

Fair Play in Ultimate Frisbee: An Exploration of Supply and Demand

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Sociology

The Colorado College

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of Bachelor of the Arts

Sophia Hennessy

April 2023

On my honor, I have neither given nor received any unauthorized aid on this thesis.

Sophia Hennessy

April 2023

ABSTRACT

Informed by Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of fair play as rooted in social positionality, the sport of ultimate is examined as a case study of how athletes make meaning of this concept. Attention is given to the variations in understandings of and experiences with Spirit of the Game, SOTG (ultimate's version of fair play), across player's gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. Findings suggest, SOTG works, at least partially, to maintain systems of power beneficial to male players and harmful to Black players. Despite often enabling systems of exclusion, SOTG is not uniformly held accountable for doing so.

INTRODUCTION

Ultimate¹ emerged as an organized sport in the late 1960s at a New Jersey high school before quickly spreading to the nearby college campuses of Princeton and Rutgers (Griggs 2009). As a sport it has a reputation for an idealized, enlightened style of play, free from the need for third party referees (Griggs 2009). As a sport it therefore poses an interesting case study on what fair play means and how it is enacted on the field.

As understood by Sigmund Loland (2002) and Pierre Bourdieu (1978), fair play exemplifies a motivation for playing beyond that of just winning the game. Increased emphasis is placed on following both the spoken and unspoken rules of play. In ultimate, fair play, renamed as spirit of the game (SOTG) is strongly emphasized to players. As “a truly unique and defining element of ultimate, Spirit of the Game places the responsibility of fair play solely on the athletes themselves by requiring each player to know the rules and make their own calls, without the help of a neutral official. These underlying principles reinforce mutual respect and trust between opponents; communication and conflict resolution skills; and self-confidence – both on and off the field of play” (USAU 2022c).

However, SOTG has come into question in recent years (Lehmann 2018; McGlynn 2020a, 2020b; Rath 2021; Smith 2022). Players, particularly those of color, have pointed to discrepancies between ideals and real experiences of play. This paper uses Bourdieu’s analysis of fair play as a form of embodied capital to interrogate how players understand and experience SOTG and how their experiences and perspectives may be related to forms of systemic power dynamics.

¹ Though the sport is often referred to as ultimate Frisbee or even just Frisbee, Frisbee is actually a brand name for a certain make of flying plastic disc. Ultimate itself is a distinct sport, and not tied to the Frisbee brand in any official way.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The history of sports is deeply intertwined with the project of social control. Early proponents of sports included boarding school administrators who found sporting competitions an easy way to maintain oversight of students and channel the students' free time and adolescent energy (Bourdieu 1978; Giulianotti 2005). Sports have been instrumentalized in colonial projects and efforts to create the civilized self (Stoddart 2004). Indeed, Giulianotti writes that sports emerged out of "the 'sportization' of games" which "involved establishing rules and conventions within play that necessitated self-discipline" (142). Sports are therefore concerned with both socialization efforts and the power dynamics that exist within the greater society.

It is here helpful to use Pierre Bourdieu's field theory to conceptualize power in sports. While preexisting dynamics influence the world of sports, sports exist within their own cultural fields distinguished by their own unique features such as jargon, traditions, rules, and positions of power. The struggle over power within each of these fields is the ongoing battle over whose definitions of these unique features is accepted as legitimate (Bourdieu 1983). Often the ability to validate new rules lies with sport specific organizations like the International Football Association Board (IFAB) for soccer while sport media companies, like the Entertainment and Sports Network (ESPN), have significant sway over sport narratives. In both instances the IFAB and ESPN often possess the power of legitimation in both the field of soccer and in the larger field of sports.

Power, or the ability to legitimate or delegitimize, is concerned with the possession of capital. Importantly, the outcome of a sporting competition is not solely predetermined by possession forms of capital independent of sports (Bourdieu 1978; Giulianotti 2005). While capital can certainly affect sporting outcomes, the athlete with the most social connections or

highest education does not automatically win the competition. Within a sport field there exists capital specific to the sport. Such capital can manifest as titles, sporting ability or reputation. Those with the greatest amount of sport capital are then in the position to legitimize or delegitimize features of the sport field (Bourdieu 1983).

Because power in sports is not entirely dependent on social, economic, cultural, or other capital, sports can be a site of resistance to dominant social structures. Power is neither stagnant nor objective. A well-respected athlete may be able to change how the game is played regardless of institutional rulings because a fraction of participants and observers of the sport see their methods as legitimate and thus support or mimic their play. Cultural dynamics and systems of power are continually remade through the daily actions that reify them (Williams 1978).

Sports can be a site where fractions of people traditionally removed from power can inject their own definitions. For example, cricket was originally introduced to the West Indies to instruct players in teammanship and common sense. However, through local defiance, the sport morphed into a symbol of resistance to colonization (Stoddart 2004; Giulianotti 2005). In this case the definition of the dominant meaning of sport was contested by at least two different groups and shifted in favor of the colonized.

Strategies for Maintaining Power

Fields are dynamic; the struggle for power is a *constant* struggle (Bourdieu 1983). Fractions of people who find themselves in power must therefore work to maintain it. This can be accomplished in a few ways.

First, fields are relational. Within a field any object or concept is only given “distinctive *value* from its negative relationship” with other objects within the field (Bourdieu 1983:313). One group of people can therefore present definitions of sports or sport features that raise up

their own ideas while simultaneously oppressing the definitions of others. This process of distinction is reflected in the seventeenth century emergence of sports in England. In these leisure centric establishments, “the sons of aristocratic or upper-bourgeois families took over a number of popular – i.e. vulgar – games, simultaneously changing their meaning and function in exactly the same way as the field of learned music transformed the folk dances” (Bourdieu 1978:823). When compared to popular games, sports were presented as refined art forms that contrasted with the “vulgar” activities of folk events. This strategy of distinction on the part of the upper-bourgeois included both the dismissal of the activities and definitions of the working class and the elevation of activities and definitions of the bourgeois class.

The second way fractions can work to maintain power is to tie definitions to resources outside of sports that that fraction has access to. Although sports are not dependent on outside forms of capital, fields are often nested within larger fields. For instance, any sport field is set within the field of economic capital. This introduces a two-way relationship between the positions a person occupies in each field. Economic capital is often a pathway into sports via one’s ability to pay for gear, private lessons, and club fees. All of these assets can result in a rise in sporting ability and therefore a rise in the sporting field. In the other direction doing well in sports can also result in a rise in position of the other fields one occupies. Some athletes, such as Serena Williams, are on the level of celebrity with significant amounts of cultural, social, and economic capital.

To return to the seventeenth century English bourgeois definition of sport, this definition pulled on the resources already available to the bourgeois to define the correct meaning and function of sport (Bourdieu 1978). Unlike the plebian act of playing sports to accrue economic capital or engage in popular traditions, the bourgeois stated sports should be performed as a

display of free time and unattached to greater end (Bourdieu 1978; Giulianotti 2005). In this context, free time should be read as the hidden economy of time or the ability to use time and energy unproductively rather than to fulfill needs to survive (Bourdieu 1978; Veblen 1899).

The Olympics has long subscribed to this bourgeois definition of sport. Historically professional athletes, who get paid to compete, have been banned from the renowned games. Only since 1985 have professional athletes begun to very slowly gain access to the sport capital earned through Olympic titles (Thomas 1985). Up until recently the preservation of Olympic titles for amateur athletes, who have the ability to train, travel, and compete in their sport without financial compensation, represented a significant accomplishment in the bourgeois' fight over maintaining the power of legitimization in the field of sport (Loland 2002).

By linking the ability to accrue sport capital to the ability to use time unproductively, the bourgeois essentially said sport capital is only available to people with economic capital. Furthermore, because positions of power are further restricted to people who had economic capital to start with the bourgeois class are theoretically more likely stay in power. If this definition of sport is accepted as the legitimate definition, bourgeois are thus likely to monopolize power in the sport field long term.

Fair Play

In addition to defining amateur competition as the pinnacle of sport achievement, the English boarding school system scripted the attitude with which sports should be played. Sports were used as “a means to realizing what was seen as an ideal masculine, moral, and Christian upbringing” (MacIntosh 1979 in Loland 2002). Teachers used sports to instruct students in lessons about “physical and mental toughness, and loyalty to their team and school” (Loland 2002:13). Sports were about passing on the bourgeois practice of using time unproductively and

priming future leaders with the characteristics believed to set them up for success in life (Bourdieu 1978). Encapsulating these concepts was the idea of fair play.

Loland defines fair play as competing within both the written rules and within the spirit of these rules (2002:13). Bourdieu emphasizes that the method of winning through fair play is “conceived as an aristocratic disposition utterly opposed to the plebian pursuit of victory at all costs” (Bourdieu 1978: 824-5). Fair play is conceptualized as an attitude, or “personal virtue”, separate from the outcome of the game (Loland 2002:13) and distinctly in contrast with the pursuits of the people. Fair play is a definition of winning the game that engages in the strategy of distinction and relies on a bourgeois level of access to capital. Fair play is concerned with the monopolization of power in sports.

