

OUT OF BOUNDS: COLLEGE WOMEN'S ULTIMATE FRISBEE AND THE PRACTICE OF  
GENDERED IDENTITIES

By

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To my teammates, past, present and future

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My research examines what happens when an emerging sport, such as Ultimate Frisbee, does not reinforce stereotypical gendered identities and gendered practices. There are two areas of my research on women's Ultimate Frisbee. The first area examines the individual gendered practices of players such as attire, language, and physicality. I argue that these individual players manipulate and negotiate "masculine" identity practices, making them their own and thereby creating a distinct space. The second area of my research examines the space that college women Ultimate players create. My observations suggest that these players feel comfortable in an all-female space and can freely express their sexuality among themselves. The data for this project come from my ethnographic research, group interviews, and one-on-one interviews that I conducted while participating on a college women's Ultimate Frisbee team. During the spring season, I attended practices, tournaments, and other social events off the frisbee field.

My project builds on important gender and sport scholarship. For my research, I use the concept of formulating gender as a social institution wherein people "practice" or "do" gender but are also part of a larger social structure. By conceptualizing gender as a social institution, I am able to analyze the specific practices of gender in Ultimate Frisbee while also noting that there are other important structural components to gender. My research builds on important

existing sport scholarship. Several sport scholars address the construction of gender identity, specifically “hegemonic masculinity,” within the culture of sport. The concept of “hegemonic masculinity” is important when discussing gender identities in sport because it is the primary identity formed.

College women’s Ultimate Frisbee may challenge structural levels of the institution of sport and gender. At the individual level, women Ultimate players sometimes “perform” their gender outside of their “acceptable” gendered identities. However, this is acceptable because it exists in a culture where college women’s Ultimate players incorporate aspects of both categorical and individual gendered identities in order to destabilize these oppositional categories. These actors in the space transform and change perceived masculine gendered identities in order to create a culture without a distinct hierarchy. In this space, college women Ultimate players transform masculine gender meanings and thereby feel a level of comfort and camaraderie with their fellow players. Through my observations, I have found that college women’s Ultimate Frisbee allows women to cultivate relationships with one another and may sometimes allow for playful erotic expression. These exchanges may signal an adoption of hegemonic masculinity, heterosexuality, or male sexuality, but they may also indicate that these women feel at ease in this space and can express themselves sexually and playfully among other women on their teams. I argue that college women’s Ultimate Frisbee challenges the institution of sport by creating a location for female athletes that is outside the “center” of mainstream sport culture. This location may disrupt the overall culture of mainstream sport by challenging ideas on gender and sport.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

Gender is a critical and core category of analysis when understanding the culture of sport, but how does gender function in a sport unmediated by the ideologies of mainstream sports? This work will critically analyze how gender functions in the emerging sport of Ultimate Frisbee. Often female athletes must “fit” into a culture of sport designed for men (Theberge 2000:10). I will show how college women’s Ultimate Frisbee players negotiate and reshape current mainstream sport ideologies in order to create a space for themselves as women and as athletes. This space provides a site for an alternative sport community that focuses on women’s relationships. Women in this space may often feel comfortable freely expressing their sexuality and camaraderie with each other. Based on current scholarship on gender and sport as well as my own research, I formulate conclusions about the relationship between gender and Ultimate Frisbee.

### **Project Objectives and Methodology**

The data for this project come from my ethnographic research, group interviews, and one-on-one interviews. During spring 2006, I conducted ethnographic research while participating on a college women’s Ultimate Frisbee team called Discs.<sup>1</sup> This research was approved by the institutional review board and each participant was aware of my project. Discs is a sports club under the division of recreational sports at a large southeastern university. During the spring season, I attended practices, tournaments, and other social events off the frisbee field. While at these events, I observed language use, mannerisms, dress, and other behaviors closely associated with gender. When I made an observation while playing, I remembered what I had seen and as

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<sup>1</sup> The names of players and the team name were changed for privacy.

soon as I came off the field I recorded it in my notebook. I took my notebook to social events, tournaments, and practices and recorded my observations.

My one-on-one interviews and group interviews allowed participants time to discuss how they consciously perform gender and how this relates to their behavior and physical appearance as well as their mental state. Most interviews were informal and lasted for approximately one hour. During the interviews, I used a tape recorder and also took notes in my journal. I used the same notebook for interviews that I used for my ethnographic notes. Most of my ethnographic data came from the spring season and most of my interviews were conducted during the fall season. During these periods I would highlight interviews or observations that were particularly important for my work. At the end of the fall season I highlighted sections of my ethnographic work, as well as sections of my interviews. This step helped me to organize my data so when I began to write I could easily interpret my work.

Participants came from established Ultimate Frisbee programs where the average player had played Ultimate Frisbee for approximately three years. My research sample consisted of women who were predominantly white and from a middle-class background. A degree of diversity existed within the sample insofar as some participants came from Hispanic and Asian-American backgrounds. I interviewed 27 women and the average age of these participants was 21, most of them undergraduate students. A majority of players had played a sport before they began Ultimate. The sports that they played varied from team sports such as soccer, basketball, softball, and crew to individual sports such as track and cross-country. These varied experiences in sports may have influenced the player's participation in Ultimate.

As a researcher and an Ultimate player, I have a distinct advantage in understanding the culture of Ultimate Frisbee and in noticing "patterns" in the sport that others might not see.

However, my position could also create potential problems in my research. As Gelya Frank notes, “there is often a conflict of interest and emotion between the ethnographer as ‘authentic, related person (i.e., participant)’ and the ethnographer as ‘exploiting researcher (i.e., observer)’” (Frank 2000:15). At times I found myself “cheering” for college women’s Ultimate and the line between “self” and “other” became a blur.

In a collection of essays compiled by Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon, feminist ethnographer Lila Abu-Lughod (1993) writes about “traveling” past the “impasse of the fixed self/other or subject/object divide” when describing her experiences with pregnancy in United States and Egypt. Abu-Lughod (1993) notes how her feelings and friendships with the women in Egypt led her to explore more complex ways to represent and make more apparent the complexities of their lives and individual experiences. I also noticed my feelings on how to “represent” the complexities of the female athletes in the Ultimate community. Abu-Lughod recognizes that the personal experiences of the researcher may be shaped by the knowledge and lives of the women she comes to know (Abu-Lughod 1993). When I acknowledged that the lives and experiences of the community around me shaped my knowledge, I began to interpret the data more readily.

For my research, I conceptualize gender as a social institution wherein people “practice” or “do” gender but are also part of a larger social structure. This concept stems from Patricia Yancey Martin’s (2004) sociological work in gender scholarship. Martin argues that we must frame gender as an institution because it “underscores gender’s sociality; directs attention to practices, practicing, and interaction; requires attention to power; reinstates the material body; acknowledges disjuncture, conflicts and change; and challenges micro – macro dualisms” (Martin 2004:1261). By conceptualizing gender as a social institution, I am able to analyze the

specific practices of gender in Ultimate Frisbee while also noting that there are other important structural components to gender.

My research builds on important existing sport scholarship, including Shelia Scraton and Ann Flintoff's (2002) edited collection of essays, *Gender and Sport*, and Susan Birrell and Cheryl Cole's (1994) collection, *Women, Sport and Culture*. Several sport scholars address the construction of gender identity, specifically "hegemonic masculinity" (Connell 1987), within the culture of sport. As Messner notes, "in contrast with 'rational' or 'professional' masculinity constructed in schools, the institution of sport historically constructs hegemonic masculinity as bodily superiority over femininity and over non-athletic masculinities" (Messner 2002: 20). The concept of "hegemonic masculinity" is important when discussing gender identities in sport because it is the primary identity formed. Like organized institutional sports, some emerging sports may construct gender in ways that reinforce notions of gender difference and masculine hegemony (Anderson 1999:22).

My project examines what happens when an emerging sport, such as Ultimate Frisbee, does not reinforce the usual notions of stereotypical gendered identities and gendered practices. I argue that in college women's Ultimate Frisbee, players use "masculine" practices and language found in sport culture because they have no other way of expressing themselves as competitive athletes. Although they use "masculine" language and practices, they do not use them in a way that reinforces gender inequality. Women Ultimate Frisbee players reformulate the meanings of masculine practices and language into their own, thereby creating a distinct space. In this space, these players reshape masculine practices and identities, challenging the hierarchy and power that hegemonic masculinity often creates. I will argue that insofar as the ideology of Ultimate Frisbee exists outside the culture of mainstream sport, the majority of these female athletes

create a safe space, without a marked gender hierarchy, to nurture female bonds and relationships.

My research suggests that in college women's Ultimate Frisbee, women's sexuality does not exist solely in opposition to male sexuality or simply reinforce heterosexuality. Often in the culture of sport, sexuality is solely heterosexual and created in opposition to homosexuality (Messner 2002:35). My observations suggest that college women's Ultimate Frisbee provides a space that cultivates women's relationships with each other and may sometimes allow for playful erotic expression. This suggests that these players feel comfortable in an all-female space and can freely express their sexuality among themselves.

College women's Ultimate Frisbee challenges the culture of mainstream sport by creating a subculture. My critical analysis contributes to the field of women's studies and to gender and sport studies because it offers Ultimate Frisbee as a possible model for greater equality in the culture of sport. In addition, my research highlights gender inequality in mainstream sport and describes how some female athletes work against it. Therefore, to some degree, college women's Ultimate Frisbee may serve to destabilize men's institutionalized sport and challenge dominant ideas on gender.

### **History of Ultimate Frisbee**

Ultimate Frisbee college teams travel all around the country competing in highly organized and highly competitive tournaments.<sup>3</sup> The sport has come a long way since its humble beginnings in Maplewood, New Jersey in 1967. The game known today as "Ultimate Frisbee" began at Columbia High School when a student, Joel Silverman, presented the idea of "Ultimate" to his student council. Within the year, the first recorded game was played between the student

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<sup>3</sup> The information on the history of Ultimate is from World Flying Disc Federation at: <http://www.wfdf.org/index.php?page=history/ultimate.htm>

council and the newspaper staff. Today, games are played out on the best fields, lined with chalk, and set off by cones. However, in the early years boundary markers were such things as railroad tracks and telephone lines.

Players do not need expensive equipment but only a 175-gram Frisbee (also known as a flying disc) which costs approximately ten to twelve dollars. The “Frisbee” became a trademark item in 1958 by the Wham-O Company; Wham-O still exists today and produces many discs used in flying disc sports. Before the Wham-O company, the name Frisbee came from the Frisbie Pie Company, a small company in Connecticut. The Frisbie Pie Company made their individual pies in metal tins and one day the company discovered that these tins could fly a short distance if thrown into the air. The company soon started calling these flying contraptions, “discs.” Students at Yale University, located in close proximity to the pie company, started to “toss the disc” as a way to pass time. In 1948, Fred Morrison recreated the metal disc using light durable plastic. The new form flew much better and the “tossing of the disc” became increasingly popular. In 1954 the first recorded game using a disc started at Dartmouth University and was nicknamed, “Guts.”

As Silverman began developing the rules for the game of Ultimate, ten years after the creation of the “Frisbee,” disc sports grew in popularity. Over the next few years, games between the student council and newspaper became structured with the new guidelines. Soon Columbia High School students grew tired of playing each other and approached Milburn High School about interscholastic games. Columbia High School won the first interscholastic game in 1970 against Milburn High with a score of 43-10. As students began to graduate and go on to college, they took the game of Ultimate with them. As students formed teams, the game of Ultimate began to spread to more campuses. On November 6, 1972, Rutgers University defeated Princeton

University in a competitive Ultimate Frisbee game with a score of 29-27. Three years later Yale University held the first Ultimate Frisbee college tournament. Eight teams attended the tournament and Rutgers University pulled out the overall win. That summer at the Second World Frisbee Championship, Ultimate made its first public appearance. Since the Championship was held at the Rose Bowl, many on the west coast got their first glimpse of Ultimate and the game spread quickly. In 1979, the Ultimate Players Association (UPA) became the governing body for Ultimate Frisbee and one of the first flying disc sport organizations. Today the UPA is a player-run, not-for-profit organization based in Colorado with over 24,000 dues-paying members. The UPA establishes and publishes all rules and regulations, and oversees the three championship series (Club, College, and Youth) of Ultimate Frisbee.

Although Ultimate may have diverse players, most players come from a middle-class background. During the 2006 year, the Ultimate Players Association had 22, 079 members. Fifty percent of those members were college players, 33 percent were regular players and the remainder played youth Ultimate. Seventy percent were female and thirty percent were male. Eighteen percent of the regular club members had a household income over \$100,000 and 55 percent earned over \$50,000 ([http://www3.upa.org/files/06\\_About\\_the\\_UPA\\_factsheet\\_low.pdf](http://www3.upa.org/files/06_About_the_UPA_factsheet_low.pdf)).

