

# Eagles Flying Together: An Examination of Boston College, Its Basketball Team, and Social Identity

Author: Daniel Duquette

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**Eagles Flying Together:**  
*An Examination of Boston College, Its Basketball Team, and Social Identity*

**By Dan Duquette**

**A Senior Honors Thesis Submitted to the  
Department of Communication  
Of Boston College**

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*To Dr. Marilyn Matelski and Dr. Susan Michalczyk  
for believing in me when others didn't*

*To Steve Donahue and Dick Kelley  
for making it easy to be a BC basketball fan*

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	ii
<b>Abstract</b>	iv
<b>Chapter I</b>	
Introduction	1
<i>Thesis Statement</i>	2
<i>Review of Literature</i>	3
<i>Methodology</i>	6
<b>Chapter II</b>	
The Boston College Way	9
<b>Chapter III</b>	
The BC Kid	16
<b>Chapter IV</b>	
Sports In Its Place	22
<b>Chapter V</b>	
Creating Relationships	27
<b>Chapter VI</b>	
Discussion: Defining Success	38
<b>Chapter VII</b>	
Conclusion	42
<b>Works Cited</b>	45

**Abstract**

*Every college basketball team competes at the highest level, and has goals both on and off the court. But how often do those goals align themselves with the university that the team is affiliated with? This thesis examines the relationship that the Boston College men's basketball team has with the University through the lens of social identity. Through library research, participant observation, and one-on-one interviews with individuals around the team and the university, a pattern of the relationship emerged. By focusing on doing things the Boston College way, recruiting a "BC type of kid," keeping sports in its place, and by creating relationships with different publics outside of the team, the men's basketball team strives to align itself with the university's social identity. This thesis will map out what this unique interaction entails and attempt to provide a comprehensive look of the social identity of the men's basketball team and how it relates to the social identity of Boston College.*

## **Introduction**

This season at Boston College marked a turning point for the men's basketball team. After a disappointing campaign in 2009, the school parted ways with longtime head coach Al Skinner and began a search for a new coach. It would not be an easy task to replace Skinner, who left the program as the all-time winningest coach in Boston College history.

The coach chosen to replace Skinner was Steve Donahue. Fresh off a postseason berth and a trip to the Sweet Sixteen in the NCAA Championship tournament as the Cornell University head coach, he was heralded as a breath of fresh air for a program in need of new leadership. With the new coaching staff in place, the season began with low expectations: Boston College was picked in a pre-season media poll to finish 10<sup>th</sup> in their league, the Atlantic Coast Conference (TheACC.com, 2010).

An early loss to lowly Yale University in the team's second game fed into those expectations, but then the team began to gain momentum. The Eagles won seven games in a row to jump out to a 10-2 record, and eventually improved to 3-0 in conference play. The remainder of the season was an up and down affair, with the team struggling against top opponents and ending the regular season with a record of nineteen wins and eleven losses, with their league record standing at 9-7. Exceeding those pre-season expectations set for the team by the media, the Eagles finished the year in fifth place of the ACC standings.

With a postseason berth in the NCAA tournament still possible, the Eagles traveled to Greensboro, North Carolina looking to cement a place in the so-called "Big Dance." They lost in the second round of the league tournament, and found themselves

on the outside looking in at a chance to play for a national title. After an upset loss in the second round of the National Invitational Tournament (NIT), the Eagles ended their season with a final record of twenty-one wins and thirteen losses. It was, all in all, a decently successful season.

Every college basketball team has an institution behind it, and Boston College is no different. For every minute played, every tournament entered, every game won and lost, the basketball team represented not only the team of Boston College Eagles, but the institution of Boston College as well.

Or did it? How similar are the identities of what it means to be from Boston College, and what it means to be a member of the Boston College basketball team? Is there an overlap between the social identity of the university and the basketball team?

This thesis set out to determine the social identity of the Boston College basketball team, and how well it relates to the social identity of the institution of Boston College. Through library research, individual interviews, and participant observation, this thesis will map out how the social identity of the basketball team relates to that of the school. Four dominant themes were found through research, and each will be explored to provide a complete picture of what it means to be a part of the men's basketball team at Boston College.

### **Thesis Statement**

This study of the Boston College's men's basketball team aims to discover the link between the school's social identity and that of the team's. I will study how closely

the two align themselves and how the team fits into the school's vision for what it means to be a part of the university.

I would expect the university to focus on its academic achievements as a point of pride and distinction when comparing it to other institutions. Boston College has recently focused on the education that it provides for all students, as well as specifically the high graduation rate it attains for its student-athletes.

Similarly, I expect the team to focus on its mix of athletic and academic achievements, but focus predominantly on its success on the court. While this season had mixed results from a winning standpoint, I expect to hear promises of success in the future, and athletic achievement as a focus above all else.

## **Review of Literature**

### *Social Identity Theory*

An individual's social identity is, in a sense, the way that they define themselves by who they spend their time with. Developed first by Henri Tajfel and then later refined by other scholars, it is the way that an individual interacts with a group of people and then how they value that relationship (Tajfel, 1974; Hooper, 1976; Suke, 2009).

However, an important distinction of social identity is that it only becomes an important issue when other groups are present. When an individual creates his or her own social identity, they do it by comparing the groups he or she is a part of (an "ingroup") with the other groups that they are not members of (an "outgroup") (Tajfel, 1974; Tarrant, et. al. 2001). By sorting through their associations, people make judgments about themselves and the way that they present themselves to the outside world. We choose



which groups we associate ourselves with and consider ourselves members of those groups and hold those memberships up to other groups and their members to form a cohesive identity. A member of a high school football team may not necessarily consider himself a jock when at a team practice, but in a math classroom surrounded by members of the chess club, that identity might become more important to him. He is more likely to have a shared view of his group membership and identity after being reminded of his group membership (Haslem, 1999).

However, certain limitations apply to this identity. According to Ashforth (1989), simply accepting a social role does not necessarily mean that an individual agrees with everything the group stands for. But this is to some extent a matter of degrees. A member of the in-group will see the distinction of their decisions with respect to the others with higher clarity and difference than a member of an out-group will looking in on the group.

And when groups are more noticeably distinct, they are more likely to view each other negatively (Ashforth, 1989). Similarly, when constantly recognized as a part of a certain group, its members become more cohesive in their actions and may find themselves acting in a way more fitting members than non-members (Adler & Adler, 1987). In a sense, they may become a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy walking the path of actions laid out for them by the expectations of those in the out-group.