In “Sport and Social Class” Pierre Bourdieu (1978) conceptualizes the English boarding school form of fair play and the colonialist ethos of common sense as mechanisms of class distinction. Fair play was linked to a set of concepts or values that were defined and controlled by the bourgeois. These included valuing “education over instruction, character or willpower over intelligence, sport over culture.” The result was to create “a hierarchy irreducible to the strictly scholastic hierarchy which favors the second term in those oppositions. It means, as it were, disqualifying or discrediting the values recognized by other fractions of the dominant class or by other classes” (Bourdieu 1978:825-6). By getting ideas of fair play accepted within the field of sport, the dominant class emphasizes the particular combination of experience and values associated with that class. In doing so, they also limited ascension into positions of power in sport via education or other paths alone. It says you only belong if you always belonged.

In his analysis of the leisure class Thorstein Veblen, defines manners as “an expression of the relation of status,” a way to easily distinguish if one belongs (1899:5). Through this lens,

manners are a form of embodied capital: things you do or act out that indicate your social position. One's manners illustrate the social position to which one is acclimated. A socialite is less likely to know how to behave at a folk event and a laborer is unlikely to know which fork to select from a place setting in a dining room. Thus, your ability to either fit or not fit into a space is indicative of the capital you possess and because knowledge is socially located, of the capital you therefore embody.

We can therefore understand fair play, which is linked to the bourgeois understandings of character, willpower, and education, as a form of embodied capital. The knowledge of how to speak, act, and play with and by the rules is informed by your social location. Fair play, as defined by Bourdieu (1978) and Loland (2002), perpetuates the hidden economy of time by centering the amateurism and moral play rather than acknowledging them as a form of livelihood. It works to exclude those from other social classes who are deemed “not to compete with the ‘correct’ attitude and respect for the intrinsic value of the game” (Loland 2002:13). The rhetoric of fair play is therefore the rhetoric over control of the definition of how to properly play sports. Where it is legitimized as necessary to winning, fair play favors embodied and economic capital for victory.

Ultimate

Ultimate is a relatively new sport first emerging in a formalized capacity in 1968. Of interest in this study, it elevates ideas of fair play in its official rules (USUA 2022a), honors (USAU 2021), and cultural scripts (Spencer-Cavaliere et al 2017; Thornton 2004). This paper is interested in how these ideas of fair play are experienced in ultimate as informed by Bourdieu's analysis of fair play as a mechanism of class distinction. However, while Bourdieu's analysis is

centered around class, I am interested in how fair play is experienced along different axes of power including class, gender, and race.

Ultimate is a team sport played with seven players from each competing team on a 40 by 120-yard field. Players attempt to move the disc down the field and catch it in their opponents' endzone. Players cannot run with the disc but rather must establish a pivot foot and successfully complete a pass to another teammate to maintain possession. If the disc touches the ground or is intercepted by a defender the result is a change in possession, or "turnover".

Ultimate is divided into three divisions of play, men's or open, mixed gendered, and women's. Players are permitted to select the division that best aligns with their gender identity with the open division open to all players although primarily comprised of men. In the mixed division players select whether they want to play as female-matching or male-matching. The systems of declaring whether you are a female-matching or male-matching players allow mixed to still play with a gender ratio without completely prescribing to the gender binary. A gender ratio of female to male matching players is set at the beginning of a game (usually either 3 vs 4 or 4 vs 3). There are additional formats in mixed such as a (3 female-matching, 3 male-matching, and 1 other) to account for gender diversity although these are less common. When playing mixed, players are not required to match up against opponents of the same gender-match.

Ultimate is largely self-officiated, played without traditional referees, umpires or officiants. Players on the field are largely responsible for 'calling' infractions, completions, turnovers, and goals. They then have the opportunity to discuss, dispute, and/or agree to rescind any given 'call' with the other players on the field. The inclusion of a third-party mediator, called an observer, is becoming more common in competition settings. An observer's jurisdiction may vary by competition but generally they do not make active foul or violation calls (USAU 2022b;

PUL 2022). Rather players may defer to an observer to resolve a dispute for them or clarify a rule, though the players remain responsible for determining the correct call. Lastly, some professional ultimate leagues have active referees who are responsible for making all active calls although some room for player involvement remains. (American Ultimate Disc League 2022). While ultimate competitions outside of North America remain largely self-officiated, even at the highest levels of play it is important to note this paper will be focused on ultimate played within the U.S.

Within the U.S. ultimate players are disproportionately White non-Hispanic, male, and of higher socioeconomic status than the general population (Laseter 2022). These trends can be partially attributed to historic pipelines into the sport. Many people begin playing in college or through personal connections with someone who is already involved in this sport (Disc Diversity 2020; Eisner 2019; McGlynn 2020). As a result, similar populations continue to be brought into the sport year after year. While these pipelines are definitely worth interrogating, this paper is interested in the role of fair play once players outside this predominate identity enter the sport.

Fair Play in Ultimate

An important component of self-officiation in ultimate is spirit of the game (SOTG), an ethos, or moral code by which ultimate players are obliged to act. For the purposes of this paper, we will consider SOTG ultimate's version of fair play. The definition of SOTG has changed over the years and ethnographic and qualitative studies have found variations in how players interpret the concept (Griggs 2011; Robbins 2004; Spencer-Cavaliere et al 2017). Spencer-Cavaliere et al (2017) found SOTG was a formalized ethos of fair play while Crocket (2015) talked about it as tenants of moderation, tolerance, and self-control. Spirit is often tied back to the 1960s/70s countercultural legacy of the sport (Crocket 2016) and frequently used by players to distinguish

ultimate as unique in the universe of sports (Crocket 2015; Thornton 2004). SOTG has been proposed as the “guiding moral order” by which self-officiation is able to function and allow players to “evade the code of winning at all costs” (Robbins 2004:333). SOTG also functions to uphold the integrity of the rules. Ultimate contrasts to nearly “all other comparable team sports today” in that intentionally breaching the rules is not considered an “an integral part of the strategy of the game” (Thonhauser 2022:9). Currently the governing body of ultimate in the U.S., USA Ultimate (USAU), defines spirit in their rules. This body observes that as “a truly unique and defining element of ultimate, Spirit of the Game places the responsibility of fair play solely on the athletes themselves by requiring each player to know the rules and make their own calls, without the help of a neutral official. These underlying principles reinforce mutual respect and trust between opponents; communication and conflict resolution skills; and self-confidence – both on and off the field of play” (USAU 2022c).

The centrality of spirit is perpetuated through the use of spirit scores with which teams quantify the spirited behavior of themselves and their opponents after each match. Based off spirit scores, teams can win spirit awards at the end of tournaments. Individual spirit awards based on popular vote are also a common practice in many ultimate settings. Players who make bad calls on the field, therefore failing to uphold spirit, may be shamed by fellow players or crowds (Robbins 2012). Similarly, players who have a reputation for being un-spirited may be less likely to be chosen for a team (Robbins 2012). Spirit thus acts as a form of capital within ultimate communities and has sway on a player’s position within the field.

Parallels between SOTG and the earlier discussion of fair play are easily drawn. SOTG is conceived in opposition to the plebian pursuit of winning at all costs. It comes with a framework

of proper behavior and relies on the universal understanding of subjective concepts including fun and respect. Lastly, it acts as a form of capital in the field of ultimate.

Of particular interest to previous scholars has been how self-officiation actually works in ultimate frisbee. To clarify, many sports are commonly self-officiated; however, the ultimate community takes particular pride in this feature (McGlynn 2020; Thornton 2004). Within a self-officiated setting, players are supposed to be responsible for knowing and upholding the rules. Nonetheless, ethnographic scholarship on ultimate has found large variation in rule enactment (Crocket 2015; Griggs 2011; Robbins 2004; Robbins 2012). Notably, Robbins (2012) found that as rule complexity grows so does rule ignorance which may account for some of this variation. Even at higher levels of play, where players in general are more familiar with rules, rule enactment continues to vary (Crocket 2015; Robbins 2004; Robbins 2012).

What is repeatedly highlighted in all studies that grapple with how self-officiation operates is the concept of flow. Robbins found that under SOTG “eye-for-an-eye reciprocity is shunned in favor of letting infractions *slide* so as to keep a continual ‘flow’ of the game” (2012:286). Crocket (2015), Griggs (2011), and Robbins (2004) similarly found that players are often reluctant to disrupt the game by stopping play and taking the time to discuss a call. Rather, they learn to get a sense for the game and refrain from calls which would interrupt its flow.

The idea of flow, as upheld by SOTG, links back to ideas of embodied positionality or capital which manifest as inclinations, habits, and bodily impulses. Embodied positionality or habitus is “constructed from and reflects the cultural and economic resources that define an individual’s place in the social world” (Beisel 1993:159). In acting out habitus associated with a certain positionality, we remake the habitus of that positionality. Habitus then describes the “socialized subjectivity” of people and is commonly referred to as “a feel for the game”

(Giulianotti 2005:157). Thus, if the officiation of ultimate is rooted in ‘a feel for the game’ then it is rooted in the habitus of the social position of players. Moreover, given the demographics of ultimate, the habitus being taught and remade on the field is likely to be one rooted in a White, male and upper-class positionality. Ultimate thus relies on the embodied capital of that identity to succeed in demonstrating the spirit required to correctly enact the sport.