### **Playing Ultimate**

At their 2001 Strategic Planning meeting, the UPA Board of Directors formed a definition of Ultimate: “Player defined and controlled non-contact team sport played with a flying disc on a playing surface with end zones in which all actions are governed by the “Spirit of the Game” (<http://www.upa.org/ultimate>).

The current game of Ultimate Frisbee incorporates skills and athleticism similar to sports like soccer, basketball, and football. The “playing field proper,” or the field where you are in

play, is seventy yards long and forty yards across. At each end of the field are end zones, which are twenty-five yards long and forty yards across

([http://www.upa.org/files/11th\\_ed\\_Finl\\_1\\_25\\_07.pdf](http://www.upa.org/files/11th_ed_Finl_1_25_07.pdf)). Games typically take two hours to play to a score set by the tournament director (e.g., 15 points). Players start the games by lining up seven players at each end zone. When the defense pulls, or kicks off, to the offense, the point begins and does not end until the offense scores a goal worth one point. A player cannot move after catching the disc, or else a “travel” is called. The defense may “mark” the person with disc for ten seconds; this forces the thrower to throw in a specific direction.

There are two basic throws in Ultimate: a backhand and a flick. There are variations of these throws: long, short, inside-out (the trajectory of the disc goes from the inside to the outside), outside-in flick (the trajectory of a disc goes from outside to inside) low, high, or around the mark. The offense and defense may use strategic offensive plays or deceptive defensive zones.

When a disc is up in the air, it may change possession if the defense catches it or if the disc falls to the ground. There is no intentional physical contact between players and if this does occur, the player calls a foul. If a defensive player encounters an obstruction (from a teammate or other player) and cannot play defense, she may call a “pick” and play stops so that the defense may catch up with the offense. The “Spirit of the Game,” meaning there are no referees, governs Ultimate Frisbee and it is up to each player to enforce the rules to the best of her ability. Some believe that the Spirit of the Game is Ultimate Frisbee's most defining and important characteristic.

### **A Typical Tournament**

After playing Ultimate Frisbee for five years, I have noticed a pattern when preparing for a tournament. In the following two chapters, I draw on my ethnographic material to discuss

specific moments from the culture of college women's Ultimate Frisbee. In this section, I describe the events of a typical tournament so the reader may fully understand those moments. These events typically occur when Discs prepares for a tournament. Ultimate Frisbee tournaments typically start on Saturday morning and end Sunday afternoon. Tournaments are usually held on fields at a university or soccer complexes and are hosted by a college team. The tournament director chooses a format to use during tournament play. The format usually begins with pool play on Saturday, followed by an elimination bracket on Sunday. Teams must pay a tournament fee to attend; the fee covers water, minimal food, field space, and any additional costs paid by the host team.

The Monday before a tournament, the team begins to prepare for the upcoming weekend by trying to drink, eat, and sleep well. Tuesday, they make sure to go over their skills and plays during practice and decide how they will travel to the tournament. Generally, on Wednesday and Thursday the team rests or has a very easy and light practice. Last minute emails go out on the listserv to remind the team of what to bring, what car they will be traveling in, directions, tournament schedules, and other relevant information. Most cars leave at the same time but there is nearly always a "late car" which arrives at the tournament hotel late, waking the players trying to sleep. The late comers must step over sleeping, snoring bodies in sleeping bags. The team has reserved two rooms at the tournament hotel and tries to cram eight to ten people into each room.

At the end of the first day, the small hotel room begins to mix the smells of sweat and dirty cleats from all those crowded in the room. The team is usually tired from the trip and does not stay up late. The next morning the team awakes early to cell phone alarms and clock buzzers. Everybody goes downstairs for the free continental breakfast and tries to load up on carbohydrates for the long day. Saturday pool play typically begins at 9am and ends around

5pm. During pool play, teams will usually have a round off. Discs and most other teams arrive on the fields an hour before play to warm-up and prepare for the day. Tournament directors will usually provide water, bananas, and bagels for the teams. Many members bring extra food items in their field bag. For example, I bring soups and apple sauce because these items are easier for me to digest.

At the end of the first day, Discs goes back to the hotel and team members take turns showering. Discs usually calls a “team dinner” to regain team cohesion and discuss the events of the day. After dinner, they begin to prepare for the tournament party, usually held at a local bar. At the party there are various typical party events, including the “boat race.” The team selects seven players to line up across seven players from another team with half full beers in their hands. The boat race is a relay race; the first person must finish their beer before the next person goes. After the boat race the team continues to drink and dance. Depending on the level of competitiveness of tournament play, the Discs team will sometimes stay until the end and try and “win the party.” If your team has the most representatives left at the end of the party then your team “wins.”

Sunday morning begins early and team members must be ready to play their first game. These rounds start early because teams must travel long distances home. The team may have one game or three depending on whether they win games and continue to advance to the finals. Whether the team wins or loses, the ride home is always long and full of talk on the frisbee events of the weekend. Sometimes team members change clothes before the ride so they do not have to sit in their dirty and sweaty clothes. The Discs team arrives at their respective homes tired and ready to shower and go to bed. Some have homework or papers to finish, but most are

exhausted and make a decision to go to bed and get up early to work. They return to practice on Tuesday and get ready for the next tournament.

## CHAPTER 2 REVIEW OF GENDER AND SPORT LITERATURE

Current sport scholarship frequently discusses the relationship between gender and sport and the formation and consequences of masculinity in sport. At the core of this literature is R.W. Connell's concept of "hegemonic masculinity" and "emphasized femininity" as introduced in his 1987 work, *Gender and Power*. Connell (1987) states that hegemonic masculinity does not always correspond to the actual experience of masculinity by men in society. In fact, the "winning of hegemony" or cultural hegemonic masculinity involves the creation of idealistic, exemplar, and fantasy heroes, such as star athletes and their "heroic" bodies (Connell 1987). In reality, at the local level most men and boys do not live up to this model of masculinity. This hegemony of masculinity functions through the production of these cultural symbols of masculinity. How does the development of athletic male bodies and careers based on specific notions of success serve in the creation of specific masculine identities?

In his work on sport, Michael Messner (1992) extends Connell's concept by noting that athletic success is based on "physical power, strength, discipline, and willingness to take, ignore, or deaden pain inclined men to experience their own bodies as machines, as instruments of power and domination—and to see other peoples' bodies as objects of their power and domination" (Messner 1992:151). Connell (1987) states that all forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men; for this reason there is no femininity that holds among women the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men. The option of compliance, according to Connell, is central to the pattern of femininity, which is given the most cultural and ideological support at present, called "emphasized femininity."

In a more recent work, Connell revises his previous concept with scholar James Messerschmidt by discussing and analyzing the four major critiques of “hegemonic masculinity.” Here Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) suggest a “review and reformulation” of the concept. Specifically, they reformulate the framework surrounding the locations of hegemonic masculinity. They list three levels of analysis: local, regional and global. In emerging or alternative sports the emphasis is on the local level because of the sport’s reliance on a sense of community. At the local level hegemonic masculinity is constructed in the “arenas of face-to-face interactions of families, organizations and immediate communities” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:849). At the regional level, hegemonic masculinity is constructed at the cultural level or at the level of the nation-state. Finally, at the global level it is constructed in arenas such as world politics, transnational business and media. These levels relate to each other to constantly reproduce and reformulate conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005:849). Hegemonic masculinity, at the regional level, manifests itself symbolically through the actions of specific local practices with regional significance, such as those practices constructed by such images as professional sporting athletes (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Sport thus provides the heroes that hegemonic masculinity needs for survival; the body of the sporting hero exhibits the physical signs of strength, speed and agility (Connell 1990).

There are numerous empirical research studies that investigate the relationship between gendered identities and sport. For example, there is empirical research on the sport of bodybuilding which calls for conceptualizations of gender, sexuality, and the body, arguing for the collapse of gender as an unambiguous principle. Camilla Obel (1996) suggests there are different readings of identity in the sport of bodybuilding. This work suggests that there are far

more contradictions and ambiguities experienced by women than men in the sport. There is the potential for women bodybuilders to both support with and resist dominant notions of gender and also to expand definitions of “emphasized femininity” (Obel 1996:192). However, their agency is still contained by structures and ideology of female bodybuilding.

Timothy Curry (1991) notes how “hegemonic masculinity” and male privilege is reinforced through sexist locker room talk. Through participating in sport, young men learn how to adhere to a dominant masculinity that denigrates women and marginalizes men who are perceived as different. Men’s talk reveals how masculine identity is affirmed through conversations about women, competition and heterosexuality. Sport provides an arena for male bonding and the constructions of hegemonic masculinity (Curry 1991). Kristen Anderson (1999) found in her research on snowboarding that there are different ways of constructing gender within the institution of sport, resulting in many sport masculinities. Anderson (1999) found that sport is often depicted as an institution that creates and maintains male dominance, but the construction of gender differs greatly in the various activities that constitute sport. Snowboarding is developing in a different social and historical context from that of organized men’s sports, and these contextual differences are salient to the particular ways in which it becomes gendered. Like organized sports, some emerging sports are constructed in ways that reinforce notions of gender difference and masculine hegemony (Anderson 1999).

Using Connell’s framework of hegemonic masculinity, the sporting body is an important part of maintaining hegemonic masculinities. Sport thus provides the images and “standards” that hegemonic masculinity needs to continue; the athletic body exhibits the physical signs of strength, speed, and agility (Connell 1990:83). Although current images of female athletes seemingly represent a greater definition of femininity, there are still societal expectations of the

femininity of female athletes that includes expressions of heterosexuality and a non-threatening “feminine” body image.

Sport scholar Pat Griffin (1992) notes that this need to present a heterosexual body is one of the six manifestations of homophobia in women’s sport, also known as the promotion of a heterosexual image. The other five categories of homophobia Griffin (1992) defines are silence, denial, apology, attacks on lesbians, and preference for male coaches. The “lesbian label” is used to define “acceptable” boundaries for women in patriarchal society, and women in sport are outside of these boundaries (Griffin 1992). When placed within the context of Judith Butler’s “heterosexual matrix,” all female athletes are perceived to feel pressure to present a heterosexual feminine body. Butler (1993) describes the “heterosexual matrix” as the way in which heterosexuality encodes and structures everyday life. In their 2000 case study using the “multiple bodies model,” Cox and Thompson (2000) note how the presentation of a heterosexual body, even in cases where the female athlete is not heterosexual, exists in order to combat suspicion and shift focus to the athletic ability of the athlete. By using this model, Cox and Thompson advance a theoretical perspective that understands the complexity of the constituting human bodies in sport. Cox and Thompson state, “They [conformed to standards of heterosexuality and femininity] to gain acceptance as team mates, to overcome prejudices associated with negative stereotypical images of lesbians and to help preserve their own and the team’s credibility in the broader sporting realm” (Cox and Thompson 2000:8).

Sport sociologist Nancy Theberge (2000) advances research on gender and sport as she analyzes the relationship between bodies, physicality, force, and power in sport. Theberge (2000) discusses how there is no body checking in women’s ice hockey and how this constructs ideas of gender in the masculine sport of ice hockey. Women’s ice hockey is often seen as “inferior” to

the “real” game of men’s ice hockey, which is full of bodily contact, force, and power (Theberge 2000:133). Connell notes, “images of ideal masculinity are constructed and promoted most systemically through competitive sport, where the combination of skill and force in athletic experience becomes a defining feature of masculine identity” (Connell 1987:85). Based on this aspect of competitive sport, Theberge argues that physicality, bodies, and force as represented in competitiveness help to create and sustain hegemonic masculinity in sport.

Is hegemonic masculinity the only way to conceptualize masculinity in sport? Judith Halberstam (1998) introduces the concept of “female masculinity” in her discussion of butch/femme roles within lesbian communities. Halberstam (1998) tries to disrupt the connection between masculinity and the male body by providing an alternative masculinity in a female body. Halberstam asks, “[if] female born people have been making convincing and powerful assaults on the coherence of male masculinity for well over a hundred years, what prevents these assaults from taking hold and accomplishing the diminution of the bonds between masculinity and men” (Halberstam 1998:15).

Halberstam’s (1998) insight into masculinity offers a greater perspective on gendered practices, identities, and power. She is careful not to catalog female masculinity into a concrete definition. She notes that there are several types of masculinities and not all are born to male bodied men. At times, Halberstam says, “these new masculinities are produced as new renditions of male masculinities and sometimes they are produced as original forms of a growing subculture” (Halberstam 1998:277). Halberstam very briefly addresses the need for the reformation of the gender binary within the context of sports. She builds on Susan Cahn’s (1994) work on gender and sexuality in twentieth-century women’s sport. Halberstam builds on this work in order to show how if women want to be competitive then need to build traits that are

associated with masculinity and the male-born body. Cahn argues that these traits should not be associated with gender but should be “human” traits. Halberstam acknowledges that society is not moving toward the elimination of gender and argues that these traits should extend to women as female masculinity, a masculinity not associated with male-bodied individuals.