### *SIT in Athletics*

In the athletic realm, there has been some study on social identities of athletes, particularly at the college level. Most notably, Adler & Adler (1987) studied the social identity of a college basketball team over the course of four years, focusing on the role

that academics played in the players' social identities. They found that, among other things, the players were viewed as athletes over all else and their other competing identities were marginalized. In the struggle to balance academics, athletics, and a social life, the players placed athletics first, social life second, and academics were a distant third. The student-athletes spent most of their time in an anti-intellectual environment around other student-athletes where they were ridiculed for putting effort into their academics. This study will consider these previous findings and compare them to the current climate at Boston College to determine how this team's social identity may be similar or different than the one found by Adler and Adler.

Others have found similar results when studying college student-athletes. Parham (1993) found that student-athletes struggled balancing academics and athletics, and skewed their efforts towards academics when forced to prioritize their efforts. Studies focusing on different types of universities than Adler and Adler found differences in how athletes spent their times. Miller and Kerr (2002) found that students at Canadian universities spent most of their time with other student-athletes. Interestingly, they found that student-athletes were more successful academically when they were more motivated to succeed in the classroom, a sentiment echoed by Gaston-Gayles (2004). When focusing on athletes at highly competitive Ivy League and Division III schools, however, Aries et. al. (2004) discovered that student-athletes at those schools actually spent the majority of their time away from their teammates, socializing with non-athletes.

In addition to the stress caused by college athletics, there were also several benefits to be found in prior research. Pascarella and Smart (1991) found that college athletes were more likely than their non-athlete counterparts to graduate and have

positive self-esteem in the future. The researchers also theorized that sports had a positive impact on social skills. Findings by Aries et. al. echoed this, as they found that the student-athletes they studied thought of themselves as more socially skilled and as better leaders than their non-athlete classmates (2004).

Dunning (1986) also wrote that athletics might have a secondary implication of reinforcing a “macho” attitude and masculine identity in an increasingly gender-equal world. Although the paper was not rooted in social identity theory, it may be relevant should the participants focus on that aspect of their individual or team identities, since it is the men’s basketball team that will be studied.

Overall, there has been a broad picture painted of the college athlete and his or her social identity by the academic community. This paper will attempt to peel back another layer by interviewing, researching, and observing the 2010-2011 Boston College men’s basketball team to see how the team’s identity relates to the rest of the student body’s.

## **Methodology**

To provide a review of literature and context for this study, extensive library research was conducted. Team press releases, the university’s mission statement, news coverage of the team and school were considered in determining both the team’s and university’s social identities. Furthermore, for the review of literature, past scholarly works focusing on social identities and college athletics were considered to provide a basis for creating interview topics and establishing context for the study.

However, the bulk of research for this study was conducted through participant observation and individual interviews by the researcher. To determine the team’s social

identity and in order to conduct an in-group analysis, the researcher focused on interviewing those close to the team such as players and coaches, as well as administrators for the athletic department. To determine the university's social identity and the out-group's perception of the team, interviews were conducted with members of the university's administration, marketing teams, and public relations office. Interviews were conducted according to the regulations set forth by the Boston College Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher participated in a training procedure through the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) and was certified under its Human Research Curriculum.

Additionally, the researcher personally observed team meetings, practices, film sessions, and community service trips, as well as multiple scrimmages, home games, and post-game press conferences conducted by players and coaches.

Each of the seventeen separate interviews conducted was transcribed and forty-seven pages of single-spaced transcripts were produced. Each participant's quotes were made anonymous by then categorizing each as spoken by a "player," "coach," or "administrator," according to their author. From there, dominant themes were selected and quotes were coded as matching to each of these dominant themes, to be used for illustrative purposes in the body of the thesis.

In the second chapter, this thesis will examine the idea of what it means to do things "The Boston College Way." This was an idea mentioned extensively by those surveyed, and this chapter will attempt to put into words what they meant when talking about what it means to be from Boston College.

Chapter three will transition from this idea to focus more specifically on the idea of the “Boston College Kid.” It will be explored what characteristics this student has, and how neatly members of the basketball team feel that they fit in with that characterization.

Chapter four deals with the idea many interviewees expressed: that Boston College is unique in its social identity because it keeps “sports in its place.” This paper will discuss what this idea means to the basketball program and how it affects it.

The next chapter will discuss the ways that the team creates relationships with outside entities. By discussing the relationships that the team has with the school and its different subsets, the outside community, and with each other, this paper will explore that part of the team’s social identity.

The thesis will conclude with a discussion of how success is defined for the team by examining the interfacing of each of the previous four themes. Through this definition of success, this study will attempt to provide a comprehensive look of the social identity of the basketball team, and how it relates to the school’s social identity in many complex ways.

## **Chapter II**

### **The Boston College Way**

*It's not like you look out on the court and have no idea what that university stands for or what it's about. I hope people would look out and say: 'That must be a great school. They're doing things exactly the way you would hope at a school like Boston College.'*  
– Member of the BC coaching staff

Boston College is, first and foremost, an academic institution. Comprising of close to 15,000 students and an undergraduate population of over 9,000, the medium-sized school sits in Chestnut Hill, just on the outskirts of downtown Boston. Ranked 31st in the country as a national university by the U.S. News and World Report, Boston College was founded in 1863 by the Society of Jesus, which makes it a Jesuit, Catholic institution (*Boston College*, 2011).

Its mission statement highlights the Jesuit background of the school, stating that, “Boston College draws inspiration for its academic societal mission from its distinctive religious tradition” (Boston College, 1996). The university elaborates, aiming its mission of serving society in three distinct ways: intellectual development and personal formation of students, research to enrich the public culture, and discussing religion and society (1996). Another motto the school puts forth is the commonplace phrase heard on campus, focusing on the Jesuit ideals of bettering one’s “mind, body, and spirit.” These two trios align themselves fairly well together, demonstrating the university’s dedication to the mission it states for itself.

But Boston College is more than just a research university or a Catholic school. It also houses a Division I athletics program that competes at a national level for championships in a variety of sports. Overall, the school supports 750 student-athletes participating in thirty-one varsity programs for both men and women (Boston College,

2010). This thesis focuses on the men's basketball team and its relationship with the school, but it stands to reason that many other teams on campus have similar relationships to the social identity of Boston College.

In addition, the Athletics Department's own mission statement elaborates on the university's. The Athletics Department pledges to "[play] an integral part in the personal formation and development of students" through intercollegiate athletic participation (Boston College, 2011). Based on these statements, this thesis will explore the relationship that the team has with the institution of Boston College to determine what it means to be a part of Boston College for the men's basketball team. That relationship to this so-called "Boston College Way" can best be described in terms of academics, the university's motto of "Ever to Excel," doing things the "right way," and the university's Jesuit background.