Meanings of Fair Play

Many ultimate players cite SOTG as a reason they continue to play the sport (Robbins 2012; Spencer-Cavaliere et al 2017). Many players like that ultimate does not push a win-at-all costs mentality and incorporates fair play into its rhetoric. Crocket (2016) found ultimate players viewed SOTG as an asset in the fight for greater gender equity in ultimate. These players harnessed SOTG to argue that part of a non-win-at-all-cost ethos is finding and prompting the joy in playing for everyone and thus gender inequity violates spirit. Other players emphasize the importance of SOTG to guard the integrity of the game and ensure players abide by the rules (Griggs 2011).

Some players have raised concerns about spirit. Seemingly alone in published literature on ultimate, Thornton (2004) warns of the dangers of a sport that declaims inclusion while enacting something different. He argues, “ultimate players’ embodiment of the Spirit of the Game seems to represent a desire for moral purity and the negation of social difference” rather than actual inclusive action (2004:187). Outside of published literature members of the ultimate community have written articles or spoken publicly about difficulties around race and SOTG (Lehman 2018; McGlynn 2020a; Newson 2019; Rath 2019; Smith 2022). Players of color have reported being more likely to get called for a foul, to experience microaggressions on the field, or

to struggle with certain manifestations of spirit like post-game high-five lines (El-salaam 2020; McGlynn 2020b; Rath 2019).

Like habitus, prescribed and interrupted meanings also vary socially. Communication is a two-way process in which someone says something and then someone else hears it. What fair play (and even sport) means depends on the social positions of actors (Bourdieu 1978). How we perceive actions is informed by structures we exist in, the cultural meanings we have been taught, and our expectations for what we will hear (Radway 1984). Moreover, what one actor intends to communicate may not be the same message another actor receives (Radway 1984). Thus, when someone communicates what SOTG is in ultimate what the receiver hears is not necessarily what the speaker intended to communicate.

The ultimate specific scholarship discussed above has rarely examined differences within the ultimate community. All the studies were conducted in western countries, and many studies worked with male division teams (Crocket 2015; Griggs 2011; Robbins 2004, 2012) with only a few papers including or looking at experiences of female players (Crocket 2016; Neville 2019; Spencer-Cavaliere et al 2017). Few papers mentioned race at all while none looked at variation between players of different races. While studies have stated that players report variation in understandings of SOTG, those understandings, who is saying what, and what is being said have not been flushed out. These various meanings of SOTG may look like how sports should be played, an oppressive idea of the upper class, an anti-institutional way to play sports, or something else entirely.

Ultimate poses an interesting case study for the effect of fair play in a sport. Fair play, as SOTG, affects the capital of players in the field, it influences how rules are enacted on the field, and it is used to distinguish ultimate from other sports. We expect what fair play means and how

it is experienced to vary depending on the social identities of the players. However, what these variations are remains unclear. Given ultimate's strong connections to ideas of fair play, as linked to bourgeois capital, I hypothesize SOTG reproduces an exclusionary ethos for those removed from positions of power. However, it is also possible that ultimate or pockets of ultimate, in similar fashion to Cricket in the West Indies, have reconceptualized an ethos of fair play separate from bourgeois meanings (Stoddart 2004).

METHODS & POSITIONALITY

I collected data for this project via an online Qualtrics survey which asked respondents about their experiences with SOTG, positions within the sport, and identities held outside of ultimate (see Appendix 1). I collected data through a convenience snowball sample wherein the survey was shared with people I knew in the ultimate community and they, in turn, were asked to share it with other players they knew. Participation in the project was limited to people that had played ultimate before and were over 18 years old.

Of those people who took the survey forty-five said they would be willing to participate in a follow-up interview. Of those, I randomly selected twelve individuals to contact for follow-up and was able to connect with six of them. Five interviews took place over a video call and one was comprised of conversations over zoom and email. Due to time restrictions, interviews were not officially coded. Trends and quotes were pulled out in order to fill out the survey data which is the focus of my analysis.

As an ultimate player myself, I bring personal experiences with the game to this project. As a member of the ultimate community since birth and a current captain of a college team I have access to a network of players and community members. However, my distinct position is also reflected in the data that I was able to collect. The northeast region, where I spent the first

twelve years of my life as a kid of two ultimate players and the next six playing, is drastically overrepresented in the survey sample comprising 69.0% of responses. The south-central region, where I play now comprises 10.9% of responses, and all other regions fall between 7.8% and 0.8%. Asian and Hispanic/Latinx players are also slightly underrepresented in the sample when compared to USAU's membership data from 2019 (the most recent data available). This may be due to the overall demographics of the northeast which tends to be more White non-Hispanic than the U.S. as a whole (United States Census Bureau 2021). It should therefore be noted now that any findings from this data are not necessarily generalizable and that this should be considered an exploratory study.

I am also the only person who analyzed the data. My unique experiences as a player in a variety of settings (pick-up games, local leagues, high school, youth club, adult club and college) as well as experience in all three divisions gives me insights into the respondents' ultimate jargon, the settings they may reference in their responses, and my own experience of how the game operates. Additionally, a preexisting relationship with some of the participants in this study allowed me to gain a level of trust and depth that is hard to obtain in a short zoom interview.

In particular, my identity as a woman has given me personal experience with the subtle (and blatant) power dynamics of a sport that subscribes to a patriarchal idea of athleticism. My racial (White non-Hispanic), socioeconomic (middle to upper class), and gender (cisgender) all align with the identities the sport of Ultimate was created around and by. Systems in ultimate are therefore frequently constructed to work for me. For example, I have the resources to travel across states to spend an entire weekend playing ultimate. In data analysis, I am therefore not as well situated to identify the unquestioned assumptions that exist in the sport or places where the system does not work for people who hold different social identities.

ANALYSIS

Demographics

Table 1. Percent (n) of Survey Respondent Demographics

		Interviews	Survey	USAU	
		2023	2023	Members	ACS
				2019 (%)	2021 (%)
Gender	Female	50.0 (3)	45.7 (59)	32.3	50.5
	Male	50.0 (3)	48.8 (63)	67.3	49.5
	Nonbinary/Genderqueer	--	5.4 (7)	0.2	
Race	Asian	16.7 (1)	2.3 (3)	8.5	5.8
	Black	16.7 (1)	2.3 (3)	1.5	12.1
	Hispanic/Latinx	--	1.6 (2)	3.3	18.8
	Native American/Alaska Native	--	0.8 (1)	0.3	1.0
	Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	--	--	0.2	0.2
	White non-Hispanic	50.0 (3)	89.1 (115)	62.7	58.1
	Multiracial or Another Race	16.7 (1)	3.1 (4)	3.7	19.8
	Prefer not to say or Blank	--	3.9 (5)	19.9	
Income	Less than \$25,000	50.0 (3)	9.3 (12)	21.4	17.4
	\$25,000 to \$49,999	--	7.8 (10)	3.7	19.1
	\$50,000 to \$74,999	--	8.5 (11)	4.1	16.8
	\$75,000 to \$99,999	16.7 (1)	14.7 (19)	2.3	12.8
	\$100,000 to More	33.3 (2)	52.7 (68)	3.7	34.0
	No Response	--	7.0 (9)	64.9	
Age*	18-24	50.0 (3)	42.6 (55)	46.4	9.1
	25-34	--	22.5 (29)	<u>25-35</u> 21.2	13.6
	35-44	16.7 (1)	16.3 (21)	<u>36-39</u> 2.5	13.2
	45-54	16.7 (1)	10.9 (14)	<u>40-49</u> 3.2	12.3
	55-64	16.7 (1)	7.0 (9)	<u>50-59</u> 1.9	12.9
	65+	--	0.8 (1)	<u>60-89</u> 0.3	15.3
Total					
(N)		6	129	61678	331,893, 745

* Note that USAU tracked age groups differently than both my survey and the ACS.

Table 1 shows the breakdown of the four demographic measures captured in the survey that are not directly tied to ultimate (i.e. excluding number of years the respondent has played, the divisions they have played in...). The survey demographics are compared to the most recent

demographic data of USAU membership holders. Importantly, a USAU membership is required to participate in most competitions in the U.S including club and college play. A USAU membership is not a requirement for most pick-up games and locally run leagues. The USAU membership column is therefore not a perfect reflection of the ultimate population but is included to give some reference to the demographics of the sport as a whole. Lastly, census data from the 2021 American Community Survey (ACS) estimate is included to give reference to the demographics of the wider U.S. population.

Comparison between USAU member data and U.S. census data indicates that male players are overrepresented in the sport, comprising 49.5% of the national population and 67.3% of membership holders whereas only 32.2% of members identify as female and 0.2% as another gender. Census data for nonbinary or genderqueer members of the general population was not available. Ultimate also appears disproportionately Asian (8.5% USAU vs 5.8% ACS) and White non-Hispanic (62.7% USAU vs 58.1% ACS) whereas Black, Hispanic/Latinx, and Multiracial players are underrepresented. Importantly, nearly 20% of USAU members chose not to share race/ethnicity data in 2019 so these data points may not capture the full picture. Demographics for race/ethnicity may total over 100% as respondents had the ability to select multiple options.

