

# “Putting the Blessings on Him”: Vouching and Basketball Status Work

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## Background

How a person is seen by others has real implications for social relations.

- People act toward others based upon an interpretive process that determines meaning and prescriptions for action.
  - Identity is not static; it is in a state of flux to be worked out through one’s social interactions.
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## Philadelphia Basketball

For some Black men in Philadelphia involved in basketball, self-identity is as much about whom one knows and how one is perceived by others as it is about how an individual views himself.

- One’s basketball identity is rooted in a larger structure of relations fitted to one’s network and relationships.
    1. Identity is presented by individuals who are attempting to fit their actions to notions of what some role is.
    2. Status is the position that one has in a group based upon one’s identity.
  - This study is a study of masculinity, status, and mobility in the inner city – it addresses the issue of why young men play basketball and what happens as a result in their status and relationships.
  - The author presents how his own identity and status were negotiated and what this might suggest about status, identity, and interaction.
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## Vouching

As part of the collective action of friends, persons vouch for each other to explain how good someone is at basketball.

- Vouching is part of being a friend or associate.
- It may provide protection when among outsiders, for a person who may not be very good at the game.
- Vouching only works if the friend who provides the information is thought to be credible or is known to be a good player himself.
- Associations validated through vouching tells a researcher about a group’s social organization, its norms, values, and order.
- Vouching identifies how people interact with others and how individuals present themselves and are presented by others.

- Friends are those who vouch for one another.
    1. This bolstering via vouching is necessary when the friend is thought to be unable to prove himself on his own or has not proven himself yet.
    2. The identity one gets from vouching is “borrowed” until one can prove himself on his own.
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### **The Author’s Story**

The author’s borrowed identity from the head coach of the basketball league enabled him to become an assistant coach.

- First he gained a position as a member of the league’s informal network and then he began forming personal bonds.
- Gaining status is a process and is always a work in progress that needs to be updated and validated by one’s actions and performance.
- The author first was protected by the identity he borrowed from the head coach and then he was allowed to coach on his own and was able, after some false starts, to gain status and recognition on his own.

**Note:** Borrowed identity tells more about the social organization of a group than about an individual’s ability.