Nearly every single person interviewed for this thesis mentioned Boston College's academic standing when asked what came to mind thinking about the university. One of the coaches recalled how much of an impact the school's academic reputation played into the staff's decision to accept a job offer:

Being in this business for as long as we have, you get an understanding of what places are about and what they represent. And this is one of the best academic institutions in the country. And it's one of the best, I think, in having an athletic program that's at a very high level, and having a great academic curriculum. There aren't too many schools that can say that.

The academic tradition that Boston College takes part in was a point of pride for many different individuals surveyed. Many players stressed the academic reputation of the school as a draw for them to attend. One noted, "I know my basketball career is going to end at some point, so I want to have a good degree in my back pocket." While other

reasons were mentioned such as an opportunity to play at a high level, chances to play right away as freshmen, and the beauty of the campus, the mix of an athletic program with a prestigious academic environment was the number one factor mentioned by the players.

The coaches not only talked the talk about academics, but also walked the walk. During a trip to Houston for the Final Four, the Boston College men's coaches were invited to speak to a kindergarten class of an alumnus. All four coaches obliged, with glowing reviews from the teacher whose classroom they visited. In a letter to the Boston College student newspaper, the teacher gushed, "I was so amazed with the enthusiasm the coaches brought... that they took time out to come speak to a class full of kids they didn't know" (Stabile, as cited in Adams, 2011). The author of the article echoed the sentiment, commending the coaching staff for "[hammering] home the importance of education" to these young students (Adams, 2011). Obviously, the aspect of academics plays a strong role in the coaches' lives and in their social identities.

Others close to the program mentioned not only Boston College's academics, but also the success that athletes have had in that academic environment. Boston College is known on a national stage for the high graduation rates its sports programs have. In 2010, Boston College ranked first in all Division I schools with twenty-one different athletics programs posting a perfect graduation rate of 100% (Seward, 2010). It was the second year in a row that Boston College ranked at the top of programs with perfect graduation rates and a true source of pride for many surrounding the university. A school official stated: "To me, as an alumnus and an administrator here, I always felt great pride that our teams have done pretty well *and* they're pretty good in the classroom." Through this



relationship of academics and athletics, Boston College has created a unique niche for itself in the Division I athletic community. And in this niche, the basketball team occupies its own space, and that academic reputation plays into the team member's identities when considering what it means to be a part of the team.

A second aspect of the team's involvement with Boston College concerned the school's motto of "Ever to Excel." To many surrounding the team, this meant different things, but they focused on one in particular. For the players, it meant giving their best effort, all the time, every time they stepped out onto the court. "Our slogan is 'Ever to Excel,'" one player related. "So I think we try to show that, especially on the floor. We always go out and put forth our best effort. We always work hard for everything." And other players repeated that desire for the effort in the program.

However, it was not a universal sentiment that was tied directly back to the school. One upperclassman player admitted, "I don't know what the school motto is." But despite the setback of putting the motto formally into words, many team members echoed the desire for effort on the court. Judging from this, one can ascertain that a part of the team's social identity is this idea of excelling, manifested in the effort that they give while playing basketball.

Next, a focus on "doing things the right way" was an important part of the team's identity when relating it to acting in a manner representative of the university. A sports marketing administrator quipped that when asked what other universities thought of Boston College, the administrator claimed that the school is known for "Doing things the right way." This idea permeated other aspects of the team, from the marketing side, to the coaching staff, and trickling down to the players.

One way that players related to this idea was by comparing the past coaching staff to this one, and in shaping the expectations for player behavior. One player explains: “In the past, Coach Skinner was a more laid-back guy, which is fine... [This year] I have to do things because I know Coach Donahue is going to be out there checking out what I’m doing.” The coaching staff this year clearly emphasized to this team the need to behave in a manner befitting the Boston College tradition.

On the other hand, the coaches claimed an air of independence surrounding the players, trusting them to handle themselves on their own. A member of the coaching staff felt that players already had already been instilled with what the team expected, so it didn’t need to be drilled into them:

We don’t do study hall; we don’t do dorm checks or things like that. Once they’re out of [the basketball facilities], they’re on their own... We’re not a program that has a ton of rules. It’s pretty simple in what we’re asking.

The reason things were so simple, he reasoned, was because the high standard that Boston College impressed on all students was so obvious that the basketball team didn’t need to pay special attention to it. According to the coach’s logic, the players knew what the university expected of them behavior-wise, and so the team had no use for higher standards. The bar was already set high enough by the institution. The school’s social identity is strong enough that it permeates the boundaries between the university and the team, imposing itself on the players with its expectations.

A similar way that the school’s identity expanded itself onto the team’s social identity is through the Jesuit, Catholic influence of the university. Several players mentioned the school’s Catholic background when asked what came to mind when they thought about Boston College. However, for the players, it was not a large point of focus.

It was much more so for the administration, particularly those outside of athletics. An official from the marketing department of the university described the department's attitude when discussing the school as one that focused in on Boston College being a "Jesuit, Catholic institution, more on the Jesuit [side of it]." The official continued, noting, "We feel strongly that the Jesuit ideals [of Boston College] need to be explained to people."

Another administrator at the school played up the religious aspects of the school's identity. "As a university," the administrator mused, "obviously the number one mission is the Jesuit view of higher education." While that view may have many different aspects, the fact that it is labeled as "Jesuit" sets the marker for how the priorities lie.

For the team, however, it was a much more complicated relationship with religion and its identity. One member of the coaching staff felt that it was best for him to tread carefully with religion and the members of the team. "I can't push my faith on [the team]," he said. "I just wanted them to have faith... I didn't want to push it, but I wanted them to know that it's important to me. And if they want that, we're going to have that available." But many team members mentioned that although they were aware the school was Catholic, they themselves were not. One of the coaches feared that there might be tension because of that fact: "I think the Catholic piece does play a role in [some players] feeling removed. Urban, black kids...are not Catholic."

Therefore, the religious nature of the school did not seem to affect the team in a significant manner. One player went so far as to distinguish Boston College's identity as an institution and as a *Catholic* institution. "The coaches' standards reflect Boston College's as a whole," he said. "They don't say things like, 'We're doing this because

we're a Catholic school." This player thought that the values the coaches taught were universal, and religion did not end up playing a significant role in their content or origin. So while administrators and coaches felt that the Jesuit tradition of Boston College was an integral part of the school and the basketball team, some players were not so quick to make that assumption.

So while these four factors play into the idea of what it means to be from Boston College and do things "the Boston College way," which kind of person is expected to attend the university? The next chapter will discuss the idea of "the Boston College kid" and whether or not the basketball team is representative of this arbitrary person.