There is a similar issue with the income data for which more than half of members (64.9%) chose not to share their income bracket. Also notable is that 93.1% of those in the lowest income bracket reported incomes of under \$15,000 and may be students/youth who are not the primary income providers for their household. It is therefore hard to know what socioeconomic status looks like over the greater ultimate population from this USAU data.

As may be expected with a high impact sport, ultimate players skew young with 46.4% of USAU members falling between 18-24 years old (with 24.1% under 18). Involvement then continues but declines, dropping markedly after 35 years of age.

Survey demographics show an overrepresentation of female and nonbinary/genderqueer players with 45.7% survey vs 32.3% USAU and 5.4% survey vs 0.2% USAU respectively. Race/ethnicity survey data show Asian players are underrepresented whereas White non-Hispanic players are overrepresented when compared to USAU data. Survey data indicate a disproportionate number of players in the highest income bracket with 52.7% reporting a household income of over \$100,000 compared with 34.0% of the general population. The first three income brackets are subsequently underrepresented in the survey when compared with ACS data. USAU income data are ignored on account of the degree of missing data.

The age distribution of ultimate players is fairly well reflected in the survey with 18-24 year-olds comprising 42.6% of survey respondents and 46.4% of USAU members. The 25-34 (survey) and 25-35 (USAU) age groups are again fairly consistent, both falling just over 20%. After this group it becomes more difficult to compare but the survey consistently overrepresents older players. This is likely a result of a few factors. First, respondents were not required to be actively playing ultimate but rather were required to have played at some point in their lives. Second, older players may be less likely to play in formal competitions but still participate in less intense settings like pick-up or local leagues and thus be missing generally from USAU's measure of the ultimate population.

Bourdieu and SOTG

Survey results show that SOTG is widely accepted as a positive attribute of ultimate. 65.4% of respondents strongly agreed that SOTG was essential to the sport of ultimate. 50.4%

strongly agreed that SOTG was important to why they play the game. 126 out of 129 provided their own definition for SOTG without anyone stating they were unfamiliar with the concept demonstrating its strong integration into the sport of ultimate. One respondent wrote:

Spirit of the game and the energy that comes with it is what drew me to ultimate in the first place and what has made me keep playing. The community I've found in ultimate (both within my own teams and with players on other teams) is largely due to spirit of the game, and I wouldn't trade that for anything. (Woman, White non-Hispanic, 18-24, 4 years of playing)

This appreciation for was reflected in many responses though a minority of players (6.3%) viewed the practice either negatively or included caveats about its enactment in their definition.

The broad support for SOTG aligns with the first step of Bourdieu's analysis: fair play is widely accepted by participants. Bourdieu's next point, that fair play can become a form of capital within sport, is also mirrored in the data. Some survey respondents wrote about respecting people who demonstrated strong SOTG, often players who occupy positions of power. For example:

Actually, it goes along with...being called a dick...I was talking on the sideline to my own teammates and their captain(?) overheard and came over to find out what happened and clearly talked to her player about it, who came over and apologized (a bit unconvincingly). The captain was showing strong SOTG. (Woman, 35-44, White non-Hispanic, 10+ years)

One interviewee stated that people who have power and sway over him are those who "are really spirited, and if they have a record of being really spirited, ... and showing that on the field" (Tom, Man, White non-Hispanic, 56-64, 10+ years). Recognition of spirit as a form of power was also reflected in descriptions of spirit captain roles, and teammates holding each other accountable to the rules on the field.

The next step of Bourdieu's theory is that fair play results in a harmful ethos that works to exclude people outside the dominant group from the sport and success within it. This study is based around participant perceptions of the game, so I am therefore unable to speak to what actually occurs on the field (who is making calls, who is contesting calls², what the outcome of calls are...) nor did I collect data on game outcomes. However, data on players' attitudes towards SOTG as well as experiences on the field can start to get at the question of who, if anyone, feels excluded within the sport.

In terms of broad explicit relationships with SOTG (whether players found it essential to the game, whether it was important to why they play, how confident they felt in their understanding of it, how just they thought it was), player identities used in this study failed to account for more than a weak effect in response variability. We are therefore left with two possible primary scenarios. The first is that SOTG is not felt or operationalized differently based on gender, race/ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. The second possible scenario is that SOTG does result in varied experiences within ultimate, but that players do not always associate the differences with SOTG.

Interviews and qualitative survey answers were then used to better understand player relationship with SOTG and search for whether latent power dynamics exist within the concept. Player definitions of SOTG represented an important place of divergence in the study. While USAU proposes their definition of SOTG, survey respondents returned a host of nonuniform answers. Response coding yielded five primary themes in SOTG definitions: proper rules

² The outcome of the discussion may be consensus and agreement regarding the correctness of the call, the call is correct, or the call is incorrect. Often, when there is not agreement between players on the whether the call is correct, another player involved in the play that resulted in the call may instead 'contest' the call. The rules of ultimate describe how possession, position and/or the score are impacted for a contested call.

knowledge and use (included in 74.6% of responses), playing with respect (62.7%), being an active community member (36.5%), prioritizing fun (34.9%), and subjectivity in SOTG (6.3%).

Rules of Play

The rules in ultimate include basic rules of play (how to score, how to move the disc down the field), descriptions of fouls, emphasis on preserving the safety of others, and the rules of spirited play (banning offensive language, considering an opponent's point of view...) (USAU 2022a). In this context, SOTG is often viewed as a mechanism for successful self-officiation.

A handful of players brought up ultimate's self-officiated format as an important aspect of why they enjoy the sport. Comparisons were often drawn between other sports in which, ...there are always complaints about 'calls', and players are rewarded for faking injuries, penalties, etc. Spirit of the game allows players to decide that winning a call is less important than integrity, without a referee making the decision. I love that the mindset is that players need to be comfortable with the rulings on the field in order to proceed. (Man, Other, 25-34, 8-9years)

In addition to eliminating the subgame of 'playing to the ref', players enjoyed the ability to both advocate for themselves and engage with multiple perspectives. When asked to describe a positive experience with SOTG, 42.7% of respondents described instances of successful self-officiation wherein players made appropriate calls and held themselves accountable to the rules. This often involved making calls which impeded their ability to win the game thus valuing the rules over the desire to win. Respondents acknowledged that one person will not always have the best perspective and engaging in conversation is an important part of play for them.

In theory self-officiation can offer more sources of insight than a single official. Firstly, as in the case of foul calls, you are often more aware of how another player affected you than a third party is. Additionally, the concept of officiating through multiple perspectives mirrors Donna Haraway's theory of best approaching an objective truth. Since each individual is socially

situated and therefore unable to escape subjectivity the composition of multiple subjective perspectives can get us closest to the truth (Haraway 1988).

However, respondents also spoke about times when rule knowledge and use went poorly. When asked to share a poor experience with SOTG, 51.1% of respondents cited instances where players made bad calls, refused to partake in discussions, and/or appeared to self-officiate based on personal interest rather than integrity of the game. One respondent wrote about another player's "unwillingness to admit unlawful play even when teammates and opponents both [were] telling this person their play was not appropriate" (Woman, White non-Hispanic, 25-34, 5years). The ability of one player to hold up or debate play may be a good thing if the player truly believes they alone know what happened. Though, at the same time, data highlight that there is nothing in the rules or SOTG beyond social pressure to prevent a player from contesting all calls made against them or refusing to listen to the perspectives of others.

The second disconnect between the theory of SOTG and the practice is actual rule knowledge. Knowing the rules of ultimate means reading and remembering the contents of a 45-page pdf document. One interviewee recalled reading the whole rule book when she was elected spirit captain of her high school team only to realize the coach who had told her to do this was only joking (Cammie, Woman, White non-Hispanic, 18-24, 5 years). Another interviewee stated he had to read the rules because he was a coach (Tom). No data spoke to an expectation that all players read the rules before competing in ultimate. Rather than reading the rules, players described learning them through experience on the field. One shared,

I sometimes play in the summer with like older players and they'll throw the book at you man, and you learn a lot from them. Like I learned I think over the summer that if you go and you make a movement that looks like you are trying to pick up the disc but then you don't pick it up, it's like some sort of foul because it's like a delay of game...in that moment trying to get it

enforced I was like dude this is pickup what are you doing! Like there's some rules like that I don't know off the top of my head I just generally know pick, foul, stall, dangerous play...it definitely helps to know the rules because you can definitely end up making really stupid calls... (Jeremy, Man, White non-Hispanic, 18-24, 4 years)

A few things are important to pull out from Jeremy's response. First learning through play is a common experience for respondents and knowing the rules "helps" but is not required. Secondly, the rules he did report knowing are the ones that come up most frequently in games he is playing. Connected to this were other responses expressing resistance to calling rules or forgetting to make calls. Another interviewee said he often did not notice a rule infraction after the moment has past (Kade, Man, Asian/White non-Hispanic, 18-24, 3 years). Learning to make calls can then also be understood as an important part of playing within the rules too.

