubs, Mustafa and I noticed two African American women who were customers and not dancers. However, the majority of patrons were men. I do not aim to silence the voices of female customers but have not had the opportunity to interview them as time and social context did not permit that.
44 Mustafa also admitted that his wife would also join his on occasions to strip clubs, he emphasized that her initial skepticism led to eventual pleasures with this kind of leisure, “she loves it but won’t tell people about it.” At this moment, Mustafa also made it clear that his wife maintained a particular South Asian American Muslim femininity by partaking in these pleasures free from the presence of other South Asian American community members. Mustafa did not have to worry about such acts as they only reinforced his South Asian American masculinity by making such practices as commonsensical and normal. Whereas those South Asian Americans like Daniel and Joe who had a strong grasp on their Middle Class identities, professional jobs, and consumer patterns preferred strip clubs that spatialized white aesthetics and featured mainly white exotic dancers such as the “Pink Pony,” Mustafa chose those businesses with mostly African American and some Latina dancers (the majority of the clientele were also people of color—mostly Latinos and African American men).
45 Since Ali, a Pakistani Muslim American with parents very active in the local Atlanta Muslim community, was marrying Susan, a white Christian American, they had separate Muslim and Christian festivities. Like other luminal stages (see Turner 1969), this can be an unpredictable position with the possibilities of sexual intimacy and sexual encounters alien to the current relation.
46 These were young men who Mustafa said owned gas stations and took part in the underground economy as well. He referenced these young men as different from the young men deemed “model minority” as they were not educated professionals. Mustafa also mentioned that the leader of this crew had been affiliated with The Islamic Brotherhood (TIB) at one point.
47 Similarly, claiming such currency as men also emerged in relation to the urban vernacular and hip hop linguistic terms where the term “make it rain” gains currency.
48 A “lap dance” is a private dance in which the dancer does the “bump” and “grind” for the client while removing her own items of clothing—this is called a “strip tease.” She can also make intimate physical contact with the client on any part of the client’s body.
49 See Klein (1994) for work on masculinity and body building.
50 “Nigga” references other South Asian American men for Abdul, Ali, and Mustafa; it did not reference African American men.
51 The “3 strikes” rule would have applied to Sanjeet 4 times over but his father’s influential role in the community provided a sanctuary for Sanjeet from criminal prosecution.
52 These masculinities while vying for a position as hegemonic masculinities are also stigmatized masculinities (see Connell 1995). The members of TIB are discursively produced as “Fresh Off the Boat” (FOB) and thus outside a normative US masculinity. Furthermore, the class position of TIB as detailed by some of my interlocutors positions members of TIB as working class and outside the parameters of “model minority.”

Chapter 4 Endnotes:
I refer to Manalansan (2001) in this use of “queer.” Manalansan (2001: 224) states, “I also use ‘queer’ both as an anti-normative signifier as well as a social category produced through the ‘intersectionality’ of identities, practices, and institutions.”

“Spectacles contain within them discourse of power that effect, reverse, intensify, and reinforce relations within the same spectacle.” (Carter 2008: 70)

Affective politics are embedded in fields of power and dislocates various others (Fernandez 2000; Lutz 1998).

The production of South Asian American femininities make impossible the queer female South Asian subject (Gopinath 2005).

Madeleine emphasized that she did not socialize with other South Asian Americans other than her older and younger brother in addition to her parents. She also mentioned that she interacted with whites in many spaces while with African Americans in mostly sporting spaces.

“An ambiguously classifiable femininity is seen as dangerous because it disrupts the categories of pure or contaminated identity that are used to circumscribe the ethnic community and define cultural tradition.” (Maira 2002: 184)

See Dasdupta (2007) and Rudrappa (2004) for analysis of domestic abuse in South Asian American communities, they also interrogate immigration law that genders immigration as masculine.

See Gopinath (2005), Abraham (2000), Rudrappa (2004), and Dasdupta (2007) for an analysis of how South Asian femininity is imagined with regard to South Asian-ness. They argue that South Asian femininity is a contained category whereby women are asked to problematically represent culture.