### Chapter III “The Boston College Kid”

*You have to be really good in your school, and take care of your books, and you have to not get in trouble. But at the same time as you're looking for those qualities in a kid, you also have to make sure this kid is good enough to play in a big conference.*

*– Player on the BC basketball team*

While the previous chapter discussed an idea of what it means to do things “the Boston College way,” it only makes sense to consider who the kind of person is that abides by these standards set forth by the university. This idea of an ideal student, or student-athlete, that would attend the school and be a part of the basketball team arose at different points in many interviews, and was eventually adopted into a specific interview question encouraging opinions on the topic.

While the players on the team were a little unsure on the concept—perhaps for fear of being labeled as fitting or not fitting into this category—the coaches and administrators had a much better idea of what their ideal student-athlete would be like. “The person [that coaches] find is more than just a basketball player,” one team member noted. Student-athletes on the team would be expected to be “good people,” get good grades, and work hard while still maintaining athletic ability. However, some noted the potential pitfalls of setting such a standard.

The first—admittedly vague—idea that many looked for in the ideal “BC Kid” was that he (or she) would be a “good person.” “I think BC recruits excellent basketball players who are good people as well,” one player said. Another mused, “I don’t think the school is looking for kids with troubled histories... They like ‘good people’ to come here.” A coach echoed this sentiment: “I think we value as a recruiting ability kids who have great character... I think [Boston College] values those things more than other

schools do.” It became a distinguishing factor for Boston College. When members of the Boston College in-group compared themselves to the out-group of other schools that Boston College associates with, the institution’s social identity—and the social identity of the team—included the focus on being good people, and having “good kids.”

The overarching message here is that Boston College looks for high-caliber students when recruiting and accepting prospective student-athletes. However, a more concrete definition than “good” is needed if it is to be any use. By examining one level deeper and looking at more specific attributes singled out, focusing on academics, and work ethic along with athletic ability, this paper attempts to define a “Boston College type of kid” described by others that relates to the school’s social identity.

Similar to the ideals put forth in the previous chapter, the “Boston College Kid” is described as a good student. Fitting for someone at an institution that values education like Boston College does. “Coming in, students are recruited here based on the understanding that they will be successful academically,” a university administrator said in an interview. “They’re not just here to have a good time. They’re here to learn.” Members of the coaching staff also reflected that attitude. “If he’s not a good person, and he’s not a good student, it won’t matter what kind of basketball player he is,” one coach noted. If a student-athlete was not expected to be able to cope with Boston College’s rigorous academic demands, they were not considered for a spot on the team and a spot within the university. Many expressed the thought that other college basketball programs did not care about academics, and only focused on winning games and championships. But for Boston College, there was a part of its social identity that they adopted for their own, preventing team members from shirking their academic duties.

The next factor described by participants in this study as characteristic of the “BC Kid” was a strong work ethic. Obviously, Division I athletes have worked long and hard honing their craft in order to compete at such a high level. However, many expressed extra effort, and giving full effort all the time as characteristics of what they looked for in those representing Boston College in a basketball capacity. One player described the ideal recruit as, “Someone who’s going to play and work hard. And that’s on and off the court. Get their work done in the classroom and give it everything they got on the court.” Again, the idea of classroom work was broached, but this time the focus was on the energy of the prospective student-athlete.

The best kind of recruit would be somebody willing to give the extra effort in everything that they are a part of. Another player used a direct description: “I think there is a certain kind of kid you label as a ‘BC Kid:’ someone who’s going to work hard.” The effort the players are expected to give is obviously a point of emphasis for the team.

But of course, athletic ability was an important factor listed by the participants in the study in what was expected of a recruit, and what made them a “BC Kid” ideal for the basketball team. “To win games you feel like you have to have talent,” reminded one coach when confronted with the thought of Boston College recruiting players. An official in the marketing department also noticed the need for a competitive team with ability, noting that when Boston College sports do well on national television, it helps draw national attention, increase enrollment, and diversify the student body. One player had a long list of adjectives to describe “the BC Kid,” but when applying it to the basketball team, “athletic ability” was the first thing that came to mind, suggesting its importance in the player’s mind.

While these factors were all described as what was expected of incoming recruits and how to describe the “BC Kid,” others noticed the limitations of such a description, and worried that it might be too difficult a standard to meet. The worry focused mainly on the different backgrounds that players came from and from concern that players were too different from the rest of the student body to live up to the school’s universal standards. “I would think some possible students might look at BC and think, ‘Boy, this would be a difficult place to go,” said one school administrator. “Just talking about the overall student body. It’s very upper-middle class or even upper class. Many basketball players are not.” Some players echoed this sentiment, lamenting the fact that without their athletic scholarships, they would not be able to attend the university.

Still other worries permeated the coaching staff when thinking of the difficulty of meeting the “BC Kid” standard. “Anytime you’re going to have a school like BC that has very high academic standard,” one coach explained, “there’s going to be some differences in terms of interests and experiences” when you consider the basketball team compared to the student body. That disconnect can materialize into a lack of connection to the Boston College community, something that will be touched on in a later chapter.

But other members of the coaching staff agreed with the sentiment as well. “I think the school definitely has a tendency to be a little homogeneous,” one stated. “Not just white, but seemingly preppy white, upper middle class to upper class white. I think for a lot of guys on our team, it’s not a good fit.” He later added that he felt the line was cast on more socioeconomic lines than racial lines, but it stands to mention the racial disparity between the basketball team and the student body. As a whole, Boston College students report themselves as 24% AHANA, meaning African-American, Hispanic,



Asian or Native American descent (BC Fact Sheet, 2011). In contrast, of the fourteen members of the basketball team on the roster, ten fall under the AHANA category, a whopping 71%. When considering scholarship players, the gap is even more obvious: the percentage of AHANA players rises to 80%. As diverse as the basketball team is, the university's student body is approximately the opposite percentage non-minority students.

Many players stressed the fact that they had never been stereotyped against, and those who worried about the potential pitfalls of players living up to the "BC Kid" standard did so stressing socioeconomic backgrounds, not racial lines. However, with the information on players' and BC students' socioeconomic statuses unavailable, it is difficult to determine if race does or does not in fact play an unspoken role in what some see as a disconnect between players and the ideal "BC Kid." The disconnect in backgrounds between the student body and the student-athletes on the team, however, will be revisited in a later chapter.

Overall, the four factors of being a "good person," getting good grades, working hard, and having athletic ability formed what some members of the study referred to as "the BC Kid." Despite some acknowledged difficulties sometimes present in living up to that standard, it stands as one of the characteristics of the team's social identity that matched up strongly to the university's identity. In this case, it was a direct tie to what those around the team associated with when representing the school on an individual level. The school was expected to be looking for a certain kind of individual with its own social identity that correlated to the university's, and this was how the men's basketball team related it to its own mission. In the next chapter, this thesis will consider how the

BC team related to the school in a different way: how the team kept its priorities in order, and kept basketball “in its right place.”