Adding to the above issues with rules enactment, is dissonance around how SOTG interacts with proper rules knowledge and use. In the above section Jeremy spoke to being annoyed that some players wanted to enforce all rules during a less formal pick-up game. The discrepancy about what rules should be enforced also appeared in survey respondents' attitudes toward SOTG. One wrote that, "in a game of pick up, someone tries to catch a pull and then drops it. The rules say that is a turnover, but the spirit of the game move would be to let them pick up the disc and play as if they had caught it" (Man, White non-Hispanic, 35-44, 10+years). For some players SOTG is about being flexible as it's "a fluid thing" and should be "changed and modified based on the situation" (Woman, White non-Hispanic, 25-34, 10+ years). For others, SOTG was defined as "the responsibility of all players on the field to know the rules and follow them at all times" (Man, White non-Hispanic, 18-24, 6-7 years).

Variation in SOTG will appear as a theme throughout this paper. In order to revisit my original hypothesis, that SOTG is not experienced by players uniformly, I investigate the

variations in how respondents conceptualized the practice across three non-ultimate specific identities (gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status).

Chi-square tests of independence are used to explore variation in demographic identities across various measures in the study. Since many group sizes are minute, Fisher's exact test is used to corroborate any statistically significant findings, although these again should not be taken as generalizable. Cramer's V and Kendall's tau-b are used as a primary measure of association to determine how strongly, if at all, demographic identities covaried with survey responses.

In the context of rules knowledge and use, neither gender, socioeconomic status, nor BIPOC identity appeared to notably affect whether respondents include this code in their SOTG definition ($V=0.0, p=0.8$; $\text{tau-b}=-0.2, p=0.2$; $V=0.0, p=0.9$ respectively). Race presented a moderate association between the inclusion of rules and definitions of SOTG with 100.0% of Asian, 100.0% of Hispanic/Latinx, 73.0% of White non-Hispanic, 50.0% of Black, and 0.0% of Native American/Alaska Native respondents ($V=0.2, p=0.2$). While these trends could be worth investigating, the minute sample size of most racial groups means that these findings are likely anecdotal. This difficulty with the data persists throughout the paper; however, a breakdown of all racial groups continues to be included so that variation between different racial/ethnic identities is not erased. Further research with a larger sample may be able to further illustrate

Playing with Respect

The term respect appeared in 62.7% of respondents' definitions of SOTG. Many responses emphasized respect broadly for instance, "... play in way to make everyone feel valued, included, and respected" (Woman, White non-Hispanic, 25-34, 3 years). Respondents reported an ethos of respect enabling them to be heard on the field. After a tricky catch one respondents open was unsure if they were out of bounds. "They questioned me and I explained

what happened and they just were like okay that's fine and we moved on" (Woman, White non-Hispanic, 25-34, 2 years). The player was able to successfully advocate for what they felt happened and the opponent respected their opinion. No associations between gender, race/ethnicity, or socioeconomic status and inclusion of respect were found.

Respect is a personal and subjective concept. When asked how players communicate respect, answers varied. 61.5% of people who answered this question included praising opponents, 67.0% included aspects of respectful communication, 20.9% describe giving out high fives or fist bumps, 14.2% included time spent talking outside of expected interactions, and 8.8% said playing your best. Within these categories the effects of gender, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status were weak or negligible. The only exception was gender and race had weak to moderate effects in the playing your best category with 0.0% nonbinary/genderqueer, 2.3% male, and 15.9% of female respondents ($V=0.2$, $p=0.1$) and 0.0% Asian, 7.1% White non-Hispanic, and 50.0% Black respondents ($V=0.3$, $p=0.0$). In all these instances the p-value approaches or achieves significance at the 0.1 level although the uneven group sizes in this study means results are not necessarily generalizable.

Mirroring variation in displays of respect were variations in felt respect. 18.6% women, 27.0% of men, and 28.6% of nonbinary/genderqueer respondents always feel respected when playing ultimate ($V=0.2$, $p=0.2$). One player wrote that "often male voices and/ or white voices are heard much more than mine. Outspoken people are also heard more than softspoken..." (Woman, Black/White non-Hispanic, 25-34, 10+ years). Building off this, female-matching players repeatedly brought up issues in mixed spaces. One stating, "I play for a mixed club team now, and as a woman-matching player this is a challenging environment to feel fully supported

and important on the field, even though I feel respected and valued by my teammates off the field” (Woman, White non-Hispanic, 18-24, 8-9 years).

When asked about power dynamics that exist on the field, each of the male interviewees also brought up the role of gender on the field. Kade stated, “Of course when we play mixed frisbee it has a pretty obvious impact ... I’ll do my best to not be especially physical while still doing what I can to get the disc and I’ll be more careful not to run through people.” Jeremy noted that in mixed, “it’s just like obviously you are going to have guys who think they are all that...I would just say that more often than not the male identifying players that I play with don’t abuse that power dynamic.”

Discussions of mixed included tags of ‘of course’ and ‘obviously.’ These sentiments reflect the fact that despite ultimate’s egalitarian philosophy it exists in a patriarchal society. Tom, as a youth coach, talks about how each year he sees boys throwing only to boys and how it takes concentrated effort to break these habits. Patriarchal ideas of athleticism are also reflected both in respondents’ sentiments about gender mismatches and the construction of USAU’s divisions themselves. Men’s ultimate is grouped in with open. This means that female-matching players are welcome to try out for men’s ultimate teams with of course the assumption they are at a disadvantage and their presences will not negatively affect the game. On the other side of this equation male-matching are barred from the women’s division.

Male players expressed concerns about greater body control and holding back more than they would when playing another male-matching player. On the other side of this dynamic female-matching players described not getting thrown to by male players (Cammie) or feelings of having to prove themselves: “I guess like any sport, you earn respect. As a [woman] playing with younger men, I had to earn respect by proving myself in order to get thrown to” (White

non-Hispanic, 56-64, 10+ years). While male players talk about holding back and not abusing the power dynamic, female players have mixed opinions about how they want to compete against male-matching players with some players feeling like “taking advantage of gender mis-matches” is un-spirited (Woman, White non-Hispanic, 45-54, 10 +years) and others desiring respect through hard play.

The Role of Community

36.5% of respondents included some reference to the larger ultimate community in their definition of SOTG. These responses went beyond one’s own team, or an individual relationship with an opponent and got at the development of all players and larger ultimate community. Teaching was often emphasized with one respondent noting SOTG is “...not just knowing the rules, but making sure everyone else involved in a call does too...” (Nonbinary/Genderqueer, White non-Hispanic, 18-24, 6-7 years). The active nature of being a community member was also reflected in responses where SOTG meant “...objecting to unfair and aggressive behavior” (Man, White non-Hispanic, 56-64, 10+ years) and/or “...celebrating the successes of other teams and cheering for them on the sidelines, too” (Nonbinary/Genderqueer, Hispanic/Latinx, 18-24, 6-7 years).

Of particular emphasis were feelings of acceptance. Cammie spoke about ultimate as a community that immediately accepted her and became central to her social life. In her interview, Nicki spoke about ultimate as a “salvation”, a place where “I was safe/free to be who I am (especially with respect to my sexuality)” (Woman, Black, 35-44, 10+ years).

The emphasis placed on bringing people into the sport of ultimate, of being welcoming, of being a community for each other, has an important function for small sports. One respondent spoke of needing opponents, recalling a time “our team had a full roster and the opposing team

didn't have enough women to play. So rather than make them forfeit, we lent two women to play on their team” (Man, White non-Hispanic, 35-44, 10+ years). When not a lot of people play ultimate, it becomes that much more important that your opponent wants to play you again. The emphasis on acceptance and “getting to play tough, hard-fought games, but enjoying the experience & still respecting each other afterwards” (Woman, White non-Hispanic 25-34, 10+years) speaks back to the need for your opponent to play you again.

For Emily, returning to ultimate later in life, after taking a break after university, was spurred by feelings of isolation and a desire for connection (Woman, Asian, 45-54, 10+ years). “Anytime that I meet anybody that I think they would be able to play ultimate frisbee like if they run or they’ve played soccer or lacrosse or whatever I basically invite anybody to play ultimate frisbee.” Currently, she plays with a mixture of college players and older community members. “I would love to play with women my own age but there’s not a lot of people up here.” Another respondent tied love of the game and desire to play back to SOTG stating, “SOTG is also a celebration of playing, a practice of gratitude. It’s a gift to play, a joy to play. We need each other as a team to play, and we need our opponents to play” (Man, Other, 56-64, 10+ years).

Connected to SOTG’s emphasis on caring about the experience of others and ultimate’s broader desire to retain players, time and activities have been built into ultimate to create opportunities for bonding outside of simply game play. Practices like spirit circles³ offer time “...where both teams sit down together and stretch and chat (mostly making jokes, rarely serious) about the game and the day of frisbee. I feel like this really builds the feeling of community” (Man, White non-Hispanic, 25-34, 8-9 years). Similarly, one interviewee or

³ Spirit circles are spaces where two teams come together, usually post game, and spend some time reflecting on the match. Reflection often looks like praising game play, spirit, and or attitude on the field. Sometimes small gifts are exchanged to acknowledge players the opposing viewed as particularly spirited. The expectations around whether teams will have a spirit circles vary across the sport.

respondent said, "...My club team does "coconut bowling" at the end of our games and the other teams LOVE it. Even when we play (and get crushed by) Brute Squad, they are so so excited to play our spirit game afterwards" (Woman, White non-Hispanic, 25-34, 10+ years). Activities like 'coconut bowling' also speak back to the prioritization of fun that appeared in (34.9%) of SOTG responses. Post-game cheers and high-fives also present similar time spent thinking about one another in a way that often aims to end play on a positive and fun note.

