

The *Ultimate* Alternative: A Study of the Institutionalization of An Emerging Sporting Practice

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## ABSTRACT

Studies on sports such as skateboarding (Beal, 1995) and snowboarding (Humphreys, 1997) have suggested that the transition from emergent counterculture practice to mainstream or commodified sport is problematic, particularly to the community of participants. The relationship of sport, as cultural practice, to its environment is the subject of much research and discussion (Brohm, 1978; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Guttman, 1978; Hargreaves, 1982; Heron, 1991; Morgan, 1994). Ultimate (Frisbee) is an example of an emerging practice with interesting and unique characteristics that contest the paternalistic, authoritarian and market driven ideologies of mainstream team sports (Brohm, 1978; Calhoun, 1987; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). For example, the sport is typically played at all levels without referees and only occasionally with coaches. Additionally, standardized rules, bureaucratic structures and external funding which characterize mainstream amateur and professional sport (Slack & Hinings, 1992) are noticeably absent at this developmental stage of Ultimate.

Research, incorporating an institutional perspective (*i.e.*, featuring the application of institutional theory or similar principles of related work to the study of sociological phenomena), which examines the developmental process of a sport form from the perspectives of athletes and administrators is largely absent from the literature (Yiannakis *et al.*, 1993). The purpose of this study was to identify the pressures and forms of resistance in the institutionalization of a non-traditional team sport, Ultimate and to understand the meanings and impact of these tensions on players and administrators as they relate to the future direction of the sport.

The research methodology was qualitative in nature and relied on a number of ethnographic techniques: i) focus groups with competitive players from Vancouver competitive

teams (n=12); ii) e-mail discussions with key decision-makers in North America (n=10); and iii) analysis of relevant documents.

Results of the study demonstrated that participants believed the sport is at a crossroads in terms of its development and future direction. The meanings and shared beliefs, values and norms of this subculture (Crosset & Beal, 1997; Yiannakis *et al.*, 1993) are powerful mediators of any change in direction or mainstream identity. While growth, popularity and commercial market forces are pressing the sport for change, a number of resistances including the divided attitudes of players and the sport's image are impeding this development. Analysis of data suggested that there will likely be a distinct and problematic split and two different forms - recreational (grassroots) and competitive (commercialized) will exist.

This study contributes to an understanding of the development of sport forms from an institutional perspective (Morrow, 1992; Slack, 1997; Slack & Hinings, 1992). The focus on Ultimate as an emergent, counterculture team sport provides additional insight into the relationship of participants of this practice with powerful forces which seek to influence their sport and community.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
LIST OF FIGURES	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION	1
* Background: The Ultimate experience	3
* Organization in North America	7
* Locating the phenomenon: Institutionalization in a sport context	11
* Pressures and resistances in the institutional order	15
* Purpose of the study	21
* Research questions	21
CHAPTER 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW	22
* Institutional Theory: institutional elements and terminology	22
* Conditions of institutionalization	26
* Institutionalization in context	29
* Individual and group interests in the institutional order	32
* The Institutionalization of modern sports	39
CHAPTER 3 - RESEARCH DESIGN	47
* Role of the researcher	47
* Site and sample selection	49
Organizational support	49
Site	50
Sample	50
Vancouver players	51
Key decision-makers	52
* Data Collection Procedures	53
Analysis of relevant documents	53
Focus Groups with Vancouver competitive players	53
E-mail discussions with key decision-makers	55
* Data Analysis Procedures	56

* Methods of Verification of data	59
Credibility	59
Confirmability	60
Transferability	61
* Limitations	61
* Communicating results	62
* Ethical Considerations	62
CHAPTER 4 - RESULTS	64
* Background of participants in the study	64
Focus group participant profile	64
E-mail respondents profile	65
* Document Analysis	66
* The Ultimate Community	67
The identity and character of the Ultimate community	67
The representation of mainstream sport	69
The meanings and significance of Spirit of the Game	70
Sportspersonship	73
Player autonomy and the amateur state of Ultimate	74
* Pressures and forces of resistance affecting the development of Ultimate in North America	76
Pressures on the development of Ultimate	76
Growth and popularity	76
Commercial market forces	78
The marketing of Ultimate	80
Forces of resistance to change in the North American community	83
Player values and norms	83
Ownership and control of the sport	86
Behavioural Norms	89
Lack of spectator appeal	90
Image	92
Developmental stage of sport	94
Administrative and organizational inadequacy	95
Economic conditions and status of sport delivery system	98
Consequences: speculation as to the future of Ultimate	98
Technical and structural elements	99
Cultural elements of the sport	101
CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS	104
* The meaning and significance of the development of Ultimate	105

* The impact of forces affecting the direction of Ultimate: an institutional perspective	107
* The significance of resistances	110
* Conclusion: The compromised future of Ultimate	111
* Recommendations for future research	116

<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	120
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Appendix A Letter to the Ultimate Players Association	126
Appendix B Focus group consent letter	129
Appendix C Document analysis sources	131
Appendix D Focus group questions	132
Appendix E E-mail questions	133
Appendix F Theme index tree	134
Appendix G Data analysis example	135

## **List of Figures**

	<i>Page</i>
Figure 1.1: Organizational Structure of North American Ultimate Associations	5
Figure 1.2: Forms and Characteristics of Ultimate	8
Figure 5.1: Competitive Structure of Ultimate in North America	114

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## INTRODUCTION

The sport of Ultimate, its evolution, and the community of participants demonstrate interesting and unique characteristics. Invented in 1967 by a group of high school students in New Jersey, the game has become one of the fastest growing team sports in North America. Membership in the Ultimate Players Association has increased from 5,900 members in 1990 to 9,900 in 1997 (Source: U.P.A.). The social and cultural characteristics of the game are unique in the world of sport and represent a valuable forum to investigate alternative meanings of the sporting experience. In addition, there is some controversy amongst participants over the direction and organizational form that the sport should adopt in the future. Some insiders argue for the retention of the values, norms, and structures that led to the evolution of the sport including no rule adjustments and not compromising the game at the request of corporate sponsors. Others argue that for Ultimate to continue to flourish, it should adopt some of the characteristics of mainstream, institutionalized team sports such as the emphases on quantifiable performance outcomes, marketability and commercialization (Morgan, 1994; Sage, 1990). These debates and tensions have characterized Ultimate since the late 1980s and have produced a sport at a crossroads.