## Chapter IV Sports in its Place

*I feel basketball is put in the right perspective, but is still played at a very high level. It's not before anything else in this institution. I think it has its right place, academics has its right place... I sense that other schools have gotten away from that, where basketball is way overblown.*

*– Member of the BC coaching staff*

After considering what it means to be a part of the “Boston College Way” and who is a “BC type of kid,” we next turn to what place athletics has at Boston College and how the university considers it as part of its social identity. We have already established that academics is a strong part of the university’s identity, but it also stands to consider how big of a deal is made about the sports teams at Boston College.

After all, Boston College is an institution that competes at a Division I level in the Atlantic Coast Conference, a top competitive conference. In basketball specifically, two of the last three national champions have emerged from the conference, speaking to the level of competition present in the league that Boston College participates in. However, at Boston College, the school stressed a balance between academics and athletics and did not want sports to dominate and take too big of a role in student-athlete’s lives. This manifested itself in two ways: by focusing on reducing the entitled nature feared of many student-athletes participating in the basketball program, and by considering the student-athletes equal to non-athlete students in day-to-day interactions.

The popularity of college basketball appears to be on the rise. With the postseason NCAA tournament expanded this year from 64 to 68 teams, the tournament is more competitive than ever, and the sport may be more popular than ever. The ratings for this year’s tournament were at an 11-year high, suggesting that the sport is growing in popularity (Hiestand, 2011). Additionally, this year attendance in Division I basketball

rose by over 86,000, drawing 27.6 million fans throughout the course of the season (ESPN news services, 2011). But with plenty of talk in the media about the increasing commercialization of collegiate sports, does that have an effect on the behavior of the student-athletes participating? Many surveyed in this study feared that it did, and that today's college basketball player is becoming increasingly self-absorbed and overconfident, simply because of their status as a college basketball player. However, for Boston College basketball, the identity of the school put pressure on the team to find a kind of person who was not entitled, and would keep sports in perspective when considering their individual social identity.

One player described this as a tradition at Boston College, where the school valued down-to-earth student-athletes. "In past years, I think that BC has gotten kids who don't have a sense of entitlement. I think that's an important word. Especially in today's athletics, these high school kids are put on pedestals." That idea that high school kids are put up on increasingly bigger pedestals harkens back to the focus the school places on finding the right kind of kid to attend the university, discussed in a previous chapter. Other players reiterated this idea of a metaphorical pedestal that student-athletes could be placed upon. One mentioned that at Boston College, "I think the average student thinks the average athlete is full of themselves.... But getting to know these kids [on the team], they want to be an average student like everyone else."

Some players mentioned coaching messages communicated to them as reinforcing the idea that basketball is not a social identity marker for superiority. One said in an interview that the coaching staff "doesn't want us to think that we're better than people just because we're basketball players." The coaches were also vocal about the idea of

keeping student-athletes grounded. Comparing Boston College to other universities with top basketball programs, one coach warned that with “the level of scrutiny that athletics has [at other schools], it’s almost separated and put on a hierarchy. And that’s not where I think athletics should be in terms of the whole student experience.” He continued, emphasizing the difference that Boston College places on its athletics programs compared to other, more zealous programs. “[Basketball is a valued part to the university, but it’s not overvalued,” said the coach. While many other college sports may have been assumed to have gotten away from the traditions set by the school, Boston College was always true to itself.

University administrators agreed with this coach’s assessment. “Sometimes people ask me about athletics,” said one school official, “and I try to compare it. It’s like the physics department, or the English department, or the theology department... It’s as much a part of the BC life as those departments.” The emphasis is again on keeping sports in the proper perspective, and not allowing the athletics to overpower any other parts of Boston College’s identity for the sake of success on the court, field, or any other athletic arena.

Another aspect regarding the avoidance of entitlement in student-athletes at Boston College focused on the future of the student-athletes. According to one coach, if the school were to allow basketball players to feel entitled and overestimate the value of being on a basketball team, it would make them ill-prepared for their time when they are done playing. He explained it this way:

Kids these days are extremely entitled because of the basketball culture. And I think that’s terrible, I think it does them a tremendous disservice. When they’re done playing—which for most guys ends up a lot sooner

than they think—it hurts how they’ll be in regular life. In regular life, you don’t get all this gear and you don’t have all this attention.

Because of the lavish attention that basketball could bring upon a player, student-athletes that are done playing, such as graduating seniors, would be ill equipped to handle themselves when their time in the spotlight of sports ran out. Instead, an important part of the basketball program’s social identity becomes fighting this perceived entitlement, and making sure that basketball is kept in the right place for its participants. It goes hand in hand with the focus on academics the school has, discussed earlier in this paper. The social identity of Boston College looms over the basketball program, reminding the basketball team that it is only a part of a larger whole, and that there should be no sense of entitlement or superiority compared to other students due to membership on the team.

One way that the school and the team worked on avoiding this entitlement was by reinforcing the idea that student-athletes are the same as other students, and there was no significant difference from a social standpoint between the two. A player iterated the thought that “guys who were considered ‘superstars’ [on the team] were kids in the end,” as opposed to more than students. One of the coaches had a similar thought, saying, “The number one thing in my opinion why [a basketball team is] even in existence, is to enrich the experience of the college student.” There was no distinction in the coach’s mind between which student’s experience was being enriched: the student-athlete’s or the “regular” student’s. For this coach, it was significant that there should not be a difference between the two. It stands to reason that in the coach’s mind, if one of those two groups was more served than the other, then that would not be a successful use of a basketball program. The students are supposed to get something out of having a team on their campus just like the players do.

By treating student-athletes similarly to other students, the basketball program at Boston College reinforces the idea that athletics is only part of a whole. The university avoids a sense of entitlement in its program, also playing a role in reinforcing its ideals. This paper has argued that the school's social identity is a guiding force for the program in how they recruit players and then how they interact with them while they are attending the institution. So this thesis has demonstrated the relationship between the program and the school to a large extent. But how does the program interact with other publics outside of it? The next chapter will focus on the effort that the program is undergoing to create relationships with other outside entities, and how that ties back into the school's and the team's social identities.

## **Chapter V**

### **Creating Relationships**

*It's crazy what a little bit of charity and community service can do. One of the best discussions we had this year, which I never thought I'd ever have in my lifetime at BC, we actually were upset that we weren't going and doing community service in inner cities, that we were just staying local around here. We wanted to do more.*

*– Player on the BC basketball team*

On the court, those on the outside looking in on the men's basketball team at Boston College know many of the players for what they do there. Starting point guard Reggie Jackson and 6'10" center Josh Southern are some of the most recognizable faces on campus and would be hard to overlook in a crowd of other students. Outsiders may know that walk-on player John Cahill is deadly from long range, thanks to his 54% three point shooting. But the outside world seemed to struggle to know the players any more than that.