While community may offer acceptance and feelings of belonging, the predominant role community plays within this sport can also have negative impacts. Nicki spoke extensively about noticing that fouls get called on her more often and not always feeling safe enough to address the racism operating on the field. For her, as a Black player "in a predominantly White sport, SOTG is ultimate's method of policing black and brown bodies." The subjectivity and variation in SOTG leave room for a lot of bias in this process, something 9.1% of respondents noted when asked to expand on dynamics with SOTG. In a predominately white sport situated in a systemically racist society, the practice of community policing can be deeply harmful, whether intentional or not.

As previously discussed, both SOTG and the interconnected aspects of rules knowledge and enforcement are variable. As a result, a predominately male, White non-Hispanic, and upper socioeconomic cultural may be upholding habitus that Nicki is speaking to and that negatively affect Black players who are already underrepresented in the community. Furthermore, despite respecting others being written in the rules, there is no mechanism to ensure players unpack their own biases and positionalities before entering the field of play and policing their fellow players. In mixed play, respondents spoke to female-matching players as being the ones to call out sexist behavior. In Cammie's high school experience of not getting passed to, it was the coach's wife

who told him in turn to say something. Similarly, Tom stated that “some of the girls will step right up and say you’re not throwing to me” to the boys in youth ultimate. The responsibility to call out behavior then often falls on the negatively affected versus the inequity being seen and addressed by the community as a whole.

Of particular influence in community policing is the team to which a player belongs. A handful of respondents described instances where the opposing team called their own members out for interjecting if their teammate got too heated in an argument. On the other hand, some respondents expressed struggles dealing with teams who enacted different versions of the rules or expectations of play on the field:

We had a game [in which]... the other team was strong and more physical than we were used to. They physically hit us quite a bit and we called fouls accordingly. At one point in the second half their spirit captain called a spirit timeout and we did a spirit circle with both teams... They said that they felt [we] were calling a lot of fouls and disrupting the flow of the game....Meanwhile we felt that they were fouling us a lot, ... (Woman, White non-Hispanic, 25-34, 10+ years).

In this instance the teams were unable to come to an agreement about play. While this resulted in a negative experience for the respondent, players continued to play by their own rules. As reflected in the section about rules enforcement, teams are important spaces in which players learn and are socialized to the rules. This can allow players to find teams they like being on and potentially be insulated from being policed by all other players on the field if their own captains defend their players’ enactment of rules (as those did the example above).

Rationalizing SOTG

Analysis of quantitative data showed that while neither gender, race, or socioeconomic status were strong indicators of how people understood or felt about SOTG, latent power differences still existed in the break down between theory of SOTG and practice in reality.

83.3% of non-binary, 74.6% of female, and 54.8% of male respondents said they strongly agreed that SOTG was an essential component of the game ($V=0.2, p=0.2$) at the same time male players reported higher comfortability with SOTG ($V=0.2, p=0.2$) and a stronger belief that SOTG was just ($V=0.2, p=0.6$). In qualitative responses about whether players felt respected, valued, and supported 50.0% of nonbinary/genderqueer, 31.1% of women, and 0.0% of men raised issues about female-matching athletes feeling less respected and valued in mixed settings. Results were statistically significant at the 0.01 level and gender had a relatively strong association with how respondents answered the questions ($V=0.4, p=0.00$). Even though female-matching players felt less protected by SOTG, and they experienced lower levels of respect, they still put faith in the system of SOTG.

In her interview Cammie said the most satisfying play in ultimate was when her team achieved flow. This state emerged when players on the field had chemistry with one another and worked collectively to move the disc. When asked if she had anything else important to share Cammie said that “Trust is big!” taking time to bond on and after the field is important to build it. Cammie expressed a desire to be included in game play and to feel trusted by her teammates. While female and nonbinary/genderqueer athletes appear to put faith in SOTG at the same rate if not more than their male counter parts, the system of community enforcement SOTG relies upon fails to continually uphold a space where they feel as trusted in the game as male players.

In order to escape feelings of disrespect in mixed spaces, some female-matching players are simply more selective about where they play:

“... I am a five foot tall woman in my 40s and am not always seen or thrown to. I choose to play with teammates who are supportive, and at this point captain local league teams to make sure I'm playing in an environment I want to be in. Pickup can be rough” (Woman, White non-Hispanic, 35-44, 10+years).

Some avoid mixed or note they generally feel more respected on women's division team. The act of finding solace together was also mirrored in Cammie's interview. When navigating male teammates not throwing to them, the female-matching teammates processed the issue together. Finding fem identifying spaces offered a way for players to feel respect and validation within the broader ultimate community.

Though this study did not include many BIPOC players, being a Black player (n=3) in the ultimate community did appear to affect player's experiences. 100% of Asian, 100% of Hispanic/Latinx, 100.0% of Native American/Alaska Natives, 64.9% of White non-Hispanic, and 33.3% of Black respondents strongly agreed that SOTG was essential to the game. Distribution of answers by racial/ethnic groups across the full five step Likert scale showed race/ethnicity had a weak moderate nearly statistically significant effect on respondents' answers ($V=0.2$, $p=0.1$). Again, due to small group sizes, results are not generalizable, but this finding is still worth noting. Differences in felt respect were statistically significant by racial/ethnic groups and with race having a moderate association with how respondents answered the question with Black players reporting lower levels of respect ($V=0.3$, $p=0.0$).

Qualitative responses again, with a small sample (n=3), speak to systemic racism rationalized and enabled under SOTG. In comparison, to female and nonbinary/genderqueer respondents who still supported SOTG despite experiences of sexism, these respondents pushed back on the system calling SOTG out for its policing and lack of enforcement. Further studies should look more into the experiences of different racial/ethnic identities in ultimate both for long term players and those who just test out the sport.

In contrast to female players who spoke to affinity communities, the predominate Whiteness of ultimate likely means Black and BIPOC affinity spaces are more difficult to come

by. Teams of entirely Black or BIPOC players are rare. Moreover, while female-matching players often have the option to retreat into the women's division the same alternative does not exist for players of color. Regardless of these barriers, the act of taking refuge in affinity spaces still exists as a strategy. Nicki writes that for her ultimate,

...is mostly a tool/weapon. A tool to help me gather up players like me and build healing opportunities for us all to fall back in love with ultimate. A weapon to help me get people (all over the place- Carleton, UCLA, UGA, Wisconsin, University of Washington, etc.) with both the understanding (that it's necessary) and the resources to cause real social change.

Even for players who reject SOTG, the communal element of ultimate continues to be an important, and possibly necessary, aspect of the sport for them.

CONCLUSION

Results from this preliminary study show SOTG serves a few functions in ultimate. It's emphasis on community and acceptance works to build playing opportunities and grow the relatively small sport. However, ultimate leaves the choice of how to play up to the majority. This results in systemic power dynamics leeching into the sport and likely contributing to the preservation of a predominately homogenous space.

SOTG works, at least partially, to maintain systems of power beneficial to male players and harmful to Black players. It's system of enforcement, through community consensus and policing, is tainted with endemic sexism and racism and aligns with Bourdieu's conception of the use of fair play. Results from this paper add to Gerhard Thonhauser's (2022) rule analysis of ultimate which found time limitations were the primary theoretical barrier to an egalitarian execution of self-officiation. I complicate this finding, noting that a lack of complete rule knowledge and execution along with the existence of power dynamics outside the sport act as additional barriers to complete egalitarian play.

While SOTG is often executed harmfully, people do not always notice these differences in experience or conceptualize them as connected to SOTG. Rather, consistent with earlier findings, SOTG is sometimes harnessed as a theoretical basis to object to these harmful behaviors (Crocket 2016). At other times SOTG is called out as a form of policing more marginalized identities. Moreover, since SOTG is based on community policing, experiences likely vary strongly between games. The role of team as a unit of control means that teams can be a space in which players can find positive playing experiences that more closely mirror the tenants of respect encouraged in SOTG than those practiced in the broader ultimate community. Finding a team that you feel respected on does not insulate players from poor interactions with other teams.

Cultural and power dynamics are reproduced as they are enacted (Williams 1978). As ultimate changes, as it brings in new people and ideas, its culture is changed. SOTG varies across different spaces. The dilemma for ultimate is then to truly accept new players and not rely upon SOTG as a reliable mechanism to ensure the sport is welcoming. SOTG alone and/or unquestioned may be a filter which reinforces acceptance of only those who represent the predominate players of the sport.

Recommendations & Limitations

Systems should be established to ensure all players know the most current rules of ultimate before competing. This will help prevent rules knowledge from defaulting to general consensus in the loudest voice in a predominately White non-Hispanic and male sport. Additional emphasis on rules may also help curb socially permitted variation in rules in the name of SOTG.