Messner (2002) discusses the role of “subculture” sport or “alternative, extreme” sports outside of institutionalized organized men’s sport (Messner 2002). Located outside in the margins, extreme sports hold the ability to challenge the dominant model of sport. Belinda Wheaton (1998) utilizes the emerging sport of windsurfing to analyze how these new “subculture” sports challenge the center of sport. Messner asks, “Who were these ‘alternative’ athletes who seemed to revel in doing sports differently and autonomously, in the relative obscurity of sport’s ‘extreme’ margins?” (Messner 2002:81). Current research indicates that these “alternative” athletes are males who tend to come from white middle-class backgrounds, where they have access to models of such “extreme” athletes as skateboarder Tony Hawk. However, if the current status of institutional sport already benefits white middle-class males, then why are they moving away from the center into the margins? Messner suggests that these young white male middle-class athletes are attracted to “extreme” marginal sports not because they are rejecting or rebelling against organized men’s sport, but because they see the center of sport (basketball, track and field, and football) as thoroughly racialized as “black sports” and therefore fear this perceived racial center. Messner writes, “this fear is based, in part, on a contemporary myth of black physical superiority (and ‘natural’ orientations toward physical violence), played out most publicly in men’s sports” (Messner 2002: 82).

Empirical research by Sarah Banet-Weiser (1999) on the intersection of race and gender in the sport of basketball indicates that there are specific representations of athletes. Banet-Weiser

examined the depiction of gender and race in the WNBA. She found that there exist gendered and racialized meanings that surround both male and female professional basketball players. The WNBA women, the promotional hype promises, offer fans a “return to the purity of the game,” this purity was positioned against the backdrop of the image of the rich, spoiled, violent, highly sexualized and very “black bad boys” of the NBA (Banet-Weiser 1999:405). In short, the WNBA were coded as women, the athletes of the NBA are coded as black (Banet-Weiser 1999).

Research by Ben Carrington (1998) offers an alternative focus on race and sport. Through ethnographic research in a Northern England cricket club, he develops an account of the meanings associated with sport in relation to black masculinity and the use of sport as a form of cultural resistance to white racism. Carrington identifies three themes in his work. The first theme is the sport of cricket and its role in the contestation of racial and gendered identities. The second theme he identifies is the construction of black sports institutions as black spaces (Carrington 1998: 289). Last, he shows the use of an African American Cricket Club as the symbolic marker of community identity. The study conveys how sport can provide an arena for some black men to assert a masculine identity in order to restore a unified sense of racial identity (Carrington 1998).

One more empirical research study explores the connections between ethnic and gender identities and identifies how femininity is constructed and experienced for these women through racialized power relations that regulate ethnic identity. Specifically, Sharon Wray (2002) uses participant observation, focus groups, and in-depth interviews with women between the ages of 36 to 56 years of age and primarily identified themselves as Muslim Pakistani women. Here she illustrates the connections between gender, ethnicity, and physicality. The study showed how women participated in athletic activities in order to benefit their health rather than adjust the

appearance of their bodies because they did not wish for their bodies to conform to western ideals of femininity and feminine bodies. Instead, they wished to improve their health and constructed their feminine bodies that were circumscribed by ethnic and religious identities (Wray 2002).

Other empirical studies indicate that there are more differences within the categories of “women” and “men” than there is between them. Messner notes that, “in terms of physical abilities, there are some identifiable average differences between women and men but these differences are never categorical. And it is social practices...that produce ideologies of categorical difference between the sexes” (Messner 2002:171). However, according to Candace West and Don Zimmerman’s (1987) innovative work on gender, “doing gender involves a complex of socially guided perceptual, interactional, and micropolitical activities that cast particular pursuits as expressions of masculine and feminine ‘natures’” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 126). They propose an ethnomethodologically informed and therefore sociological understanding of gender as routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment. The key reason of why we adhere to our gendered identities, according to West and Zimmerman, is that we are held accountable to them. These authors write that “doing gender” requires acknowledgement in any given situation that our acts are gender appropriate or as in cases where they are gender inappropriate, then it is held accountable (West and Zimmerman 1987). Often female athletes “do gender” outside of their institutional gendered identity and therefore suffer negative consequences. While it is individuals who enact gender, it is interactional and institutional in character, for accountability is a feature of social relationships.

One critique of the work by West and Zimmerman (1987) is that it does not recognize the structural meanings surrounding individual actions. Why or how does society consider

something “gendered?” More recent gender scholarship focuses on the power and agency of the social actors within structures. In her work, Patricia Yancey Martin (2004) states that gender is a social institution. Martin incorporates West and Zimmerman’s idea of enacting gender at the individual level into an analysis of social structure. In addition to placing agency with the social agents, Martin also uses her concept of linking theory with empirical work. She outlines the definition of a social institution and proceeds to illustrate how gender is an institution. Moreover, she clearly describes the utility of conceptualizing gender as an institution.

Martin notes that her concept “affirms gender’s sociality” and focuses on the practices of its social characters. Martin (2004) writes that reflexive and non-reflexive practices need attention. Individuals may or may not intend to perform a “gendered” activity and may not know exactly what their gestures mean. Does putting on a “feminine” style of clothing or using “masculine” language require us to think about our gender? In addition, this concept may highlight power but may point toward disjuncture, conflict, and change. Institutions have a great ability to persist over time and hold a great deal of power. Indeed, to consider gender as an institution highlights gender’s ability to yield power by placing few in positions of power. By showing gender as a social institution, it also brings the focus back to those who embody it. People make up institutions. Most importantly, Martin challenges the distinction between the individual level or micro level and the structural level or the macro level. She shows that there are individual actors but that they are also constrained by structural meanings. Certain behavioral practices are only given meaning when they are located in society because society structures the interpretation of gender and gendered practices. Martin calls for gender scholars to interpret how individual acts constitute one another as well as the larger structure.

In my research I build on current gender and sport scholarship in an effort to offer new insights on how to destabilize men's mainstream sport culture. In the next two chapters, I offer ethnographic research from the culture of college women's Ultimate Frisbee. In chapter three I focus on the language, attire, and physicality found in women's Ultimate. These three areas highlight the individuality of gender in sport. Chapter four focuses on the space that college women's Ultimate players create for themselves. In this supportive space they often feel able to openly acknowledge their own bodies, relationships, sexuality. In my conclusion I illustrate how individual enactments of gender in Ultimate Frisbee combined with an overall structural analysis of sport, may offer insights into ways of challenging the center of mainstream sport culture.

### CHAPTER 3 PLAYING WITH GENDER IN ULTIMATE FRISBEE

Most people are unaware that Ultimate Frisbee is a sport. Most assume it is a leisure activity that involves throwing a frisbee with a dog. Ultimate is not soccer, it is not football, it is not basketball. It does incorporate aspects from these sports but in the end Ultimate is just Ultimate. For the players, Ultimate is not just a sport; it is a culture. In my experiences, I have found that Ultimate can find partners for people, it may raise children, it lets you borrow its car, it calls you when you are sick, and it chooses its people and stays with them forever. Ultimate takes over lives. Ultimate Frisbee has its own clothing, language, and uses bodies to work. College women's Ultimate is a subculture within the culture of Ultimate Frisbee, with its own bodies, clothing, language and people.

Each player has a pre-game ritual or a good luck charm, and the “necessary” items in her field bag. My field bag has countless items and always includes a first-aid kit. Team members always ask me for that one item they forgot and most of the time I have it. Discs eat on the road and arrive at the tournament hotel the night before playing, sometimes late or sometimes early. At one spring tournament I awake to see Sherrie leaving the crowded hotel rooms in her team jersey to take advantage of the free continental buffet, fighting for the last scrap of packaged cereal. After I put on pants and my generic sweatshirt, so no other team can recognize my team name, I head downstairs to try and grab some food. When I emerge, I notice Wendy heading straight for the coffee; she will rely on energy bars to nourish her body throughout the day. Sometimes players talk to each other and sometimes they know they will be in a heated competition later in the day and choose not to look at each other. Discs players arrive on their field an hour before game time for the same warm- up jog, stretch, and drills. They bring the “jam box” or radio to dance along to and act silly. Some teams have long pre-game pump-up

cheers, some have loud ones, and some don't cheer at all. On the Discs team some players that tall, some short, some wear dark colors, some wear long sleeves, some wear skirts, some wear shorts. But once they step onto the playing field they are all the same, they are Ultimate Frisbee players. Each player knows that for the next two hours she will have to tell her body to run, catch, and throw all along the seventy-yard field that feels miles and miles long. Neither wind nor rain will stop the game and both conditions are just as tough to play in. I always check the weather forecast and if it does rain I take out my bright orange rain coat to keep my body from soaking in water. If the forecast predicts windy conditions the Discs team must change its game plan because zone defense works better. In the wind, players cry when they see how it takes the disc to places they did not want it to go. Rain ruins the usually easy catch because there are no dry hands available. But some days are perfect when the sun is bright and cheerful, the air is crisp and clean and the green grass is soft. These days the disc begs to soar through the air and wishes to be caught.

The players in college women's Ultimate Frisbee have diverse body types, attire, and personalities. The culture of Ultimate Frisbee exists outside the culture of mainstream sport. Media, money, or other aspects of mainstream sport heavily influence the dominant sport culture. In his work Messner describes the mainstream sport industry as a "sport-media-commercial complex" where economics, mass media, and commercial industries work to endorse masculinity and male privilege in sport (Messner 2002:77).

How does this influence the identities of athletes, specifically college women Ultimate Frisbee players? What does their attire or language say about identity? I argue that these players incorporate "masculine" practices from mainstream sport into their identities as athletes but

reshape and reformulate their meanings into their own. In owning their meanings, players challenge the detrimental effects of hegemonic masculinity in mainstream sport culture.

### **Ultimate Bodies: Physicality in a Non-Contact Sport**

Ultimate players know that they must score in the twenty-five by forty-yard section outside of the playing field known as the end zone. It is difficult to describe what goes through the mind of players as they run around on the field. They do know that the end zone is vital; they know they must catch the disc by any means possible. They also know getting there is the tough part; it is physically demanding on the body. There is no contact, no traveling, no fouls, and no picks. The Spirit of the Game regulates the game, not referees. Each player is familiar with the rules. Throw a backhand, throw a flick, throw a hammer, throw a blade, throw inside-out, throw outside-in, throw it forty yards, or throw it ten. Cut to the open side, cut to the break mark side, catch it behind, catch it laterally, or catch it in the end zone. These are some of the many decisions in the ten-second possession of the disc. Discs player Karen feels pressure when she has possession of the disc saying, “All I think about is who is the most open. If we are playing a tight game and I know that we need to move this disc it can definitely be stressful. I usually freak out once I hear eight.” (Karen/Interview)

I do know from personal experience the exhilaration when the disc advances into the air, its movement is clear, the arc of the disc, and its trajectory all come together. When this happens in a game, I sprint to the area where I think the disc will finally settle and adrenaline pumps through my veins as blood hits my muscles. I scream at my muscles to work faster, but the defense wants the disc too. The disc drops back towards the ground and we bend our knees, push off from our toes, and launch into the air. I watch the disc move down in slow motion, and see the white plastic lip fading away as I stretch my fingers to grasp the edge. I struggle to grip it, knowing I must not drop it. The defense knows she has only one attempt at tapping it away from

me. As we hit the ground, our elbows bruise first and then our stomachs hit and finally the tops of our knees. But I do not feel the pain, not today anyway. I know that will come tomorrow. For now, I have the disc. In the distance, cheers float in like a song, people flood me. The defense acknowledges my effort with a slap of the hand and I appreciate this gesture.

The culture of sport and specifically the “center” of organized mainstream sport emphasizes the bodily manifestation of hegemonic masculinity as the “heterosexualized, aggressive, violent, strong male athlete” as well as emphasizing the “heterosexualized, flirtatious, moderately muscled female athlete” (Dworkin and Messner 2002: 24). In Ultimate Frisbee there are no standards of what an Ultimate player’s body *should* look like; there are different types of bodies within the sport. Players considered “superstars” within the sport have various body types. Outside of Ultimate, there are “standards” for feminine and athletic bodies, which are “acceptable” to the culture of sport. How do college women Ultimate Frisbee players incorporate their own ideas of the “feminine” body and physicality into ideas of what their “athletic” body should look like? How do they use their bodies in play? Ultimate Frisbee is a non-contact sport; however, it is still very physical.

Using Connell’s framework of hegemonic masculinity, the sporting body is an important part of maintaining hegemonic masculinities. Sport thus provides the images and “standards” that hegemonic masculinity needs to continue; the athletic body exhibits the physical signs of strength, speed, and agility (Connell 1990:83). Although current images of female athletes seemingly represent a greater definition of femininity, there are still societal constraints on the femininity of female athletes. Female athletes still must exhibit an image of heterosexuality, as well as, a non-threatening “feminine” body image (Dworkin and Messner 2002:23). For example, Florence Griffith-Joyner was applauded for her muscular and sculpted body yet still

competed in extremely feminine outfits and wore long, feminine painted fingernails (Dworkin and Messner 2002:24).