Ali put ethno-religious characteristics to nation but labeling the Muslim ceremonies as Pakistani and the Christian ceremonies as “American.” Such a trope showcases how Ali imagines the confluence of religion with “nation”. In addition, labeling Christian as “American” is a very useful manner to look at how cultural contours shape, explicitly and implicitly, the formation of “Nation” and how it is lived by religious others. Joshi (2006) provides an examination of the religious basis of US nationhood and how religious others, specifically Muslims and Hindus, then navigate this cultural terrain.

Williams (1977: 132-133) states, “Different spaces and times were always associated with different structures of feeling—or ‘meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt’ as ‘inalienable elements of a social material process.’”

See Maira (2002: 123-124) for a description of the particular uses of traditional garb to parlay in ideas of “Indian-ness” always in dialogue with ideas of South Asian femininity. She also traces the movement of such ideologies and requirements across various social spaces.

In this instance where dancing is coded as heterosexual and require opposite sex partnerships, Sharif expressed joy with the music by dancing with himself and older white gentlemen who did not know his sexual identity.

Mustafa’s wife took control of the dance floor at the “shaadi,” Mustafa even took time to mention to me, “She is the best desi dancer; people know how good she is.”

Kingfisher (2002: 25) discusses how the idea of femininity associated with poverty interpellates the subject of the feminine as “disorder, emotion, irrationality, need, lack, desire, and passion.”

Khandelwal (2002: 146-147) looks at the proliferation of South Asian American organizations and spaces that complicate generational differences across age and immigration waves.

Guneet added the emphasis.

I admit that these acts of agency are always constrained by structural force.

Jake is a person of white descent who has known Max and Rathi for quite a while. Jake and Rathi were the main organizers at the 2006 and 2008 Chicago IPN. Charles also played an instrumental role in the 2006 Chicago IPN.

There are also very interesting different points in which some participants support queer politics. For example, Vikram, who played pick-up basketball a couple of times, posted on his Instant Messenger page “Mississippi sucks” with a link to the article where a Lesbian student was not given access to the mainstream heterosexual prom. See news from April 6th, 2010. Vikram pointed to this website: http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ondeadline/post/2010/04/miss-lesbian-attends--fake-prom-as-classmates-party-in-secret/1
In this way, Vikram shows his disdain for the explicit homophobic politics prevalent in this Mississippi town.

Chapter 5 Endnotes:

1 This idea came through a conversation with Prof. Junaid Rana.
2 Roediger (2005: 7) warns scholars to not overemphasize narratives of assimilation into Whiteness for ethnic white immigrants but rather how their practices produce a white American identity.
3 See Patricia Williams (1997) for more information on ascription of race in relation to aspiration of race. Roediger (2008) also addresses Williams’ examination of ascription vs. aspiration.
4 Shah, in Contagious Divides, also delves with the construction of bachelors societies discursively with a “queer domesticity” controlled borders nationally and locally whereby maintaining and managing Asians in San Francisco. In the 2005 piece, Shah explores the construction of a perverse South Asian American masculinity through policing processes and legal discourse.
5 Koshy discusses the anti-miscegenation laws and policies as means of disciplining and surveillance of the citizen and non–citizen simultaneously. Furthermore, Koshy goes into description of Asians and South Asians in relation to anti-miscegenation policies.
6 South Asian men in the US have been produced in US history as “forever foreign” (Prashad 2000) and recalcitrant masculine subjects (Ahmed 2002; Puar 2007; Puar and Rai 2004). Racial designation as “Hindoo” came about through the formation of bachelor societies in the late 1800s and early 1900s of mostly Punjabi Sikh and Punjabi Muslims (Chan 1991; Leonard 1992). As racial “Hindoos,” South Asians were subjected to disciplining regimes that produced them as national outsiders. The “Hindoo” in “public discourse was racialized as backward and unassimilable” (Gupta 2006: 32).
7 At one point, South Asians were considered “white” on census data.
8 This Chicago Indo-Pak team wears a replica Chicago Bulls jersey. Furthermore, the number 23, Michael Jordan’s uniform number, is frequently seen on almost every team. In addition, the number 23 now also signifies LeBron James whose popularity has grown tremendously.
9 Page (1999) notes the difference between Jordan’s embraceable form and that of Craig Hodges (Jordan’s teammate during the early championship run and social justice activist).
10 Hooks states (1994: 133): “This has been especially the case for black male bodies whose radical political agency is often diffused by a process of commodification that strips those bodies of dignity…Black male capitulation to neo-colonial white supremacist patriarchal commodification signals the loss of political agency, the absence of radical politics.” My emphasis.
11 My emphasis.
12 McCarthy (2005: 384) would argue that this is a form of “racialized consumption.”
13 Prof. Junaid Rana provided this commentary during a class with him where he urged me to think of how scholars must not reproduce Blackness as monolithic. Prof. Rana also added that we must not theorize Blackness in its entirety as easily accessible and consumed in full through certain aesthetic qualities.
14 “Black male sporting body has now attained equal prominence in the degree to which it has become sexualized and transformed into an object of desire and envy.” (Carrington 2002: 20)
15 This is a term of South Asian origin and used mostly commonly by Hindi and Urdu speakers. It has become a commonplace term in South Asian America with subjects who linguistic heritage is not Hindi or Urdu.
16 See Burdsey (2007) for a thorough examination of mixed racial heritage players in the UK whose “authenticity” is questioned through paradigms of “racial difference.”
17 Whiteness emerges institutionally through access to these tournaments and not being questioned in the same way that African Americans and Blacks face such questions.
18 Whereas skin tone would be the point of differentiation in South Asia, “Kallu” replicates racial differences that do not concern skin tone but rather revive racial science and racial differences. My emphasis.
19 In addition, Daniel’s use of “friends” points to social intimacy with white communities to a greater extent than African American communities. This proved true as most of the non South Asian Americans playing basketball on Monday and Thursday pick-up were white.
Max, founder of Chicago IPN, has always shown a commitment to philanthropic support of the local Boys and Girls Club. In particular, Max acknowledges the history of active sporting engagement with communities of color and provides IPN as a means to give back to communities of color. At the 20th year celebration, Max brought in the African American elder at the local Boys and Girls Club whom Max worked with and also who played an active role in Max’s development. However, the engagement, lack thereof, by the larger South Asian American audience shows the limitations to a political and cultural blackness.

This answer was provided in an e-mail from Mohammed.

Brooks (2009: 48) emphasizes the difference in the various leagues in the city of Philadelphia and how certain leagues, with greater prestige and exposure, focus on team play while ascribing less value to individual play. In other leagues, “There is potential for great recognition and embarrassment in front of the people whom participants know and care about. All of this leads to flashy play and exaggerated behavior, highlighting individual efforts and abilities rather than team goals.” This individual type of play is classified by Mohammed as “Kallu style of ball.”

South Asian linguistic terms were also used to racially mark other racial groups in addition to “Kallu” for African Americans. While playing in the Asian Ballers league and playing in Asian American tournaments, Mustafa would refer to Asians and Asian Americans as “chapte’.” When asked about the meaning, he said, “It means Asian.” He then took a few minutes to think it through and laughed at the inaccuracy of his previous statement. Mustafa then said it also means “slanty-eyed” and accepted that it carried derogatory potential.

Most of the scholarship on the US South elides the presence of Asian American and South Asian American communities, rather there is an emphasis on the African American and white residents (Baylor 1989; Kruse 2005). Only recently has scholarship taken up other communities of color but this has mostly been on Latino communities (Fink 2004). Dhingra (2007), Gibson (1988), and Joshi (2006) have studied the South Asian American communities in the South with only Joshi adding research on Atlanta.

I use political economy to reference access—access in this sense stands for access to capital, social, financial, political, and cultural resources.

Although the federal mandate to integrate all facilities after the 1954 landmark case of Brown vs. Board of Education, local state governments and local city governments integrated at their own pace. LaGrange College had a plaque, now no longer in existence, which affirmed 1991 as the year of full integration. One social justice activist in LaGrange informed me that the Callaway family did not want any part in the integration plan. Supposedly, when asking elder Callaway about segregation, he responded, “I don’t believe in segregation. I believe in slavery.” In accordance with this narrative, these segregated facilities were given to LaGrange College whereupon the college integrated the facilities.