Findings from this study are preliminary, non-generalizable, and deserving of further attention. Further research should seek to better understand the role race plays on the ultimate field as well as validate findings around the roles of gender and social class. Due to a small sample size, little attention was given to the experiences of nonbinary/genderqueer athletes whose experiences within the gender dynamics could yield additional insights into the notions of inclusion, athleticism, and respect. Additionally, further investigation into the gendering of SOTG could be interesting to understand the gender dynamics of fair play, sports, and competition.

While this study focused on perceptions of SOTG, it could be worthwhile to collect data on what is actually happening on the field (who is making calls, who is contesting calls, who actually knows the rules as defined in the rule book, and who is winning spirit awards). Additionally, more attention could be given to the role of SOTG as capital. Who is seen as having the ability to enforce spirit, and what are the connotations of a spirit award? Connected to this, other positionalities specific to ultimate which I did not have time to attend to may be playing a larger role in relationship with SOTG (leadership positions, division of play, how much you travel to play....). Moreover, attainment of these positions may be mediated by gender, race, socioeconomic status, or other non-ultimate identities.

Examining variations between teams and games may also help to understand SOTG enactment on and off the field. Many respondents spoke to felt variation in SOTG between different levels of play in addition to different divisions. Similarly, while ultimate is generally predominately White non-Hispanic and male this is by no means universal. Attention should be given to variation across different team (or regional) spaces. It could therefore be interesting to understand how this concept morphs (or not) across space.

REFERENCES

- American Ultimate Disc League. 2022. "Rules, Rules, Rules." *American Ultimate Disc League*. Retrieved February 17, 2023. <https://theaudl.com/breeze/news/rules-rules-rules-ultimately-similar-ultimately-different>.
- Beisel, Nicola. 1993 "Morals Versus Art: Censorship, The Politics of Interpretation, and The Victorian Nude." *American Sociological Review* 48(4):145-162.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1978. "Sport and Social Class." *Social Science Information* 17(16):819-840.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1983. "The Field of Cultural Production, Or: The Economic World Reversed." Elsevier Science Publishers B.V. North Holland.
- Crockett, Hamish. 2015. "Foucault, Flying Discs and Calling Fouls: Ascetic Practices of the Self in Ultimate Frisbee." *Sociology of Sport Journal* (32):89-105. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2013-0039>.
- Eisner, Lily. 2019. "The Potential of Ultimate Frisbee for Transformative Justice." YWCA. Retrieved February 17, 2023. <https://www.ywca.org/blog/2019/02/21/the-potential-of-ultimate-frisbee-for-transformative-justice/>
- El-salaam, Khalif (@khalifygreens) 2020. "Response to the people who asked me to explain. Battery is recharged. Down to back and forth." Twitter January 21, 11:26pm. <https://twitter.com/khalifygreens/status/1219868985639890945>.
- Disc Diversity. 2020. "Disc/Diversity Episode #2: Systemic Racism in Ultimate Frisbee." Produced by Disc Diversity, August 28. Video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZR_INSiHgg.
- Griggs, Gerald. 2009. "The Origins and Development of Ultimate Frisbee." *The Sport Journal* (24). <https://thesportjournal.org/article/the-origins-and-development-of-ultimate-frisbee/>
- Griggs, Gerald. 2011. "'This must be the only sport in the world where most of the players don't know the rules': operationalizing self-refereeing and the spirit of the game in UK Ultimate Frisbee." *Sport in Society* 14(1): 97-110. Doi:10.1080/17430437.2011.530013.
- Giulianotti, Richard. 2005. *Sport: A Critical Sociology*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.
- Haraway, Donna. 1988. "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective." *Feminist Studies* 14(3):579-599.
- Hughes, Robert and Jay Coakley. 1991. "Positive Deviance Among Athletes: The Implications of Overconformity to the Sport Ethic." *Sociology of Sport Journal* (8): 307-325.

- Lehmann, Chris. 2018. "On Ultimate and Race: Spirit of the Game." *Ultiworld*. Retrieved March 1, 2023 <https://ultiworld.com/2018/03/12/ultimate-race-spirit-game/>.
- Laseter, Helen C. 2022. "Racial Equity and Ultimate: A Case Study in Sports Geography." UVM Honors College Senior Theses. 478. <https://scholarworks.uvm.edu/hcoltheses/478>.
- Loland, Sigmund. 2002. *Fair Play in Sport: A Moral Norm System*. New York: Routledge.
- McGylmn, Chris 2020a. "Chris Lehmann and Spirit of the Game." Aug 3 in *The Ultimate Podcast*, produced by *Stitcher*, podcast, episode 44. <https://www.stitcher.com/show/the-ultimate-podcast/episode/chris-lehmann-and-spirit-of-the-game-76634979>.
- McGylmn, Chris 2020b. "Tayara Romero, Black Lives Matter and Coronavirus." Jul 2 in *The Ultimate Podcast*, produced by *Stitcher*, podcast, episode 43. [stitcher.com/show/the-ultimate-podcast/episode/tayara-romero-black-lives-matter-and-coronavirus-74285187](https://www.stitcher.com/show/the-ultimate-podcast/episode/tayara-romero-black-lives-matter-and-coronavirus-74285187).
- Neville, Joanna. 2019. "Dressed to play: An analysis of gender relations in college women's ultimate Frisbee." *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 54(1):38-62. doi: 10.1177/1012690217712503.
- Newson, Terrence. 2019. "Color of Ultimate: ATL." Produced by the AFDC: Project Diversity, July 12. Video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PQcC3Cau2-c>.
- Philipp, Steven F. and Sherie Brezina. 2003. "Race and Perception of Acceptance in Nontraditional Sports." *Perceptual and Motor Skills* (96):463-466.
- PUL 2022. "Premier Ultimate League Competition RULES: 2022." *Premier Ultimate League*. Retrieved March 5, 2023 <https://www.premierultimateleague.com/rules>.
- Radway, Janice. 1984. "Interpretive Communities and Variable Literacies: The Functions of Romance Reading." *Daedalus* 113(3):49-73. <https://jstor.org/stable/20024927>.
- Rath, Zoe Collins. 2021. "To Play and Be Black: Black Players Share Their Experiences." *Ultiworld*. Retrieved March 1, 2023 <https://ultiworld.com/2021/04/05/black-players-sharing-their-experience/>
- Robbins, Blaine. 2004. "'That's Cheap.' The Rationals Invocation of Norms, Practices, and an Athos in Ultimate Frisbee." *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 28(3):314-337. Doi: 10.1177/0193723504266992
- Robbins, Blaine. 2012. "Playing with Fire, Competing with Spirit: Cooperation in the Sport of Ultimate." *Sociological Spectrum* (32): 270-290. doi: 10.1080/02732173.2012.663713.
- Smith, Tim. 2022. "Reforming Spirit of the Game: Six Steps to Consider." *Ultiworld*. Retrieved March 1, 2023 <https://ultiworld.com/2022/04/19/reforming-spirit-of-the-game-six-steps-to-consider/>.

Spencer-Cavaliere, Nancy, Bethan C. Kingsley, and John K. Gotwals. 2017. "Ethic of care and the competitive Ultimate Frisbee playing experiences of young women." *Leisure Studies* 35(3):329-340. doi: 10.1080/02614367.2015.1105859.

Stoddart, Brian. 2004. "Sport, Colonialism and Struggle: C.L.R. James and Cricket." Pp. 111-128 in *Sport and Modern Social Theorists*, edited by Richard Giulianotti. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Thomas, Robert Mcg. Jr. 1985. "Olympics to Allow Pros in 3 Sports." *New York Times* Accessed: February 25, 2023 <https://www.nytimes.com/1985/03/01/sports/olympics-to-allow-pros-in-3-sports.html>.

Thonhauser, Gerhard. 2022. "Competitive Team Sport Without External Referees: The Case of the Flying Disc Sport Ultimate." *Sport, Ethics and Philosophy*. doi: 10.1080/17511321.2022.2101682.

Thornton, Andrew. 2004. "Anyone can play this game: Ultimate frisbee, identity and difference." Pp. 175-196 in *Understanding Lifestyle Sport: Consumption, identity and Difference*, edited by Belinda Wheaton. Routledge in Oxon, UK.

Titley, Fraser Adam Neil. 2019. "'It's Just a Sport. It's Just a Sport...Right?': The Reproduction of Class Privilege in Ultimate." Queen's University Thesis for a degree of Master of Arts. Proquest 13872504.

United States Census Bureau. 2021. "American Community Survey 2021 (1-Year Estimates)." *Social Explorer*. Retrieved April 20, 2023 <https://www.socialexplorer.com/tables/ACS2021/R13358768>.

USAU. 2019. "2019 USAU Members by state-age-gender-demographic-levels." *USA Ultimate*. Retrieved December 13, 2022. https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1_bCTgHdWL4vRI8_gPhIRKqh_p_51FpqpabJgPvHRl2Y/edit#gid=369873161.

USAU 2021. "Spirit of the Game Score Sheet." *USA Ultimate and World Flying Disc Federation*. Retrieved March 5, 2023 <https://usultimate.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/2021-Spirit-Score-Sheet-Examples.pdf>.

USAU 2022a. "2022-2023 Official Rules of Ultimate." *USA Ultimate*. Retrieved February 20, 2023 <https://usultimate.org/rules/>.

USAU. 2022b. "Observer." *USA Ultimate*. Retrieved February 17, 2023 <https://usultimate.org/observers/>.