How does the physicality of a sport affect the body and mind of a female athlete? Sport sociologist Nancy Theberge analyzes the relationship between bodies, physicality, force, and power in sport. She discusses how in a sport like ice hockey, in which there is no body checking, ideas of gender are constructed. Although body checking is not allowed, many of the women athletes prefer the physicality of the sport and say it is “part of the game” (Theberge 2000:133). Many outsiders perceive women’s ice hockey as “inferior” to the “real” game of men’s ice hockey which is full of bodily contact, force, and power (Theberge 2000:115). Connell notes, “Images of ideal masculinity are constructed and promoted most systemically through competitive sport, where the combination of skill and force in athletic experience becomes a defining feature of masculine identity” (Connell 1987:85). Based on this aspect of competitive sport, Theberge argues that physicality, bodies, and force help to create and sustain hegemonic masculinity in sport.

Women’s Ultimate Frisbee has the ability to expand traditional notions of “femininity” in Ultimate Frisbee and to challenge hegemonic masculinity. At times, some college women Ultimate players, despite stereotypes, still see their bodies as “feminine” bodies. The following example comes from my observations at a very competitive national tournament:

The coach referred to the body types of the other team, to make us feel we were better. They are just "fat, slow big girls." The team accepted his comment by laughing.

Does this remark suggest that as athletes, college women Ultimate players must adhere to a more “feminine” body type that is skinny and non-muscular? Or was this simply a tactic for motivation? Ultimate Frisbee has many different types of bodies, yet there are some body types

that are celebrated more than others. For example, tall women have an advantage in catching the disc. However, if you can run faster, catch better, and throw farther it does not matter what body type you have.

In Ultimate Frisbee, there is no intentional physical contact between players in both the women and men's games. If there is contact between players, the player calls a foul and both players decide if the call is indeed a foul. Spirit of the Game guides the interpretation and enforcement of the game. However, players can come in contact with the ground by "laying out" or "going ho" (i.e., horizontal). Players can also lay out on defense to interrupt the other team's possession of the disc or the offense can lay out to maintain that possession. The act of laying out often results in bruises and other injuries. In my observations, hitting the ground can result in injuries ranging from bone bruises and broken collarbones, to dislocated fingers and broken wrists. Although I myself have injured myself from laying out, I still do it. In a Regional tournament a couple of years ago, I attempted to lay out on defense while my knee was bent and landed on my knee cap resulting in a very painful bone bruise. Currently, I wear a kneepad on my right knee. There is a build up of scar tissue and swelling from the number of times I have landed on it. Nevertheless, laying out is a signal of intensity and a high level of play that often excites teams. One specific cheer by Discs illustrates the intensity of laying out:

Call: *What?*

Response: *Huck [throw long] that disc.*

Call: *What?*

Response: *Catch that shit.*

Call: *What?*

Response: *Lay out bitch, yeah!*

Or

*Lay it out, Lay it out,*

*Lay it out, Lay it out, Lay it out*

*If you can't lay it out do the best that you can but*

*You better have the mother fuckin' disc in your hand...*

Fellow players often shout out enthusiastically to those in the field of play to lay out for an otherwise out-of-reach pass. For Ultimate players it shows an intense willingness to catch the disc. Amy restates this point when she talks about laying out:

I do feel like I am more competitive and it's the competitive will that takes me to that level to hit the ground for the disc. I would consider it a serious disadvantage if a player didn't lay out when a disc is within reach and if you don't do it, you are less of a player. I couldn't idolize somebody who can't lay out. (Amy/Interview)

Therefore, this may suggest that college women Ultimate players often promote aggressiveness, competitiveness, and intense physicality during play. Is this an incorporation of the ideology of men's sport and hegemonic masculinity or is it a form of resistance? I would argue it is a form of resistance despite the fact that college women Ultimate players accept the current core ideology of men's sport. Even though they perform aspects of hegemonic masculinity, they also reform and reshape it. These players use their bodies for physicality but also respect their bodies' injuries and don't "play through the pain" or see their bodies as "machines" (Messner 2002: 57, Theberge 2000:129). Theberge notes in her research that women ice hockey players saw injury and pain as symbols of weakness outside of hegemonic masculinity and therefore not traits of an athlete (Theberge 1997:83). College women Ultimate players are challenging, at times unknowingly, theories on bodies and physicality and their place between power and sport. They do not always see injury and pain as "weaknesses." They use their bodies as powerful sites for athleticism but also places of empowerment and nurture. The

act of laying out is not only a sign of competitiveness, as Amy notes, but also a skill that a player can learn. Amy goes on to say “I don’t feel like I’m magical at laying out. I taught myself.”

Sherrie, a newer player still trying to “learn” to lay out says “it’s a particular skill. I’m not afraid to hit the ground, I just can’t figure how.”

In a recent collection of essays, Andrew Thornton (2004) comments on the act of “laying out” in Ultimate Frisbee. He examines the Ultimate community and the construction of identity. Thornton states that even though Ultimate players (his research comes from coed teams in Canada and the UK) dislike the aggression, competition, and physicality celebrated in the “center” of men’s sport culture, they still celebrate it in the act of laying out. He writes:

The fear of not being seen as a ‘real’ sport I argue is most profoundly expressed in the regulation of the boundaries of physical aggression. Players do not want to be physically violent, but they still express a desire for physical dominance and experience pleasure through physical exertion. This identification is expressed by Ultimate players’ reservation of the highest praise for those who ‘go ho’ (Thornton 2004: 192).

Although I might agree with Thornton’s assessment of the whole community of Ultimate Frisbee, I disagree that this happens in the specific space of college women’s Ultimate Frisbee. Janice and Elsie, both veteran Discs players, do not ignore the body pains and injuries and note the following:

I very much listen to my body and try and keep it happy. If it’s not happy I try to understand why and try to fix it. (Elsie/Interview)

I also listen to my body. It is important to listen to your injuries and take care of them quickly. (Janice/Interview)

By paying attention to bodies and physicality, college women Ultimate players challenge hegemonic masculinity by also knowing their bodies as loving, empathic, and nurturing. Often in the culture of sport, athletes are taught to see their body as “a machine” that move through injury and pain. In his work *Power in Play*, Messner (1992) shows that athletes often “give up their bodies” to their sport because of the influence of external factors and the pressure to achieve a

full masculine identity. The external influence of teammates, coaches, fans and media pressure athletes to play through the pain or he will be negatively judged. Messner also notes that athletes wish to embody a masculine identity, resulting in a separation from their feelings and making them more inclined to see their body as a machine or instrument (Messner 1992:79).

### **Talking Tough: Language Use in Ultimate Frisbee**

Vocabulary in Ultimate is different from mainstream sport- all sports have quirks but Ultimate is more accessible. (Deidre/Interview)

Ultimate has so much personality. Personally, I haven't seen it in another sport. (Barbara/Interview)

As in many sports, Ultimate has its own vocabulary to refer to everything from plays and positions to incidents and acts. At one practice, I was on the offensive line getting ready for the pull and Lynn asked, "what popper will get the pull and dish it to the turn style or a handler and keep a chilly O?" For those who do not play Ultimate this common phrase might seem like another language. The word "popper" refers to the offensive position in a zone where the player moves between the areas covered by the opposing team in order to disrupt the defense. The "pull" is when the defense "kicks off" at the start of each point to the offense by throwing it to the end zone. A "turn style" and "handler" are both offensive positions and are experienced throwers who frequently receive the disc. When a player says "keep a chilly O," she is reminding the offense to stay steady and to make wise decisions. The terminology for Ultimate may suggest a culture, as Deidre says, "different from mainstream sport." One of the veteran players, Casey, notes the difference:

The whole spirit thing was new to me; I usually was involved in academic-gear activities like marching band. Ultimate has a different language, environment, and vocabulary and at first I didn't understand it. (Casey/Interview)

This may suggest that Ultimate offers a more "accessible" environment and vocabulary than other sports and activities. New players may feel at ease within Ultimate because its culture

and terms create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. Although the overall culture in college women's Ultimate Frisbee may be more "accessible," players may still rely on mainstream sporting terms to describe specific acts of athleticism. My current research suggests that college women Ultimate Frisbee players define their athleticism in masculine terms; that emphasize aggression, competitiveness, and physicality. I argue that these players must use this "masculine" language because they have no other way of expressing themselves as competitive athletes. College women Ultimate players use "masculine" language and practices; they do not use them in a way that reinforces gender inequality. Women Ultimate Frisbee players reformulate the meanings of masculine practices and language into their own, thereby creating a distinct space.

In an article on dialogue in male athletes' locker rooms, Timothy Curry (1991) lists categories that emerge from his pro-feminist analysis of the locker room talk. One category involves the dynamic of competition, status attainment, and bonding among male athletes (Curry 1991:123). Curry (1991) states that competition becomes an important part of the male athlete and his sense of identity. In college women's Ultimate, most do not use competition as a way to establish themselves as athletes, instead defining their identity through the culture of Ultimate. At times when play becomes intense and heated, the language turns increasingly vulgar. The vulgarity is often used by the player about herself rather than about others on her team. Ultimate players promote camaraderie and support among players with encouraging and supportive words. Veteran player Carolyn notes that she would not punish her teammates for a mistake:

I would never curse at other people, on the field. I might curse at myself or out loud, it helps my aggression. For example, if somebody scored over a stupid mistake I made, like misreading [a pass] or if I jumped too soon I would curse out loud to show I could have done better. (Carolyn/Interview)

This may suggest that college women Ultimate players may use competitive language to motivate themselves but not in relation to their teammates or other players.

Curry notes that bonding in the locker room between male athletes often occurs when they joke about women, femininity, or homosexuality. The bonding of these male athletes comes at the expense of others. At practices and at tournaments, I would hear some of these same types of “bonding” language. For example, some of the players make “your momma” jokes during practices and tournaments. At one practice I was on the offense and the opposing team pulled the disc out of bounds. As I went to retrieve the disc, Deidre calls out, “your momma.” I was confused and unsure of what she said so I asked her and she said, “I didn’t know any other insults.” Even though these jokes are at the expense of others they are so outlandish and impersonal that they often do not carry any special meaning as a put-down. At a competitive tournament, one that drew top teams in the nation and set a higher level of play for Discs, I heard the following from two fellow players:

Ronnie: You look slow out there. Are you feeling better? [She was not feeling well earlier]

Lynn: Yeah, so is your mother! I’m feeling okay, thanks.

These jokes are not meant to directly insult women. They are making fun of these jokes by showing the absurdity of them. This may suggest that female athletes change notions of gender when the competition increases. The word choice and language becomes more explicit and vulgar, as games become more tense or close. The jokes became more vulgar as well. Although language may become vulgar, it is not at the expense of others.

How do college women Ultimate players use language to describe other players as well as themselves? I argue that they use “masculine” language to describe specific acts of athleticism

by themselves and other players. The following is an example from my field observations during another high-level tournament:

Ana, Lynn, Tina, Emma all refer to a prominent and very skilled female player by her last name and refer to her as a more “masculine” player. All other references to players are by their first names. Ana and Amy refer to Karen as a ‘beast’ or ‘animal’ or ‘sick’ because she makes very difficult catches. There are numerous other references to good plays with the same language.

These terms emphasize aggression and competitiveness in a single defensive play or sequence of plays. The emphasis is on the play and athleticism of the individual during that play and not at the expense of the other player. Players will often praise their opponent for an impressive play, saying “nice bid” [for the disc] or “nice catch.” Often players refer to notable outstanding players on other teams in their region by only their surname.

Before games, teams try to “pump” up one another by cheering or singing songs in a huddle. In research on women’s rugby, Broad (2001) notes how the majority of men’s rugby songs “vilify women and homosexuals” by singing sexually explicit songs. Women’s rugby songs reinterpret and rewrite these songs and assert “active, fluid, and multiple sexualities” (Broad 2001:193). Cheers from women’s Ultimate teams vary, most are not sexual and are not rewritten from men’s cheers. Most of the men’s Ultimate teams’ cheers have vulgar and sexual content. Discs’ cheer uses the first letter from the team name and creates a supportive phrase that is repeated three times. The team stands in a huddle with players’ arms wrapped around one another’s waists and all the women jump up and down. Another rival team sings the American anthem as a cheer before games. This may suggest that these Ultimate players “pump” each other up in a supportive manner creating a space that encourages aggressive, competitive behavior but not at the expense of other players. After games, teams also cheer each other, regardless of who won or who lost. Most of the cheers are parodies of old or popular songs. Each team comes over to the other team after the game and serenades the opposing team. The other team gathers around

listens, sits, and claps along with the cheer. Teams jump around, follow poorly written lyrics, and even teach dances. At the College National Championships, another team taught the Discs team a dance. Discs had won a tight and intense game and was prepared for a fast cheer. However, the other team came over with a radio and started to teach each member a step of the dance. The opposing team said that Discs must use the dance at the tournament party later in the day.