To those not close to the team, there had not been much of a connection between the team and them; they were only a group of guys playing basketball a couple nights a week, sometimes on campus and sometimes on television. This year, the team made strides to address that issue, and to create relationships with those around it. By interacting and creating relationships with the community and the student body of Boston College, the basketball team exhibited the values of the school to create a better understanding of the team's social identity by promoting that of the university.

According to the players, the drive to interact more with others and try to increase the visibility of the team was motivated by the coaching staff. "I do think the coaches set the tone," said one player. "They're always going out and meeting people, showing their faces on campus at different functions." Following the lead of the authority figures on the team, the players also expanded their interactions with many different audiences.



Several people in the school's administration use that visibility to promote the school's interests, leveraging the identity of the team to better the school's public profile. In the marketing department, the attitude was not to focus on the scores of the games, but the stories around the team that stood out. "You won't see a story that, 'We won this weekend.' That's not who we are," said a marketing official. "We use sports in a way that complements the mission of the school." So in its literature and publications sent out to the public, the basketball team's efforts to connect with the outside world could be used by the school, but spun in a way to put the school in the best light possible.

For Boston College, it goes back to the idea of keeping sports in its place, as discussed in a previous chapter. There was less of a focus on wins and losses for the marketing department, and more of a discussion about what the team (and therefore the school) stood for. One example given involved the football team and a star player's battle with cancer. The focus for the school was not necessarily always on whether the team had a successful season. Instead, the spotlight was directed on a student's courageous battle against a deadly disease; it was a story that transcended sports. According to the marketing official interviewed, it is stories like that one that are more significant to the school as opposed to the stories that schools more concerned with only wins and losses may favor.

Another important factor in the team's interactions with outside publics was the display of the players and their personalities in an effort to humanize them and make them more accessible to the outside world. When asked what factors create a strong connection between the team and others away from it, a sports marketing administrator felt that, "It's the personalities of the people involved number one, and the willingness to

show that they absolutely care that people show support back.” The administrator later added that many of the events organized for the team this year were meant to showcase the players’ personalities, and provide opportunities for them to be more comfortable around non-team members.

A player reiterated this fact, noting that he had become much more social and outgoing away from the team. “My teammates [helped] me get out of my shell. I tend to be shy and closed off, but trying to network and meet more people is what has really made [this year] different for me.” That willingness to go out and show a personality that may have been hidden before this year made a difference in the player’s experience this year. Furthermore, it is those relationships that a more outgoing team forged this season that made a difference in many people’s eyes.

### *Community service*

One of the most significant ways that the team reflected Boston College’s social identity and created relationships with the community was through its community service efforts this year. The team was involved in many different community service projects. A special needs group from a local town was bused in and invited to come see a game in December. One coach participated in a walk to raise money for Asperger’s syndrome research and wore a blue puzzle piece pin commemorating the cause during games. But perhaps the most telling interaction between the team and the community took place every two weeks during the season, when several team members would carpool over to an elementary school nearby Brighton.

The players would visit with students at St. Columbkille Partnership School, a Catholic elementary school with an enrollment of just over 300 students. The student body is particularly diverse at the school. According to the school's principal, the students hail from over 30 different countries and speak 20 different languages in their homes. In conversations during one visit, different staff members of the school expressed gratitude for the players' visits, stressing a need for diverse role models for the kids. One expressed excitement at having male role models visiting with the kids and setting examples, while another was happy that it was more than "rich white people" helping with the students.

The players and students would interact for a couple of hours, varying in their activities. Some players sat with students at silent reading stations, while others helped the children with their schoolwork. The players were very much engaged in the visit, from what was seen during a participant observation session. During snack time, one player attempted to barter for a yogurt and recorded a student's dance routine that she had been practicing with his cell phone. Another player convinced a classroom of kindergarteners to yell, "Go BC!" as they prepared to say goodbye. In one memorable exchange, a second grade student asked a player what he was wearing on his head. The player had to explain his hairstyle to the confused student: "It's an afro."

Over the course of the year, the basketball team grew increasingly fond of the trips to visit with the children. A member of the coaching staff related how players would always text him, anxiously wondering when the team was scheduled to visit again. Teachers at the school told a similar tale of their students pestering them about when the boys from the basketball team would be returning. Overall, the team took on the "Men

and Women for Others” tenant of Boston College’s social identity for its own, embracing the trips to serve and help out others around them.

“Giving back to the community is a big thing here,” one player stated. “I don’t think it happened as much in previous years, and we definitely took a step in the right direction this year.” Other players were aware of the school’s commitment to community service, but were caught off guard by how easily it came to the team. “You’d be really surprised with this group of athletes,” a player said. “I believe we want to be involved as much as possible in the community.” But while the players knew more about the school’s identity and the relationship with service, the new coaching staff was not as much in the know.

The coaches had differing attitudes about the community service aspect of Boston College coming in. One coach admitted that, “I didn’t have a feel for the kind of core values of the school, like the community service thing. [But it] is something that really resonates for me.” Another, however, already had a sense of priority towards the service. He mentioned that he valued community service not just for those who receive it, but for those taking part as well. “I think it’s obviously good for the people that receive the service, but I think it’s exponentially more important for the people who are doing the service.” Slowly but surely, the team embraced the service aspect of the university’s social identity, and made it a part of the team’s identity. By creating relationships with the community through charity work and service, the team reflected what it meant to be a member of the Boston College basketball team.

*Student interaction*

Another important facet of the Boston College social identity is a sense of community within the student body. This idea was stressed by many authority figures interviewed, especially when considering the relationship between the team and the school. To coaches, administrators, and even the players, the bond between the team and the student was a complicated one. Some considered it solid, others considered it improving, and yet others felt that it was in disrepair. Each bears supporting evidence to aid its argument, but the final picture painted is a convoluted one of struggle and frustration, but ultimately hope for the future.

We begin with a discussion of the good. Almost every participant interviewed who believed that the relationship was positive singled out this particular season as an improvement over past ones. “There seems to be a little more enthusiasm [this year] than there was in the past,” said one university administrator. “I’m told that the student-athletes seem to be a little bit more connected to the student body than they were in the past.” This idea of the team connecting with the student body came up other times as well. “The more that kids feel invested in this program,” one coach explained, “then there’ll be a bond there, where they think they need to go out and [come to games.]” The hope was that with increased initiative from the team, the students would have a greater bond with the student-athletes and have a better connection. The better connection would result in better student turnout, and better attendance, and a better game atmosphere. Hopefully, that would also translate into wins. But for those close to the team, clearly fan support was an issue of importance, and they longed for Boston College’s basketball

team to be more connected with the social identity of its student body in the hopes that would translate to better interaction between team and school.