USAU. 2022c. "Spirit of the Game." *USA Ultimate*. Retrieved February 15, 2023
<https://usultimate.org/spirit-of-the-game/#:~:text=Focus%20on%20fair%20play,.or%20knowingly%20break%20the%20rules>.

Veblen, Thorstein. 1899. *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Williams, Raymond. 1978. "Hegemony." Pp. 108-114 in *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

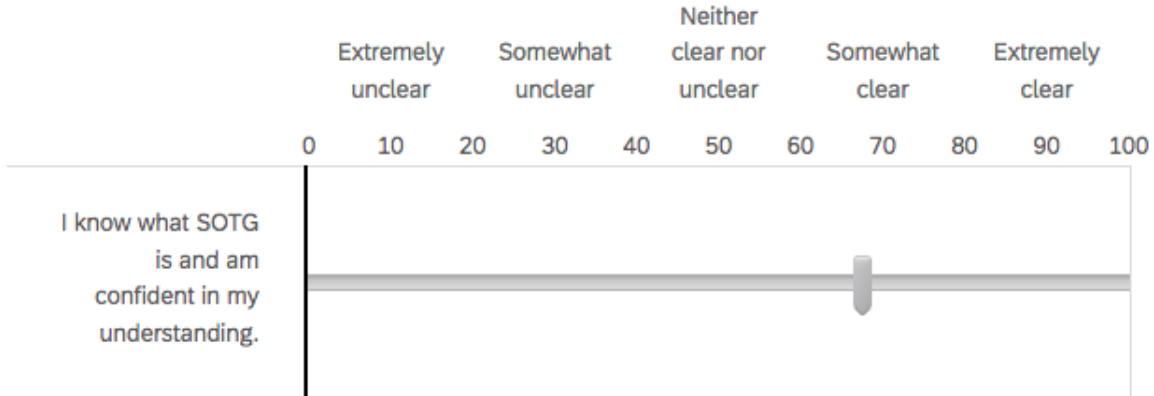
APPENDIX A:
Survey Questions from Qualtrics Online Survey

[Page 1]

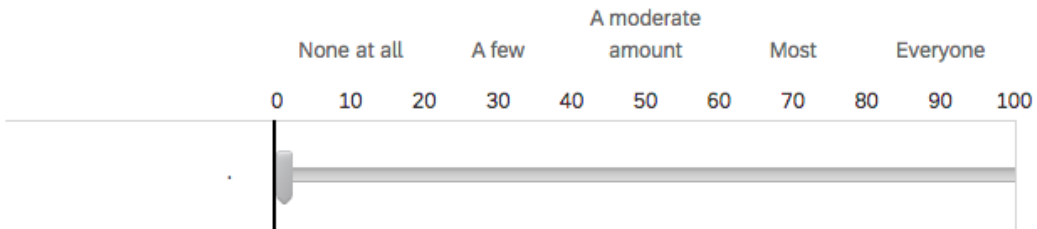
- How would you define fair play in ultimate? [Text box answer]

[Page 2]

- Do you know what spirit of the game is and if so, do you feel confident in your understanding of spirit of the game?



- If you are able, how would you define spirit of the game in ultimate? (you may also write 'same as how I defined fair play' if applicable): [Text box answer]
- If applicable, do you think other people in the ultimate community would broadly agree with your definition of spirit of the game?



- Please rate your response to the following statements.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
I feel spirit of the game is just.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I believe spirit of the game is essential to the sport of ultimate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am comfortable with spirit of the game.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Spirit of the game is important to why I play ultimate.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Please expound upon what contributes to or detracts from your impressions of spirit (building off the questions above): [Text box answer]
- What do you feel spirit of the game asks from you as a player? [Text box answer]

[Page 3]

- How often are the following true for you...

	Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
I feel like my perspectives on the field are understood.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel like my perspectives on the field are valued.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel supported by my teammates when I make calls.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I feel respected on the field.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Please expound upon what contributes to or detracts from how you answered to the questions above: [Text box answer]
- How often are the following true for you...

	Never	Sometimes	About half the time	Most of the time	Always
I enjoy participating in post game high five lines.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy participating in post game cheers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy participating in spirit scoring.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy participating in celebrations post team score.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I enjoy participating in spirit circles.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Please share a positive experience with SOTG that you have either observed or been a part of: [Text box answer]
- Please share a negative experience with SOTG that you have either observed or been a part of: [Text box answer]
- Please share a time when you felt you communicated your respect to an opposing player. What did that interaction look like from your perspective? [Text box answer]

[Page 4]

- Select the division(s) you primarily play(ed) in. If you have played in multiple divisions, please indicate no more than 3.

	Mens/Open	Mixed	Womens
Pick-Up	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Local Community League	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
High School	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Youth Club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Adult Club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Elite Club	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
College	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Masters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Grand-Masters	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Professional	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Beach	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

- Number of years playing ultimate
 - <1
 - 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
 - 6-7
 - 8-9
 - 10 +
- What region of the US do you or did you primarily play in?
 - Great Lakes (Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Ohio)
 - Mid-Atlantic (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Washington D.C., West Virginia)
 - Northeast (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont)
 - North Central (Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wisconsin)
 - Northwest (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Utah, Washington)
 - Southeast (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee)
 - South Central (Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas, Wyoming)
 - Southwest (Arizona, California, Hawaii, Nevada)
 - Other (write in option available)
- What roles do you primarily hold in the ultimate community? Select all that apply.
 - Player

- Coach
 - Captain
 - Spirit Captain
 - Observer
 - Other (write in option available)
- What is your Age?
 - 18 to 24 Years
 - 25 to 34 Years
 - 35 to 44 Years
 - 45 to 54 Years
 - 55 to 64 Years
 - 65+ Years
- What is your gender
 - Man
 - Nonbinary/Genderqueer
 - Woman
 - Other _____
- What best describes your race/ethnicity? Select al that apply.
 - Asian
 - Black/African American
 - Hispanic/Latinx
 - Native American/Alaska Native
 - Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
 - White non-Hispanic
 - Other _____
- What is your household income
 - Less than \$25,000
 - \$25,000 to \$49,999
 - \$50,000 to \$74,999
 - \$75,000 to \$99,999
 - \$100,000 to More
- Follow up interviews may be conducted for this research project. Would you be interested in being interviewed?
 - Yes
 - Maybe
 - No
- If you selected yes, please provide a contact email. Note that by providing an email you relinquish your anonymity. Confidentially will be maintained: [Text box answer]

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me and for participating in my survey research. I am excited because I received such interesting feedback on the survey, and I now want to talk with participants about some of the important themes in my survey. Specifically, I'd like to talk with you in greater depth about a few aspects of your participation in ultimate.

So that it is easier for me to remember what we talk about, I would like to record audio of our conversation today. Would that be ok? As a reminder, this interview will be kept confidential. I'll use pseudonyms and not include any unique identifiers in any report of this data

Before we get started, I just want to remind you that participation in the interview is completely voluntary. Please let me know if you would like to take a break, skip a question or stop the interview at any time!

[Questions]

If you think about your interests, your lifestyle or identity, what role does ultimate frisbee hold in your life?

What do you hope to get out of playing ultimate?

What aspects of playing give you the most satisfaction?

What does that ideal look/feel like?

Do you find this happens most of the time you play?

Can you describe how a satisfying game makes you feel?

Do you find this happens most of the time you play?

Are there any aspects of the sport that have a particularly strong draw for you?

Have you ever encouraged others to play ultimate? Why or why not?

Can you think of a time when playing ultimate was upsetting? Or when the goals we just discussed weren't met?

What was the environment of play like? (level of competition, familiarity with space, relationship with other players?)

How did you feel?

How were other players of the field acting? (both teammates and opponents? What were the emotions on the field?)

Is this something you have experienced more than once?

Did you take measures to address the situation? If so, what did you do?

How did the other person or other people respond?

In the survey a lot of respondents emphasized the role of rule knowledge in discussions of fair play. That said the rules of ultimate are fairly complex. Do you feel like you have a strong grasp of the rules?

Do you think you have a stronger or weaker grasp of the rules than most players?

Why do you think this is?

How did you learn the rules?

Who do you usually defer to when you don't know a rule?

In the survey some respondents brought up the role of gender, race, or class in how they experience the game of ultimate.

[Example if needed] For instance, gender was commonly brought up in how players felt they were treated on the field with female and nonbinary players noting they felt they did not always receive the same level of respect as male players. Does the experience of feeling like one or more identities you hold outside of ultimate, influence the game of ultimate resonate with you?

Do you ever feel that people have different amounts or types of power that affects how they play the game or how they treat and regard other players?

Are different levels of power related to how they play or whether they know the rules or is power related to one's characteristics?

Would you describe Ultimate as a fairly "egalitarian" sport?

Are there times when you feel a greater sense of belongingness than other times?

Can you please describe the differences, or would you say that nothing affects your sense of belongingness?

When the game is not satisfying, or when the experience does not match your ideal or your principles and expectations, can you think of ways in which it could more closely approximate your ideal (or situations when you are satisfied)?

Is there anything I didn't ask about that you think is important? Is there anything else about playing ultimate you would like to share with me?