In my observations, at the end of men's games players look as if they barely want to slap hands with their opponent. In the college men's Ultimate, teams do not cheer at the end of the game or congratulate the winning team on a well-played game. Discs player Sherrie feels that cheering is an important part of college women's Ultimate. She notes, "It's what keeps Ultimate different. [Cheering] kind of brings back the whole spirit aspect. It is also nice when they go out of their way to think of something specifically tailored for your team." (Sherrie/Interview)

### **Skirts or Shorts: What to Wear for Ultimate**

When a good team wears all black it is intimidating. (Carolyn/Interview)

When I first began to play Ultimate I wore short skirts, ankle-length socks, women's soccer cleats, a purple visor, no wristbands, and my team jersey. I would always wear a black skirt on the Saturday of tournament play and a white skirt on Sunday. In my mind I felt the skirt was more comfortable and easier to play in than shorts or other athletic attire. Once, at a tournament, a player asked me "Why do you wear a skirt?" I annoyingly replied, "because I can" and then proceeded to walk onto the field. After developing as a player on highly competitive teams, I realized that I wore skirts because I was uncomfortable with my athleticism and the masculinity associated with that image. In order to combat any notion of masculinity, I wore short tennis skirts to be more "feminine." Now I wear men's long black basketball shorts, black socks, football cleats, wristbands, and a baseball cap. This attire is typically viewed as more masculine. It can also be more practical and comfortable.

As noted, research suggests that women who are college Ultimate Frisbee players define their athleticism in masculine terms because there is no other vocabulary to describe competitive athletes. Players may also wear more “masculine” attire to intimidate their opponents. These players use such terms and methods because they have no other way of expressing themselves as competitive athletes. Although most players may claim to dress in a practical and comfortable manner, most also use intimidating attire, such as wearing all black.

What is practical in Ultimate? Since Ultimate is a non-contact sport, there is no need for body pads or helmets. In Ultimate Frisbee, it is necessary to wear cleats because of the stop and start nature of play; however, there is no protocol for specific types of cleats. Ultimate is played in all conditions with no preset uniform for cold, wet, or dry weather. The individual player decides what is best for her play, both mentally and physically. They may use the typical depiction of “masculinity” and uniform in sport but reshape these ideas into their own. Women Ultimate Frisbee players reformulate the meanings of masculine practices and dress on their own terms, thereby creating a distinct space and self-identity. In this space, these players claim their own identity and restructure masculine practices and identities, challenging the hierarchy and power that hegemonic masculinity often creates.

There are no mainstream images of hegemonic masculinity or feminine bodies specific to Ultimate. However, I would argue, college women Ultimate players utilize conceptualizations of hegemonic masculinity in order to constitute themselves as athletes. Specifically, women in college Ultimate often use masculine sport concepts such as physicality, competitiveness, and aggression but do not adopt them as deeply-felt identities. Terminology and attire in women’s Ultimate often reflects masculinity, such as dressing as an aggressive and intimidating player. Therefore, college women Ultimate players must use these terms because they have no other way

of expressing themselves as athletes. Ultimate players do not have a definition of an Ultimate athlete and bring their own definition of athletic ability to the sport. In addition, in my observations many female college Ultimate players wear clothing that is “masculine” in order to “feel” like a competitive athlete. The following comment came from Carolyn, during a conversation with the team about her “style” when she first started playing with Discs:

When I first started playing I wore dance shorts, T-shirts and at tournaments I would wear tall socks, skirts and my jersey. Honestly, the first year I thought about appearance- I wanted to look coordinated. For example I would think about matching socks to my jersey. (Carolyn/Interview)

In a statement after the competitive season ended she changed her position on appearance and opted to be more practical in order to perform at a higher level:

My motive now is to wear what I need to be comfortable in that climate, it’s about being smarter about playing a sport, it doesn’t matter how you look. Wear what you need to play better. (Carolyn/Interview)

This may suggest that when college women Ultimate players first begin to play organized Frisbee they bring their normative views of femininity, masculinity, and athleticism with them. As they progress in the sport and as players, they may begin to shed these ideas of “masculinity” and “femininity” as athletes and accept their space in women’s Ultimate.

Other players expressed similar feelings about their attire. At the competitive level, most players on Discs said they would rather be more comfortable and wear items that are more practical, rather than “look good.” One of the veteran players, Amy, thinks about aspects of practicality, not femininity, when choosing what to wear for a tournament:

I mostly wear knee-length [surf] board shorts because my legs might get scraped up; it’s not to wear to be intimidating but more practical. I usually scrape my elbows badly so I will wear wristbands and sometimes a hat because I am trying not to have skin cancer. I don’t wear makeup because I don’t want it to run down my face, I don’t take extra steps to be feminine, and it’s not the place. (Amy/Interview)

Again and again during interviews, I heard that practicality was more important than an “image.” Although most claim to wear “practical” dress items. The Discs team choose to wear the same brand of long black shorts with the logo on the lower corner of the short. Discs wanted to be more “intimidating,” noting that the old pair of shorts didn’t “do the trick” because it made them appear short. Teams often choose colors for their jerseys according to their school’s colors. Many women’s teams may also choose different styles and types of jerseys. There are three major licensed companies that sell Ultimate Frisbee apparel, including customized jerseys for women and men. Most teams use one of these three companies. Each team chooses a style, fit, cut, and colors. The Discs team voted for a white and black woman’s cut jersey with sleeves. The shorts are black to match the black jersey for an “intimidating look.” As Discs progressed as a team, players began to incorporate a logo, colors, cut, and styles into their jerseys. This may suggest that the culture of Ultimate Frisbee allows female athletes to use a more “masculine” image as intimidating athletes and not to feel apologetic for their behavior. The concept of the “female apologetic” in sports, first articulated by Jan Felshin, describes female athletes’ participation in the masculine world of sports as an anomaly (Felshin 1974). In an interview with Ultimate player, Deidre, she notes that in the culture of Ultimate Frisbee there might not be a need for female athletes to “apologize”:

In those sports [basketball, softball] female athletes have to restate their femininity because it’s assumed that they are masculine as athletes. In Ultimate, people don’t care. Ultimate is androgynous in general. (Deidre/Interview)

I suggest that college women Ultimate players may not feel the need to restate their femininity in the sport of Ultimate. These players are not “unapologetic” with their athleticism but rather present a different form of their own masculinity. K.L. Broad (2001) finds in her research on female rugby teams that “women’s sport can be characterized by an unapologetic, marked by transgressing gender, destabilizing sexual identities and ‘in your face’ confrontations

of normativity” (Broad 2001:199). Broad (2001) draws parallels to women’s resistance in rugby and queer activism that suggests that there exist forms of queer resistance in women’s sport. I suggest that these college women Ultimate players are not expressing a conscious form of resistance but rather participating in a culture that nonetheless resists “normativity.”

However, not all gendered identities in college women’s Ultimate express a form of masculinity. Some bring conventional forms of femininity into their identity and attire. For example, many players wear men’s surfing board shorts, but they buy them in a more “feminine” color such as pink. In addition, many female college Ultimate players use wristbands, baseball caps, and wear men’s football cleats but usually incorporate a sign of their “femininity.” This sign may be the color of the wristbands or pairing women’s soccer socks with men’s football cleats. People outside of college women’s Ultimate, such as college men Ultimate players, may “approve” of such expressions of “masculinity” only if their femininity or sexuality is also clear. At a recent competitive tournament, one of the players from the men’s team told Karen the following:

Karen you are the only girl I know that wears men’s football cleats, not stupid women’s soccer cleats. That is awesome, that is why you rock!

Everybody knew that Karen was dating a member of the men’s team and therefore her femininity was not questioned, she did not feel the need to justify her expression of masculinity.

In Ultimate it is popular to choose the color of your cleats. The colors of cleats on the Discs team range from orange to polka dots. This last bit of color may add a “feminized” and distinct individual style for the player. One year, many of the players bought pink Nike women’s soccer cleats. If players have a distinct piece of “flare” that they wear, other teams may use this to characterize them. Teams often refer players on other teams by their distinct sporting attire.

One year Discs referred to a player on a rival team as “shiny shoes” and a player on another team as “pink cleats.”

What happens off the field? Do college women Ultimate players feel as if they need to establish their femininity off the field? In her research on women’s ice hockey, Nancy Theberge (2000) notes that some players feel the need to counter stereotypes of female ice hockey players being overly masculine. From her observations, she writes about one of the players:

There is an important irony in this player’s concern about image. She is a strong and powerful player, one of the most physical and heavily penalized on the team. Although concerned to counter the stigma of masculinity off the ice, on the ice she has a particularly ‘masculine’ game. (Theberge 2000: 88)

In sport culture, ice hockey is perceived as a “masculine” sport. Ultimate Frisbee does not rely on bodily contact and therefore is not perceived as an overly “masculine” sport; this may affect how female Ultimate players consider how to present a gendered identity. At tournament parties, many of the Discs members ultimately choose comfort over presenting an image of being highly feminine. Janice, a Discs player, states the following, “I want to look like a girl but I don’t want to put much effort into it. I would never dress up for a frisbee party.” (Janice/Interview)

This may suggest that these players feel a level of comfort within college women’s Ultimate and do not feel obligated to present femininity to counter the perceived masculine characteristics that mainstream sport culture associates with a high level of athleticism.

## CHAPTER 4 ULTIMATE FRISBEE: A SPACE FOR FEMALE ATHLETES?

Discs team members generally attend tournament parties, which often are at local bars in the city where the tournament is held. At one spring tournament, I observed the same “routine” as at most tournaments. As usual after the first day of competition, the Discs team showers at the hotel, puts on “comfortable” and “feminine” clothing, and departs for the party together. This particular tournament party is held at a small local bar where the beer is free but not very good and the music is loud. At the games that day, the tournament director had given each team wristbands for admission into the bar.

The Discs team members have a drinking game that they organize at tournament parties called Boatrace. On this occasion, the boatrace “captain,” Tina, screamed at players to come over and line up. These seven players competed against seven other players on a rival team. The first person to completely finish a glass of beer and turn the cup over her head would win. In this race, the last girl on the opposing boatrace team took her cup full of beer and poured it over her own head. The Discs boatrace responded by saying that this was poor boatrace etiquette. The other team stated that she had sacrificed for the team. The opposing team had won the race and received seven very nice pint glasses. However, Discs went on to win the tournament and the team received their own pint glasses. Some team members said they wanted the boatrace pint glasses and that the other team had cheated. As in other boatraces and similar drinking games, this was not solely a competition to see who can drink the greatest amount of alcohol in the least amount of time. The game also served as a tool to bond between teams and within teams. At more than one tournament I witnessed, and even participated in, several boatraces by Discs used water rather than beer so the players would stay hydrated for the next day of play.

After Discs left the boathrace, they moved to the dance floor where they provocatively danced with one another. There are certain songs that the team likes and as they played the team fervently dances to them. Other onlookers tried to dance with them but they gently refused and continued to dance together as a team. The members decided to return to the hotel because they had a long day of tournament play the next day and they wanted to be prepared to win.

In their research on college women's athletics, Blinde, Taub, and Han (1994) studied the ability of sport to empower women at the team and societal level. They found that athletes bonded with their teammates and created important relationships with them (Blinde et. al 1994). My research illustrates that college women's Ultimate Frisbee teams also bond with their teammates, creating important and substantial relationships in their lives. This may suggest that women's Ultimate creates a space where these athletes are able to exhibit athleticism and also nourish relationships with their teammates. Often in the culture of sport, sexuality is solely heterosexual and created in opposition to homosexuality (Messner 2002). My observations suggest that college women's Ultimate Frisbee provides a space that cultivates women's relationships one another and may sometimes allow for playful erotic expression. This also suggests that these players feel comfortable in an all-female space and therefore can freely express their sexuality among themselves as women on the team.

How do researchers accurately represent the experience of the female athlete? The sociological model of multiple bodies, as proposed by Cox and Thompson, (2000) is an effective tool to interpret the experience of female athletes. By dividing the body into four theoretical components, Cox and Thompson (2000) illustrate the complex and uncertain process of how female athletes understand their bodies. These theoretical bodies often challenge each other and when placed in juxtaposition they often challenge mainstream discourses on femininity,

sexuality, and stereotypical gender roles. This analysis of the multiple bodies model helps to illuminate how female athletes in Ultimate Frisbee may experience their bodies. It also illustrates the complexity of this process for these athletes. College women's Ultimate Frisbee may be different from other sports in mainstream culture because it can create a "safe" space for its athletes. However, there are still aspects of mainstream sport that these players must negotiate when playing Ultimate.