But those on the team also stressed that this was a work in progress. “I feel like freshman year I felt like the basketball team was doing their own thing,” said a player. “We’ve come a little closer to the student body as a whole the last couple years.” A coach warned that things would not all of a sudden be better overnight, but that they were improving. He explained:

It’s not something that’s just going to change in one year, but I think being more active around campus [helps.] I think we’ve brought in a couple of younger guys who have done a pretty good job of fitting in with the regular student body and trying to be a student here and not just be a basketball player.

Interestingly enough, this ties back to the idea of a “BC kid” playing for the team and representing the student body better. By finding the right types of people to play for the basketball squad, the coaching staff and the administration hoped that it would create better relationships between the student body and the team, as the identities of the two become more closely aligned.

The reasons suggested for the improvement were varied, but most centered on the team’s involvement in student outreach programs designed to personalize the experience of going to basketball games. Relating to the previous idea of getting to know players’ personalities, the sports marketing department created events where students and players could interact more freely and get to know each other better. During football season, the basketball team hosted a tailgate in a prime location near a main entrance to the stadium, inviting fans to come by and say hello. To promote season ticket sales, players greeted prospective buyers outside of a dining hall, with giveaways and friendly video game

competitions for those who bought tickets. But perhaps the biggest event to draw student attention may have been the Ice Jam, where student-athletes from the men's and women's hockey and basketball teams all met in Conte Forum in a pseudo-pep rally. The basketball team had a strong showing with a dunk contest thrilling the crowd and engaging the student body, while they promoted the upcoming season. Several of those interviewed pointed to events like the Ice Jam as a way that the team reached out to the student body in an attempt to create a stronger relationship, and tighten the gap between the team's identity and the school's.

An offshoot of student relations and how the team attempted to create better relationships is the alumni relations that the team attempted to engender. According to a sports marketing official, the connection that many alumni have with Boston College sports is a unique part of the university's experience. "We may not be one of the largest alumni bases," according to the official, "but I feel like the connection back to the school is very, very strong." That connection is in a large way fueled by the performance of the athletic teams. A marketing official also felt the same way: "There's a certain segment of BC alumni that are really engaged through football, basketball, and to a lesser degree hockey... Clearly sports is a part of our identity at BC." The official continued later, slyly adding, "If [sports is] the thing that gets people jazzed about BC, then great, let's play it up and encourage them to give us money." Fundraising, it goes without saying, is a large part of a university's day-to-day operations to keep things running. If the university can engage with alumni to draw donations, then obviously the relationship between the team and the alumni that creates that engagement is important. By engaging with the alumni and creating relationships with former students, the basketball team plays a role in

perpetuating the social identity of the team, and therefore the university as well.

### *Relationship problems*

Having discussed the positives with the relationship between the team and the school, there are also striking problems present that many acknowledged. In the 2009-2010 season, the Boston College basketball team struggled, finishing the season with a 15-16 record and going 11-6 at home. The team played seventeen home games in Conte Forum, which has a full capacity of 8,606. The team sold out only two home games and for the season averaged only 5,317 fans per game (Kelley, 2010). Despite an improvement in performance on the court this year, attendance saw nearly no boost from the 2009-2010 season to the 2010-2011 one. While increasing its win total from fifteen to twenty-one—an increase of 40%—attendance only increased to 5,324, a paltry 0.1% change (Kelley, 2011). Again, the team only sold out two home games despite playing much more competitive basketball.

When compared to other schools in the Atlantic Coast Conference, the issue becomes a larger one. When looking at attendance figures for all twelve schools in the ACC and comparing average attendance by percentage of capacity, Boston College comes in dead last, with 61.9% (Stevens, 2011). Despite finishing towards the top of the division from a competition standpoint, the fans still did not show up to support the team when compared to its contemporaries throughout the ACC. So when asked about the relationship between the school and the team, some players were upset at the lack of fan support.

For one player, the lack of support was particularly frustrating. He complained,



“The school doesn’t really have a great relationship with us. So it’s hard for us to get out there and do all the stuff that people ask us to do when kids don’t really come to our games.” He felt that the effort the team was putting forth to create the relationships with the fan base wasn’t producing the dividends the team had hoped for. Some players felt differently, but others echoed the frustrated one’s opinions. A player described the relationship as “detached,” saying that students would rather be studying or at the bars than watching the team play.

The coaching staff, however, was more focused on moving past the problems than dwelling on them. “I don’t think we have the right to be disappointed at kids not coming to games,” said one coach. Another offered an opinion about why fan turnout was a problem, connecting it back to the focus of a past chapter: “There could be an issue with [connecting to the student body] based on that gap as guys looked on as basketball players and not regular students.” The coaching staff looked at the attendance issues and fan support as a symptom that could be fixed by connecting more with the student body, and not seeing the players as simply athletes instead of students. This all ties back to the idea of connecting the student body with the team, and by recruiting the “BC type of kid” that could transition seamlessly between the basketball court, the classroom, and the campus quad. The hope is that in order to remedy this problem, all the team has to do is to connect the student body more to the team through growing relationships. The team hopes to show the school that its identity is not any different than the team’s, and then hopefully the school would embrace the team more and fans would turn out in greater numbers to come see them play.

It remains to be seen how this process will turn out, and whether this approach to

garnering fan support will be successful. However, this chapter has laid out what the team is trying to do to reinforce its social identity and align it with the schools through the relationships it creates with the community and the student body. The next chapter will be a discussion about the various definitions of success that define the Boston College men's basketball program, while tying together all of the team's identity and how it relates to the university's.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Discussion: Defining Success**

*Sure, we like to win as much as anybody, but not at the sacrifice of the standards that we've set.*

*– Boston College administrator*

As this thesis has shown, the men's basketball team at Boston College interacts with the school and its social identity in several distinct ways. The next logical step must be then to consider how well those in the school and team administration judge how the team does in aligning itself with the school's identity. By posing the question of how success for the athletic program—and basketball team in particular—at Boston College is measured, this thesis found that success is measured in unique ways.

While on-court performance was an important metric mentioned, administrators and coaches also mentioned that the team's success would also be judged on how well it matched up and reinforced the school's social identity. Out of the four factors discussed for the social identity in this thesis, three were used as measures of the program's success: the team living up to the academic standards of Boston College, the type of person coming through the program, and the team's interactions with the outside community.

Those interviewed for this thesis had no illusions about what the most important factor was in judging a program's success at the high Division I level. "Obviously," one coach admitted, "the first thing people look for is wins and losses." But others were careful to limit to some extent the importance that they placed on performance in the athletic arena. "I think winning and losing has to be a part of it, but I don't think that's a major part of it," speculated another coach. While the coaches feel pressure from a

competitive standpoint to be successful on the court, they also put their roles as part of a larger educational institution in perspective.