Kelley (1997) addresses the diminishing free play structure as well as organized play in poor, urban centers throughout the US. Playgrounds and public parks are quickly disappearing and thus there is competition for the few sources of play.

See Venkatesh (2009) for an examination of the underground economy of the poor African American community.

Furthermore, as described in detail later in this chapter, those South Asian Americans discursively produced as “Black” contest racializing discourses linking “Blackness” with natural athleticism through rigorous practice, working out, and extensive labor of time.

Boyd (1997) addresses how “N-word” was re-appropriated as a term to speak to difference while contesting certain normativities—middle class respectability and whiteness.

I use “Black” instead of African American since these young men were Africans as well as African Americans.

Boyd (1997) states “The bad nigger embodied the notion of resistance at the highest level as his presence defied all acceptable norms, behavior, decorum, and existence.” (126)

Chapter 6 Endnotes:

1 See Brown (2006) for an explanation of utilizing masculinity shores up the gender binary. Hartmann (2003) shows how racial formation through sport can also solidify racial orders.

2 Max, Rathi, Charles, and Jake were the main organizers of the Chicago 2006 IPN. In 2008, the main Chicago IPN organizers consisted of Max, Rathi, Jake, and a few younger South Asian Americans from other Chicago Indo-Pak teams.
At the 2008 tournament, alumni of the Indo-Pak Basketball scene provided sponsorships of out of state teams. In addition, the Punjabi Cultural Center of Chicago provided funding for the Sikh teams coming to the 2006 Chicago IPN.

My emphasis.

The Mahindra group and the US National Basketball Association (NBA) on Tuesday announced a partnership to set up a basketball league for teenagers in India.

The Mahindra NBA Challenge League, meant to nurture players in the 14-18 age group, will start off in Bangalore, Ludhiana and Mumbai and will run for seven weeks every year. The league is being set up in collaboration with the Basketball Federation of India (BFI).

In a cricket-loving nation such as India, we feel it is important to encourage other sports as well and we believe basketball is perfectly suited to bring communities together and promote healthy active lifestyles to the Indian youth, said Anand Mahindra, vice-chairman and managing director of Mahindra & Mahindra.

The Mahindra NBA Challenge will provide basketball enthusiasts and newcomers to the game the opportunity to learn the fundamentals of the game and apply their skills in a fun, competitive environment, said Heidi Ueberroth, president, NBA International.

Over the years, M&M has encouraged various kinds of sports including owning the Mahindra United football club in Mumbai.

Mr Mahindra was unwilling to reveal the investment figure but said that a sizeable investment was being made. The association with NBA will also have a spill-over effect for M&Ms products and brand at a later stage, Mr Mahindra e said. M&M intends to make basketball the number 2 sport in India.

'The NBA is a wonderful brand. Not only does it combine the attributes that Mahindra brand stands forspeed, agility, endurance, staminabut it also stands for a sport that takes communities from a variety of section of societies. Its an inexpensive sport, it doesnt take much area to create, so you can galvanise the sport at a grassroot level and you can do that by giving youth a chance to build self esteem apart from their fitness,' said Mr Mahindra.

The BFI, Mahindra and NBA share a long term commitment to growing the game in India and to using the values of our game to make a positive, lasting impact in Indian communities, said David Stern, NBA, Commissioner. The NBA, founded in 1946 is a professional sports league and a global business that features 30 teams in the US and Canada. During the 2009-10 season, the NBA games will reach 215 countries and territories in 41 languages.

See Said (1981) and Prashad (2000) for their examinations of the various ways in which “Orientalism” took shape in Europe in contrast to its emergence in the US.

Clifford (1984), Abu-Lughod (1991), and Gupta and Ferguson (1997) question the idea of a single truth and the absoluteness of social analysis. As such experiential ethnography involves certain types of commitment to play that do not allow for a distance as researcher.
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