### **The Ultimate Bond: Relationships in Ultimate Frisbee**

After playing my first tournament with members of this team, it became even more evident to me how important good communication, patience, and a willingness to help and learn are to a successful team. I witnessed behavior on the part of members of other teams that I balked at, knowing how much healthier and more fun an encouraging environment is. (Francine/Interview)

The history and culture of Ultimate may help to create a supportive space in college women's Ultimate Frisbee. In my observations, the interactions vary from team to team but most report an encouraging environment, different from other women's sports. In her research, Nancy Theberge (2000) noticed challenges to team cohesion during the two seasons she spent with a women's ice hockey team. She notes that although the team promoted the concept of team unity, the team had several "stars" that put their own interests above the teams, causing "egos to clash" (Theberge 2000:44).

In May 2006, Discs traveled to the College National Championships in Columbus, Ohio where we competed against sixteen of the top college women's teams in the nation. During the three-day tournament, Discs played close-scoring games with all of our opponents. Although players described each game as "long and tough," the team worked hard to earn a high place the tournament. Pre-quarterfinals were held in the early morning on the second day of the tournament. Discs knew the team would face its Sectional and Regional rival and had to be prepared to play well. The team arrived as the sun was just coming up and the grass was still wet

from dew. No team members would admit that they were nervous. The team went through its pre-game warm ups, drills, and its cheers. As the game began, a van full of fans from Discs' hometown pulled onto the field and flooded the sideline. The van had traveled the entire night to come cheer for their hometown teams. I could feel the team's added nervousness, and the increased intensity. When the game started, Discs came out with strength and speed and "got up" (quickly scored) on their opponent with numerous scores. It was clear from the Discs players' actions and language that they were feeling good and confident in their offense and defense. The game soon turned and their adversary began to score. I could see Discs players panicking and making poor decisions, such as throwing the disc to the opponents' best defender and repeatedly dropping passes. Soon their opponents were "within two" points and time was running out. Discs had to score the last two points to win. On the last point of the game, Discs had the disc on offense, we "worked it up" and the throw went up. It sailed high towards the end zone where it was only Discs player Casey and her defender waiting for the disc. Casey and her defender went up high for the disc but Casey used her body to win the best position to make the grab. Both players came down and Casey held on to the disc. The game was over and the Discs had won. The team went on to the quarterfinals of College Nationals. After the game, a television station covering the championship came over to interview Casey. The interviewer asked Casey what it felt like to catch the winning goal. Casey replied, "I may have caught the winning goal, but I wouldn't have been able to without the throw that got it there. It was a team effort and I am just glad that we won and are advancing to quarterfinals."

In my experience, most Ultimate teams indicate the importance of "chemistry" for their team. Teams talk about their offense "flowing" or "gelling" together in order to create effective offensive plays. A team may become more comfortable with one another on the field and know

how each of the players work together. During the spring season, Discs never indicated that they had one “superstar” on the team or that another player “needed” to perform well. Discs player

Laurie notes the importance of chemistry and team cohesion for an Ultimate team:

I think it is very important for chemistry to exist between players on the field. To know each other’s strengths and weaknesses is absolutely crucial, so you, as an individual, can help the team as a whole. Some players’ strengths lie in speed and catching skills, others are great defenders. It is important to recognize how to utilize each player to their strengths, and to improve their weaknesses, so that they can become a better player. Nothing is more demoralizing while playing a sport than not being given the opportunity to do something that you excel at. I think that without chemistry, it is difficult for the team to recognize who works well together, and to put a strong line out every time.  
(Laurie/Interview)

Third year Discs player Karen indicates that a team’s success is from the team’s unity and not because of a few key players:

Unlike most teams that are dictated by a few people, we all respect each other on the field. We are light hearted off the field and we don’t ever get down on each other or blow up on each other on the field. I think that is very important in order to have a team succeed, to make sure that there is a mutual respect and a team bond. (Karen/Interview)

Each year in college women’s Ultimate and men’s Ultimate, teams nominate a candidate for the Henry Callahan Award. This annual award is for the most valuable player in College Ultimate.

After each team nominates one player, all eligible college women’s Ultimate players go online to a voting system and vote for the three best women’s candidates. The candidates are tallied and one female is presented the award at the College National Championships at the end of the season. Recently on an online forum for Ultimate Frisbee, a previous female Callahan winner observed that women’s Ultimate teams tend to select players based on talent, skill, and spirit. She went on to say that men’s Ultimate teams tend to select a player based only on skill. Another female Ultimate player, and a coach in college women’s Ultimate Frisbee, commented on the initial thread concerning the Callahan award:

I think that women seem to value the spirit aspect of the award and carrying a team on your back while the men seem to value being the leader and go-to player on a great team. All of

the last seven men's Callahan winners have led their teams to a Nationals appearance, six made it to the finals, and five won it all. By comparison, only five of the last seven women's Callahan winners were at Nationals the year they won, only one made it to finals, and none earned a title. (<http://icultimate.blogspot.com>)

This may indicate that college women's Ultimate Frisbee promotes a sense of team unity and cohesion, which seems to be missing from most mainstream sports. Teams may rely on their own total unity and structure in order to exhibit the players' individual athleticism and physicality. Individual players often promote their team's success over their individual success in order to highlight their school's program and growth rather than the individual players, as seen in Discs. The most successful programs in college women's Ultimate include numerous key players rather than a select few superstars.

In their research on college women's athletics, Blinde, Taub and Han (1994) studied the ability of sport to empower women at the group and societal level. They found that athletes bonded with their teammates and created important relationships with them (Blinde et al. 1994).

In their research, they found the following:

Athletes felt it was 'easier to relate with someone who goes through the same thing.' A second factor concerned the frequency and regularity of athlete interaction. Athletes constituted the major network of friends for nearly all respondents. Such sentiments were expressed by a swimmer who stated, 'We are just always there for each other. Because of the time you spend and the things you go through, I guess it creates a certain bond between teammates' Athletes frequently described their teammates as 'best friends,' 'close knit,' 'family,' and 'people you love to death.' (Blinde, et.al 1994:53)

In my research, I also found these sentiments to be widely shown. The teams I have observed work together throughout the season to develop as a team by training and practicing together.

They also develop relationships off the field. Discs player Taylor notes her relationships with her teammates:

It would've been hard not to [create relationships.] At this point, ninety percent of my friends are ultimate players, and the few that aren't know how much time I spend doing Ultimate-related things and they just accept it as a part of me. (Taylor/Interview)

In addition, Sherrie notes the following:

After a whole semester of spending at least three days a week of practice and almost every weekend together, they become like family. Granted you still feel closer to some than most, but you still share common goals and have been through so much together by the end of one season. (Sherrie/Interview)

Most of the players interviewed indicated that the time spent with their teams help create strong relationships off the field. These players spend time training, practicing, traveling and attending tournaments during the five-month college season. Ultimate player Laurie indicates that spending time with her team has helped to create lasting relationships as well as strengthen already existing relationships:

But as I've played and traveled with the team, I've become increasingly comfortable. When you travel eight hours to a tournament, you learn quickly to get comfortable with each other. Also, rather than Ultimate helping to form significant relationships, Ultimate has also formed much stronger already existing relationships. For example, my boyfriend who I met six years ago plays Ultimate. Being in a long-distance relationship, Ultimate has provided a way of seeing each other. It's a similar story with my roommate. We have been friends since middle school, but had we not both decided to play for [Discs], we probably wouldn't have ended up as roommates or such close friends. (Laurie/Interview)

This may suggest that college women's Ultimate Frisbee creates a space that promotes relationships and bonds among its team as teammates as well as friends. College women's Ultimate teams spend time training as athletes through track, gym, and practice. Through the years as Discs has become more competitive, the outside training has increased during the season. A typical week for the Discs team during the spring season would include: a three hour practice on Sunday, rest on Monday, a two hour practice on Tuesday, a forty-five minute track workout on Wednesday, a two hour practice on Thursday and an additional speed workout during the weekend. As training increased, so did the bond between players, as noted by Karen in the following example:

I feel more comfortable with my teammates than I do with my roommates now because they understand why I spend so much time playing Ultimate, running track etc. I also think that because we spend so much time together, doing all these things makes me more

comfortable with my team. We have the same or similar schedules, and therefore we can hang out more outside of practice. (Karen/Interview)

Teams spend a significant amount of time training and they also spend a significant amount of time in social settings. At a recent practice, a new player to Discs asked me what was on my lower left ankle. I looked down and replied that it was a tattoo of the image from the Discs team logo, a design of a flame. In my third year on the Discs team, two other team members and I decided to get tattoos of the logo on different parts of our bodies. For me, the logo represented the entire community. In this community, I found strong, supportive, and loving relationships. Many Discs members said that they have found their relationships in the Ultimate community to be meaningful and long lasting. One of the newer players on the Discs team noted the following:

The person I'd consider my best friend is on the team, my boyfriend is on the [men's Ultimate] B-team. I feel like I spend more time with the Frisbee community than my other friends lately and I don't really mind, I consider pretty much all of them my friends. (Margo/Interview)

This may suggest that although college women's Ultimate creates a competitive and athletic space for competing, it also extends its community to form important relationships. College women's Ultimate takes from mainstream sport culture the desire to win by training and working hard it goes farther in creating a community that does not rely on key individuals of the team. This community creates a positive and supportive space that fosters important relationships in players' lives.

Although many Discs members feel close in their relationships to other team members, not all share that closeness. Blinde et al. (1994) found that female bonding did not always occur among teammates. They found that because teammates were competing for playing time and positions, some players became jealous and distrustful of other players and their intentions (Blinde et al. 1994:54). During interviews with the Discs team, players never expressed these

types of feelings to me. However, some players stated that they felt more comfortable with team members with a comparable skill level. Discs player Lonnie expressed the following:

For the most part I feel at ease with my team members, but I definitely feel more at ease around the players that are close to my skill level. It seems that there is a hierarchy on the team that is based on playing ability, and the ladies tend to hang out with other ladies that are around their same ability. I would certainly not feel comfortable hanging out with the starting offense if I was the only one there not on it. (Lonnie/Interview)

Although Lonnie states that she feels more comfortable with specific players on the team, she does not directly express feeling competitive or suspicious of other players on the team. The high level of competitiveness in college women's Ultimate Frisbee may call for team cohesion and unity and does not often rely on individual "superstars." This may create a distinct space that does not foster a system of hierarchy and power found in mainstream sport culture. In her research on women's ice hockey, Nancy Theberge observed the ice hockey team go through two phases: a "friendship first" season to a "for the hockey" season (Theberge 2000:55). She describes the emphasis of these teams to be on either the cohesion or closeness of the team or on games and the development of skills. I would argue that college women's Ultimate is able to do both. Teams need team cohesion and unity and this in turn creates close relationships and female bonding, but it also fosters athletic skills and development as athletes.

### **Erotic Play: Expressing Sexuality in College Women's Ultimate Frisbee**

It was our semester meeting for Discs and everybody was there. There was lots of food and wine during the meeting. I could see that Sherrie was standing in the room with her back to Elsie and Ronnie. Elsie and Ronnie were whispering and looking at Sherrie. I knew something was coming. They began to advance around Sherrie and soon they quickly grabbed her breasts and slid their hand across her crotch and yelled, 'Taco' and 'Milkshake.' Sherrie smiled and replied, 'I can't believe I fell for that one!' Everybody laughed. (Field Notes)

Often when female athletes play sports, they enact identities outside of their expected feminine gendered identity and therefore they may suffer negative consequences. The concept of the "lesbian label" defines "acceptable" boundaries for women in patriarchal society, and women

in sport are outside of these boundaries (Griffin 1992:252). With the inclusion of sexuality into the culture of sport and the construction of the female athlete in opposition to masculinity, a climate of homophobia may exist. When female athletes present traits similar to those of masculine male athlete, their sexuality becomes an issue. Particularly when placed within the context of Judith Butler's "heterosexual matrix," all female athletes perceive pressure to present a heterosexual feminine body. Butler describes the "heterosexual matrix" as the way in which heterosexuality encodes and structures everyday life (Butler 1990:42).

Sport scholar Pat Griffin (1992) notes the need to present a heterosexual body as one of the six manifestations of homophobia in women's sport, also known as the promotion of a heterosexual image. Griffin (1992) notes, "where presenting a feminine image previously sufficed, corporate sponsors, professional women's sport organizations, some women's college teams, and individual athletes have moved beyond presenting a feminine image to adopting a more explicit display of heterosex appeal" (Griffin 1992:255). The other five categories are: silence, denial, apology, attacks on lesbians, and preference for male coaches. Silence, as Griffin (1992) writes, is the most consistent and enduring manifestation of homophobia in women's sport.

Female athletes often live in fear of drawing attention to themselves by achieving athletic success and therefore drawing attention to their sexuality. When a female athlete's "status of heterosexuality" comes into question to their coaches, managers, and even the athletes themselves will deny it. This denial, another categorical manifestation of homophobia, results in the erasure of lesbians in sport. In order to "apologize" for possible appearances or associations outside of femininity, female athletes, their coaches, sponsors, and managers often promote an ideal feminine image that is consistent with white heterosexual images of beauty. Women in

sport suffer not only detrimental psychological consequences but also physical effects. Griffin writes, “in a style reminiscent of 1950s McCarthyism some coaches proclaim their anti-lesbian policies as an introduction to their programs. Athletes thought to be lesbian are dropped from teams, find themselves benched or are suddenly ostracized by coaches and teammates” (Griffin 1992:256).