However, the administrators in the school were also focused on being competitive on the basketball court. One administrator explained, “That doesn’t mean they have to win a championship, but are they day in and day out competitive?” The same administrator noted with pride, “We finish in the middle of the ACC, which is something that 50 years ago, nobody would have dreamed of for Boston College.” But while on-court performance was clearly important to the success of the program, that was not all that mattered to those involved in the team. “I think a lot of people will measure the success with wins and losses,” chimed in yet another member of the coaching staff. “But if you really are fair, I think you would have to judge a couple of things.” It turned out that the couple of things were based around the school’s social identity, and how the team lived up to the standard of Boston College.

Academic performance of the team members was also an important measure of success when the administrators and coaches were asked about it. There was especially a focus on the graduation rate of Boston College, which has been noted as a particular selling point of Boston College athletics and its place in collegiate sports. “Academic performance and graduation rates [are important,]” according to one university administrator. “Those two metrics are pretty clear, and they are tracked very, very closely.” Coaches also reinforced the belief that academics were a priority when judging the team’s success. “[It’s important to be] doing very good in the classroom. Not just being average, being good.” The bar is set high at Boston College for academics, and it is a point of pride for the school’s social identity. The fact that the basketball team takes

academic performance into consideration when judging success then speaks to the importance of the school's social identity to the team.

Similarly, the type of person coming through the program was noted as an important measure of success, harkening back to the "BC type of kid" that was an important part of the school's and team's identity. "It's not about winning or losing," according to a school official from the marketing department. "It's about who's winning... not only because they win but because of the person that they are." The coaching staff agreed: "I think you would have to judge the type of people that graduate from the program, what they're doing with their lives." It is important once again to make sure to get the right kind of person, not necessarily the best talent from an athletic standpoint. Finding the "BC type of kid" is an important aspect of determining success for the basketball program's social identity, because the program judges itself as successful or not by the degree to which it aligns itself with school's social identity.

The degree of interaction and agreement with outside communities was also a measure of success mentioned by those interviewed for this thesis. Student interaction was a factor mentioned. A university administrator weighed in on the issue, saying, "Things like community involvement are very important. Boston College to me stands for something important, and I would want our student-athletes to reflect that as well." For members of the coaching staff, that idea that Boston College's basketball team stands for more than just basketball played itself out with involvement with outside publics being important. "Doing things in the community is extremely important," said a coach. "If we're winning games and we're not doing those other things, I don't think that's a success."

Clearly, success for the basketball program is defined in a unique way at Boston College. While on-court success in the form of wins and losses is an important measure, there is more to it than that. Those close to the team measure the program's success by not only its competitiveness, but also its academic performance, the character of its student-athletes, and its interaction with the community outside of the team. The team will not be judged as successful unless it is aligned with the university's social identity, and those in the know obviously keep that in mind when they attempt to work with the basketball team.

## **Chapter VII**

### **Conclusion**

Clearly, the Boston College men's basketball team has a unique relationship with the university that may very well set it apart from other schools with top basketball programs. The team's dedication to being a full part of the school and integrating its student-athletes into the rest of the student body is something that, to those close to the program at least, puts Boston College in the company of an elite few schools who strive to do the same.

This thesis demonstrated the several ways that the team focused on aligning its social identity with the university's. By focusing on doing things the "Boston College Way," the team put an emphasis on the school's strong academic reputation, its motto of "Ever to Excel," doing things the right way, and on the school's Jesuit identity. Each of these individual tenets of the school's social identity was reflected in some way on the team.

Similarly, the focus on recruiting a certain kind of "BC Kid" to the program showed the team's dedication to the school's social identity. By attempting to find "good people," good students, student-athletes with strong work ethics as well as athletic ability, the team again stayed true to the identity of the institution it represents.

Next, the team's social identity aligned itself with the school's by placing an emphasis on keeping sports in its proper place and aligned with the school's mission. The team tried to stay away from an air of entitlement purportedly found on many other college basketball teams, and also made an effort to keep student-athletes on the team on a level playing field with other students from a social perspective. In this way, the team's

social identity stayed grounded and was not able to become over-inflated. Instead, it remained in line with the social identity of Boston College as a university.

Another way the school's social identity was reinforced to the team was by the emphasis on creating relationships with the team away from the basketball court. Through community service, increased student interaction, and alumni interaction the team attempted to better the relationships it had with outside publics, bolstering its social identity while staying true to its roots within the school's social identity. However, this thesis also pointed out problems with the relationships the team has, particularly with the student body.

In conclusion, this thesis mapped out how success was defined by different authority figures around the team. It was determined that while competitive success in the form of wins and losses was an important factor, so too was living up to the standard that Boston College set, i.e. conforming to its social identity.

While this thesis attempted to be as comprehensive as possible, there are still other avenues of the team's social identity that could be explored. Some players were not interviewed due to time conflicts or a lack of experience with the program. Similarly, other coaches declined to participate. Other aspects of the team's interactions could also be explored. For example, no professors who teach student-athletes were interviewed for this thesis, nor was the alumni association. By exploring these connections that the team has with the school, a greater picture may be painted of the team's full relationship with Boston College and its social identity.

Also, because this was the first year of a new coaching regime, it may be useful to continue to track the team and its relationship with the school. The team very much is in a



transition phase between the two coaching staffs, and its identity will continue to evolve. The coaching staff professed an expectation of increased change once the players that they chose to recruit matriculated at Boston College, and there may be a shift in the team's social identity as new recruits come in to attend the university. This thesis was only a snapshot of the team's social identity, and a more longitudinal look may paint a fuller picture of what it really means to be a member of Boston College and specifically a member of the Boston College men's basketball team.

Overall, this thesis has demonstrated that there is a complex and always-changing relationship between the men's basketball team at Boston College and the institution as a whole. While it may be difficult to ever completely encapsulate what it means to be a member of a certain group, for the basketball team, this thesis has attempted to provide an answer. The basketball program does not shy away from the daunting task of living up to the standards that Boston College has set for itself. In fact, it embraces it. And the words of one senior administrator may sum up this relationship best:

If the athletic department were to try to move in a different direction, less concerned with academic performance or student involvement, and certain kinds of things that are important to BC, to focus more on simply performance on the athletic field, that would not go over well and probably would not be accepted. And I don't see the administration moving in that direction.

And so while the administration is not planning to move in that direction, neither, it seems, is the basketball team. For now at least, the men's basketball team is moving right along. The team is working towards its goal. Its goal of winning, and winning the way it should at Boston College.

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