Homophobia affects all women in sport; the idea or “lesbian label” marginalizes women’s sport and all female athletes. However, without outside influence of media women’s Ultimate Frisbee resists the need to promote a sense of heterosexualized body. As Susan Cahn (1993) notes the figure of the mannish lesbian has “acted as a powerful unarticulated ‘bogey woman’ of sport, forming a silent foil for more positive, corrective images that attempt to rehabilitate the image of women athletes and resolve the cultural contradiction between athletic prowess and femininity” (Cahn 1993:343). The idea of the “mannish lesbian” still pervades thinking about female athletes, yet the overall camaraderie of a women’s Ultimate Frisbee team overrides a homophobic climate in sport. Even so, players may create a heteronormative atmosphere, mainly through jokes, and may still promote a sexuality that is distinctly heterosexual.

Although college women’s Ultimate Frisbee incorporates aspects of mainstream ideologies of sport, such as competitiveness, aggression, and physicality, the sport still resists all facets that promote hegemonic masculinity. The following is from my observations at practice:

Karen starts with ‘Viagra jokes’ as her throws are too low and they need to get higher in order for the receiver to score. The jokes include ‘taking Viagra in order to, get it up’ and ‘I took my Viagra, my throws are up.’ Everybody else either partakes in the jokes or laughs at them.

At another practice I overheard two new players talking about how to learn the flick (snapping the wrist to release the disc) throw:

Margo: I was running around and I overheard one of the guys teaching a younger player on the men's team on how to throw a flick. He told him it's just like slapping an ass when you snap your wrist. (She mimics the act of slapping an ass)

Beatrice: Oh that's easy to remember! I will just think of when I am slapping a guy's ass whenever I go to throw flick (She also mimics the act of slapping an ass.)

In these observations, players are making jokes using aspects of heterosexuality and male sexuality. Karen is joking about Viagra, a drug enhancer for men with penis erectile dysfunction. I would argue that this type of joking may create a heteronormative environment where some players might feel uncomfortable. However, those telling these jokes may be adapting and manipulating aspects of male sexuality to make them their own. These aspects of masculinity may help these players to think of themselves as athletes. As I argue, college women Ultimate players use aspects of masculinity to think of themselves as athletes because they do not have an alternative vocabulary. These players reshape these ideas so that they do not generate a hierarchy of power.

Aside from practices, at competitive tournaments the jokes increase in vulgarity and heteronormative language. The following is from observations made at the most competitive tournament of the season:

Jane is talking about finding the water jugs in the morning before our first game. The conversation turned into talking about breasts, and Janice recalls her nickname of 'jugs.' Tina makes the comment that she prefers the word 'tits' to any other word.

Taylor and Ronnie both yell the phrase of 'pussy footing' to players on the field when they are not running hard or in the huddle before games.

On numerous occasions at practices when players would go to change colors to play on the offense or defense, other players would joke about giving them a little striptease and say things like, "take it off!" Although both of these comments may create a heteronormative environment, they may also indicate that this environment creates a space for all women to feel comfortable with themselves and each other. My research suggests that in college women's Ultimate Frisbee,

women's sexuality does not exist solely in relation to male sexuality and heterosexuality. Often in the culture of sport, sexuality is solely heterosexual and created in opposition to homosexuality (Messner 2002: 35). My observations suggest that college women's Ultimate Frisbee provides a space that cultivates women's relationships with each other and may sometimes allow for playful erotic expression. This may also suggest that these players feel comfortable in an all-female space and therefore can freely express their sexuality among themselves. These expressions may include playful interactions, playful touching or jokes. Karen's joking about Viagra and Margo's joking about how to throw a flick may signal an adoption of a form of hegemonic masculinity but it may also indicate that as a woman she is comfortable in this space and can playfully express her sexuality.

Most of my observations occur when teams are in all-female settings. If these events occurred in a mix gendered setting, these actions might be misinterpreted. For example, if a men's team were present when these teams exhibit erotic play they might interpret these acts as expressions of heterosexuality towards them. At a competitive preseason tournament, Discs lost in the quarterfinals. Discs played another losing team in an isolated field removed from the other competing teams. The two teams decided to enjoy this game since this game did not change the outcome of the tournament for either team. During the game the opposing team members took off their shorts exposing underwear or tights. The team encouraged Discs to take off their shorts and many members complied. Both teams had players on the field that had their underwear or tights on during the entire point. There were shouts from both teams' sidelines to "take it off!" These teams felt a level of comfort that allowed them to express their sexuality with one another in an uninhibited way.

On the Discs team there are long lasting jokes and playful gestures that team members often use with each other. These jokes continue through the seasons even as team members graduate and move on from their college years. One of them is the “taco.” A “taco,” mentioned earlier in this section, is where one woman quickly runs her hand across the front part of another woman’s pelvic area, as noted earlier. The opposite of a “taco” is a “butter knife” because the hand quickly slides over the backside. When one woman places her hands on the breast of another woman and moves them up and down, this is a “milkshake.” The origin of these jokes or pranks is unknown among the Discs team. This may suggest that these players feel comfortable in an all-female space and therefore express notions of female sexuality among team mates. These women flirt playfully with each other as they touch their bodies in a sexual manner. Although the culture of college women’s Ultimate Frisbee is very supportive of lesbian relationships, I would say that it does not identify as a lesbian culture. These flirtations may signify romantic relationships between players, but this did not appear to be the case during my research with the Discs team. In general, these exchanges occur because players feel comfortable in an all-female space. I would argue that since women’s Ultimate Frisbee is outside the mainstream culture of sport, these female athletes may create a safe space to nourish a female bond and relationships where female sexuality does not exist solely in relation to male sexuality and heterosexuality. My observations suggest there is a space in women’s college Ultimate Frisbee that celebrates women’s relationships with one another.

### **The Ultimate Athlete: Expressions of Female Athleticism in Ultimate Frisbee**

I identify as an athlete and Ultimate is my sport. (Deidre/Interview)

As I was parking my car at a tournament, I read this bumper sticker on another car, “Ultimate ruined my life.” There is generally no external validation for a long, hard day of physically demanding Ultimate. The team does not usually receive public recognition for its

efforts, as in mainstream sport. There are no paychecks, no benefits, and no crowds waiting at home. There is no mass production of jerseys for the “superstar” on the team, no autographs or photo shoots. I have found in my research that players speak of a desire to play the game of Ultimate, a desire to play with their team through easy and hard games and through good and bad weather. In these conditions, how do female Ultimate players express themselves as athletes? Can outside comments affect the psyche of the female athlete who plays Ultimate? Can researchers, including myself, accurately relate the experience of the female athlete? What specific areas of mainstream sport might these athletes bring into Ultimate? Can college women’s Ultimate bring their existing ideas of sport and athleticism and still create a “safe” space to express their athleticism? I would argue that by understanding the complexity of how female athletes regard themselves as athletes, researchers are able to depict their experience.

This past spring, Discs participated in a competitive tournament in cold rain, wind, and snow. The team knew that there would be inclement weather and yet the players still chose to attend the tournament. I observed that all my teammates wore at least three layers of clothing and they were soon soaked. Many of the players tried adding layer after layer and when that did not work, we huddled together to try to salvage some warmth. Casey, Ana, Karen, and Jane were in a tight huddle and Casey remarked, “I am going to put my hands down my pants because that is what the football players do when they are cold and need to keep their hands warm.” The only thing getting them through the day was the thought of a hot shower. During the middle of the day, I tried to give a “pep” talk by asking the team to visualize that hot shower. At one point when I was on the line waiting to play defense, I tried to speak but could not feel my face, nose or lips. I looked at Carolyn and her lips were purple and I knew she could not feel her face either. The players’ hands were too cold and wet to throw the disc properly. We huddled again on the

sideline with arms and hands locked together still trying to concentrate on the game. When a game ended early, the team ran from the fields into the nearby middle school and defrosted in the bathrooms. Player after player came into the bathroom and tried desperately to wash the mud off and put their cold hands under the hot water. After the shower, after eating, we would talk about the day and even laugh about it later because they were a team, a team of athletes who would play together through the good and the bad

Ultimate does not generally incorporate mainstream sports ethos into its culture. At times, players notice the differences between Ultimate and other sports. Deidre relates her experience with club soccer and Ultimate saying, “I tried out for club soccer and they were mean, different. In Ultimate, you are encouraged to keep learning, it’s unique.” (Deidre/Interview) Amy also relates her impression of club soccer players in comparison to Ultimate players by saying, “I know plenty of soccer bitches and they are conceited, selfish and have all the bad qualities of an athlete or ‘a jock.’” (Amy/Interview) This may suggest that Ultimate creates a space that does not incorporate the negative aspects of mainstream sport. However, Ultimate does not exist completely outside of mainstream sport culture; participants may bring their beliefs from other sports into their game.

Studies in feminist research often analyze the importance of the image of the female body. From theory of the sexuality of human bodies and their meanings to current feminist research on the female body, the image of the body is an important concern. How can researchers accurately represent the experience of the female athlete? The sociological model of multiple bodies, as proposed by Barbara Cox and Shona Thompson (2000), is an effective tool to interpret the experience of female athletes. The research by Cox and Thompson (2000) based on in-depth interviews and participant observation with a premier New Zealand soccer league. By dividing

the body into four theoretical components, Cox and Thompson (2000) illustrate the complex and uncertain process of how female athletes understand their bodies. These theoretical bodies often challenge each other and when placed in juxtaposition they often challenge mainstream discourses on femininity, sexuality, and stereotypical gender roles (Cox and Thompson 2000:17).

The athletic body, one of the four theoretical bodies, is a body of physical strength and endurance and it is able to perform athletics at the desired level (Cox and Thompson 2000:10). When Cox and Thompson asked what an “ideal” athletic body would entail, “All sketched a picture, particularly at elite level, that was relatively thin, muscled, athletic and strong” (Cox and Thompson 2000:10). Physical strength offers more autonomy and less reliance on the strength of others. In addition, Cox and Thompson (2000) note how the physical strength of the body transferred into a better psychological self. Several of the Discs players consider themselves to be athletes because of their athletic physical body and high level of fitness. Amy states the following:

I always considered myself as an athlete but when I started playing Ultimate, I was in decent fitness but now I have achieved a new level of fitness. I gained a new identity as an athlete. (Amy/Interview)

Team members appreciated their ability to perform within their sport. The better the physical body, the better the performance of the athlete, both mentally and physically. In addition, the number one body concern among participants in the case study by Cox and Thompson was fat. Fat is a factor that is “controllable” and “opposite” of the idea of the athletic body (Cox and Thompson 2000:13). In turn, this influenced their evaluations about performance and athletic ability, of themselves and their teammates. Karen notes how weight and fitness may affect her performance in Ultimate, but is different from “female attractiveness”:

I feel that I plan to get in shape, and in return I lose weight and that helps my performance on the field. Ultimate is not about sexy or feminine, in my opinion. (Karen/Interview)

A new player to Discs, Margo, also notes the following:

If I happen to get in amazing shape from Ultimate I won't deny that I'd be really glad. And I don't really want to bulk up, but if I *had* to choose between looking really feminine but being slow and weak or being good at Ultimate but looking kind of manly, I'd go with the manly body. (Margo/Interview)

The second body within the model of the multiple body perspective is the private body.

The private body represents the body located within the private spheres such as the dressing room or showers. In the private sphere the private body may become public when undressing and when showering. Cox and Thompson (2000) found in their research that female athletes are anxious about their naked body. An example is the way the athletic body highlights the awareness of women's comfort, appreciation, and enjoyment of their physicality. However, when we place the athletic body in opposition to the private body we can see how the private body reveals women's concerns with fat or body weight and the "attractive" female athletic body. The athletes may feel the need to incorporate the traits of the feminine body to maneuver within the culture of sports. Ultimate player Karen indicates some anxiety over undressing in front of her team:

If I am butt naked, I would feel very self-conscious. But as far as changing my shirt in front of a bunch of teams it doesn't really bother me. Usually I am in a hurry to change whatever I need to so it doesn't really matter who is watching. On the other hand, if I have the opportunity to change in the bathroom, I probably would. (Karen/Interview)

The private body is now a space where an attractive femaleness and the heteronormative female body coexist (Cox and Thompson 2000:12). Therefore, while body weight is an issue of performance and athletic ability, it was also a way to recreate female attractiveness.

In the following, Discs player Laurie relates her experiences in other sports as well as Ultimate Frisbee:

When I began weight training for basketball in high school, I was concerned about becoming too muscular. However having trained heavily for basketball with no significant muscle mass changes, I am not really worried about maintaining my 'feminine' physique

while training for Ultimate. I think my body will look more or less the same regardless of my Ultimate training. (Laurie/Interview)

Furthermore, women's appreciation of the ability of the athletic body also affects the confidence of the female athlete. Carolyn considers herself an athlete because of her training for Ultimate and her role on a team:

I am an athlete; I play for a team and compete. I play against other teams across the nation. We have an off-season and on season and I train to play. (Carolyn/Interview)

It is important to acknowledge the fact that each female athlete may experience her body in different ways and the multiple body models reveal the complexity of this process. When we place each of these theoretical bodies in juxtaposition with each other, we can see how the female athlete must maneuver and negotiate within different discourses and contexts. The body of the female athlete is constantly contradicting the dominant social discourse on identity, gender, and sexuality.

How do these athletes communicate within their team? What expressions do players use to teach a skill, play, or to motivate? I argue that college women Ultimate Frisbee players consider themselves as competitive athletes within the space of women's Ultimate, but may feel conflicted in interactions with the outside community. Ultimate player Barbara describes hearing some of the men's team describe women's Ultimate:

I remember overhearing them describe women's Ultimate and say thing like, 'women's Ultimate is men's Ultimate underwater.' They run slower and make decisions at a slower pace In regards to the men's team, you are often defined by things like being a girlfriend, and hear, 'she only plays because she is dating a guy.' (Barbara/Interview)

Deidre also describes the opinions of male players of Ultimate in the following:

Men's Ultimate, in general, does not respect women's Ultimate. They would say that younger guys aren't good throwers for women because they are direct and for women you have to cater to their lesser athleticism when throwing. (Deidre/Interview)

Carolyn also notes the following:

Men's Ultimate sees women's Ultimate as less important; in their mind, it's a lower grade of what they play. I would think that every man on the men's team would think they would know the game better than every woman of the women's team. (Carolyn/Interview)

These expressions come from all areas of the players' lives, including their coach. At one practice, I heard the following comment from Discs' male coach, as the team was getting ready to scrimmage the men's B team:

They may be taller, faster, and jump higher but don't be scared. They are also dumb. You will be fine. You get three tries to score and don't worry you can score against these dumb boys. Be patient and concentrate on throwing and catching.

I argue that these players receive criticism about their athleticism as Ultimate players but they do not internalize the comments. They use them to create a space in women's Ultimate in which they celebrate their ability as athletes. In the following, Ultimate player Melinda hears the criticisms of women's Ultimate but finds their concerns to be humorous:

The only comment that outsiders tend to make is that Ultimate isn't a real sport. But I never feel conflicted about this. I just laugh because I can definitely see where they're coming from. All they see are parties and hippies, not the practices and track workouts. (Melinda/Interview)

This may suggest that college women Ultimate players consider their identity as athletes and as teammates. This may create a space within the sport to exhibit both athleticism and expressions of support as teammates. This analysis of the multiple bodies model helps to shed light on the experience of the female athlete in Ultimate Frisbee. It also illustrates how complex this process is for the athletes. College women's Ultimate may create a "safe" space for its athletes, but there are still aspects of mainstream sport that these players must negotiate when playing Ultimate. These players are sometimes conflicted about their own athletic body in Ultimate as how to conceptualize themselves as athletes.

## CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS

The formation of gendered identities, specifically masculinity, in mainstream sport often results in an unequal distribution of power whereby masculinity in sport is favored above other forms of masculinity and above *all* expressions of femininity. Empirical research on gender and the institution of sport indicates how hegemonic masculinity may sustain and maintain a hierarchy of gender. There are few structural analyses of gender and sport, and much of the research still relies on Connell's (1987) notion of "hegemonic masculinity." In his early work, Messner (1992) relied heavily on "hegemonic masculinity" and the "gender order." Messner notes in this earlier work that, "the gender order is thus a social system that is constantly being created, contested, and changed, both in the relationships and power struggles between men and women, and in the relationships and power struggles between men" (Messner 1992). However, in his later work Messner (2002) develops a broader structural analysis of gender.

Can research better conceptualize gender in sport through Judith Butler's (1990) concept of "performativity" of gender? How can this research use a critical analysis of gender and sport, whether through notions of performativity or a structural framework, in order to disrupt the current gender hierarchy in sport? Can we use research to change an existing and established social structure, a social structure that is embedded in the gender fabric of society? By employing feminist research methods and using a critical analysis of gender, this research will expose the weakness of the structure. Specifically, by combining a critical analysis with specific individual characteristics of college women's Ultimate Frisbee, this research may begin to destabilize the center of institutionalized men's sport. With a structural change, individual acts may become significant and consequential in changing the overall structure of sport. Female athletes, at all

levels, should see themselves, as male athletes are able to, as strong, and self-confident, not as anomalies.

In her work, *Gender Trouble*, Butler (1990) criticizes the assumption that there is a “core” or “essence” to a preexisting gendered social being that willfully enters into social contracts and relationships. Butler states, “the performative invocation of a nonhistorical ‘before’ becomes the foundational premise that guarantees a presocial ontology of persons who freely consent to be governed and thereby constitute the legitimacy of the social contract” (Butler 1990:5). This premise leads most feminist theorists to mistakenly assume that there is some sort of gendered ontological woman that desires to be “free” of social attributes that essentializes their being. Butler goes on to write, “the feminist subject turns out to be discursively constituted by the very political system that is supposed to facilitate its emancipation” (Butler 1990:4). Butler suggests the notion of gender as a performance where there is no preexisting being, but an “effect” that happens in everyday performance. Many scholars misinterpret this idea of performance as being a matter of free will or choice. Therefore Butler notes:

In this sense, gender is not a noun but rather a set of free floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by the regulatory practices of gender coherence. Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance, gender proves to be performative that is constituting the identity it is purported to be, gender is always a doing though not a doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. (Butler 1990:33)

Is Butler’s notion of a performative gender useful to an analysis of gender and sport found in college women’s Ultimate Frisbee? Does Butler suggest that if we can use other performative, or subversive, acts to destabilize these effects, then we can challenge the very systems and subjects that are simultaneously producing one another? If this is Butler’s message, how can we illustrate the absurdity of gender effects while women athletes are still held accountable to them? Although Butler might disagree, a structural analysis of the institution of gender and sport

combined with Butler's notions of performativity will generate an insightful critique and useful dialogue on gender and the culture of sport.

Messner (2002) points to three levels of analysis in creating a structural framework for discussing gender and sport. The first level is an interactionist theoretical framework that illustrates the ways that social agents "perform" or "do" gender in order to describe how groups of people reproduce or challenge boundaries that create "natural" categorical differences between women and men. The next level is a structural theoretical framework that highlights how gender is inscribed in institutions. This level helps to show how under certain conditions social agents "mobilize variously to disrupt or to affirm gender differences and inequalities" (Messner 2002: 25). Last is a cultural theoretical perspective that shows how symbols and images are carefully incorporated into culture and used, reproduced, or contested in different locations in society. By combining this structural framework of analysis with specific subversive acts, as located in the sport of Ultimate Frisbee, we may challenge detrimental consequences of sport culture

To build on this gender research, Martin (2004) merges the individuality of gender with a structural analysis. Martin states that institutions do not "stand alone" and may often interact with one another (Martin 2004:1265). If we frame gender as an institution, it is possible to notice how the institution of sport and gender are reacting and reconstituting each other in mainstream sport. Martin explains that the members of these institutions, including sport, may use gender expectations to construct the social relations and dynamics of its institution (Martin 2004:1266). Martin notes, "without question, other institutional spheres 'use gender' to construct (some) practices, social relations, rules, and procedures" (Martin 2004:1266). I argue that the institution of mainstream sport "uses gender" to emphasize hegemonic masculinity as a "natural" trait of

athletes and to disregard other forms of masculinity as well as traits of femininity. By framing gender as an institution, I am able to show how gender can both work against and, sometimes, for the institution of sport. College women's Ultimate Frisbee reshapes gender expectations so that gender identities are no longer reproduced to create a hierarchy of power.

College women's Ultimate Frisbee may challenge structural levels of the institution of sport. At the interactional level women Ultimate players sometimes "perform" their gender outside of their "acceptable" gendered identities. However, this is acceptable because it exists in a culture where college women's Ultimate players incorporate aspects of both categorical and individual gendered identities in order to destabilize these oppositional categories. My research suggests that women who are college Ultimate Frisbee players often use their athleticism in a typically masculine manner, though with a difference. I argue that these players must use "masculine" practices and language found in sport culture because they have no other way of expressing themselves as competitive athletes. Players may also participate in gendered identities by wearing "masculine" attire to express intimidation. Although many players may claim to dress themselves in a "practical" manner, most still recognize intimidating attires such as wearing all black.

Another example of "masculine" practices is language use in college women's Ultimate Frisbee. Although the overall culture in college women's Ultimate Frisbee may be more "accessible," players may still rely on mainstream sporting terms to describe specific acts of athleticism. College women's Ultimate Frisbee may offer a more "accessible" environment and vocabulary than other sports and activities. New players may feel at ease within Ultimate because its culture and terms create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning. This research suggests that college women Ultimate Frisbee players define their athleticism using masculine

language; they use terms that emphasize aggression, competitiveness, and physicality but do not use these terms or language at the expense of other teammates. College women Ultimate players use “masculine” language and practices, but they alter their purpose so that it does not perpetuate gender inequality. Women Ultimate Frisbee players reformulate the meanings of masculine practices and language into their own, thereby creating a distinct space.

These actors in the space transform and change perceived masculine gendered identities in order to create a culture without a distinct hierarchy. In this space, college women Ultimate players transform masculine gender meanings and thereby feel a level of comfort and camaraderie with their fellow players. I would argue that since women’s Ultimate Frisbee is outside the culture of mainstream sport, these female athletes are able to nourish female bonds and relationships. Through my observations, I have found that college women’s Ultimate Frisbee allows women to cultivate relationships with one another and may sometimes allow for playful erotic expression. This may also suggest that these players feel comfortable in an all-female space and therefore can freely express their sexuality. Some expressions may include playful interactions, touching, or jokes. These exchanges may signal an adoption of hegemonic masculinity, heterosexuality, or male sexuality, but it may also indicate that these women feel at ease in this space and can express themselves sexually and playfully among other women on their teams.

I emphasize that these practices are specific to college women’s Ultimate Frisbee, even if, in the overall culture of Ultimate Frisbee, there are some interactions and exchanges that reinforce gender inequality. My research is specific to college women’s Ultimate Frisbee, because this sport has characteristics that I argue are different from those found in other women’s sports. Characteristics such as attire, language, and physicality may be similar in other

women's sports, but those sports can often reproduce the same inequality and gender hierarchies found in men's sport culture. For example, in Theberge's (2000) work, she found that even though there is no body checking in women's ice hockey, there can be a large amount of physicality in the game. These players use their bodies for physicality and "play through the pain," and may also see their bodies as "machines" (Messner 2002:57, Theberge 2000:129). Theberge noted that players saw injury and pain as a sign of weakness outside of hegemonic masculinity, and therefore not suitable traits of an athlete (Theberge 1997:83).

In addition, some women's sport culture and its practices may form in response to the culture or climate found in its men's sport counterpart. In Broad's (2001) work on women's rugby, she examines how women's rugby responds to the destructive culture of men's rugby. She draws parallels between women's resistance in rugby to queer activism, suggesting that there exists forms of queer resistance in women's sport. I argue that college women's Ultimate Frisbee does not react directly to practices in men's Ultimate, nor does it reproduce gender inequality found in men's sport culture.

At a structural level, college women's Ultimate players move outside the gendered hierarchy of institutionalized sport. Here they are free of divisions based on categories of gender that could have a detrimental influence on female Ultimate players. There are powerful masculine sporting images and symbols of sport which influence Ultimate, but, college women Ultimate players choose to manipulate these images in order to disrupt perceptions of "naturalized" differences between female and male athletes. In the future college women's Ultimate Frisbee may become more "mainstream" and begin to incorporate practices found in mainstream sport that may reinforce gender inequality. As Ultimate begins to grow, the media may intervene and change the dynamic found in college women's Ultimate. However, at this

moment I argue that college women's Ultimate Frisbee challenges the institution of sport by creating a location for female athletes that is outside the "center" of mainstream sport culture. Therefore, college women's Ultimate Frisbee may serve to destabilize men's institutionalized sport by challenging gender ideologies that hold it in place.

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Joanna Winn Neville was born on January 2, 1981 in Louisville, Kentucky. She soon moved to Miami, Florida where she attended Howard Drive Elementary School, Palmetto Middle School, and Palmetto Senior High School. Joanna received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Florida in 2003 and began working at a publishing house in Gainesville, Florida.

Joanna has played Ultimate Frisbee for 5 years and began her Ultimate career with the Gainesville women's team in 2002. Since then she has played with successful coed and college teams. She has played in the Ultimate Players Association Club Championships Series, and the Ultimate Players Association College Championship Series.