In attempting to identify how insiders perceive the forces, both pressures and forms of resistance, that will affect the future direction of Ultimate, institutional theory, an under used framework in a sporting context (Slack, 1997) was employed. Insiders were identified as players and administrators of the sport. It was an appropriate framework given its sociological base (Zucker, 1983), its focus on the organizational "field" and

inclusion of socio-cultural elements such as shared beliefs and values (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; March & Olsen, 1984) which will be significant in determining the course of action taken by the North American Ultimate community. Additionally, elements such as resource generation and allocation (Hall, Slack, Smith & Whitson, 1991; Scott, 1995; Slack & Hinings, 1992), legitimate control and actor autonomy within the accepted order (Beal, 1995; Oliver 1991) and change or differentiation of rules and practices (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Morrow 1992; Oliver, 1991) are examined and contextualized within the capitalist system. These three particular elements of institutionalization are in large part what currently differentiates Ultimate from the mainstream order of team sports. Virtually all resources are generated internally, by participants. The game is currently controlled by the players, given their shared interests and values about sport, and standardized in formal yet flexible rules and practices. This differs greatly from mainstream commercialized sport forms such as hockey or basketball where resources for most competitive teams (*i.e.*, college, university or professional) are provided for by outside sources. Player control is not a legitimate function in these environments although at some levels players are represented by associations which attempt to further their collective interests as with the National Hockey League Players Association (N.H.L.P.A.) in hockey.

The institutional perspective or application of tenets of institutional theory to the examination of the development of sport forms was enhanced by related research in sport involving the institutionalization of specific sports (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Humphreys, 1997; Morrow, 1992; Pearson, 1979). This study addressed issues relating to the pressures on participants of sporting practices to conform to the mainstream sport

practices, how they resist such pressures and questions of how participants perceive and interpret influencing institutional forces.

### ***Background: The Ultimate experience***

Ultimate is a non-contact, flowing field sport involving seven players per team trying to advance the disc into the opposing end zone without running with it. It incorporates many elements of traditional sports such as the running of soccer, the passing and pivoting of basketball and the receiving of football. A study conducted at the University of Western New Mexico (Boswell, 1981) reported that Ultimate is the most aerobically demanding field sport.

Importantly, it is governed by a highly respected principle called "Spirit of the Game" which outlines player responsibility and sportspersonship issues. This is significant because the sport is played without referees and, for the most part, without coaches. The Spirit of the Game clause is as follows:

Ultimate has traditionally relied upon a spirit of sportsmanship [*sic.*] which places the responsibility for fair play on the player himself [*sic.*]. Highly competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of the bond of mutual respect between players, adherence to the agreed upon rules of the game, or the basic joy of play. Protection of these vital elements serves to eliminate adverse conduct from the Ultimate field. Such actions as taunting of opposing players, dangerous aggression, intentional fouling, or other "win-at-all-costs" behaviour are contrary to the spirit of the game and must be avoided by all players (Ultimate Players Association, Ninth edition rules, 1996).

A unique "Captain's Clause" allows the two team captains to agree on any rule changes they wish prior to competition. While this is undoubtedly done in order to make

the activity more adaptive to varying conditions such as limited time considerations due to bad weather, it is a clear indication of where the founders felt the control over the sport ought to be - with the players. Unlike other team sports, the players are the decision makers and do not need the permission of a coach, referee, association or governing body to make changes in their sport. This autonomy is thought to influence the sporting experience by empowering the athletes, thereby giving them a sense of ownership or control over the quality and direction of the sport.

Ultimate has often been labeled as "fringe" or "alternative" by media and outsiders because it has highly visible characteristics including the use of the flying disc, unique dress and no referees which distinguish it from more recognizable team sports (see Figure 1.1). It does not use the traditional ball as its necessary object but rather a Frisbee which conjures images, in the minds of participants and non-participants alike, of leisurely beach activity or the hippie movement of the 1960s. North America in the 1960s was characterized as "an explosion that has run its course, a temporary outburst of utopian idealism" (Calhoun, 1987), a time with high degrees of political and social instability. Times such as these tend to lend themselves to expressive cultural innovation and the production of new cultural forms (Griswold, 1994), including the creation of new sport forms. Ultimate has been linked to the "new games" or "new leisure" movement of the 1960s and 1970s. Kidd (1995) suggested that like triathlon and beach volleyball, "Frisbee" began as a counterculture alternative to the dominant sport forms.

Traditional paternal figureheads and powerbrokers such as coaches, referees, athletic administrators are absent from the game of Ultimate. It is part of the accepted

# ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OF NORTH AMERICAN ULTIMATE ASSOCIATIONS

*U.P.A.*

*C.U.P.A.*

*N.U.A.*

Board of Directors: 12 members (elected)  
 Executive: based on function  
 Major Positions: Executive Director, Managing Director,  
 Director of Competition, Director of Marketing, National Event  
 Coordinator, International Director, Public Relations Director

Board of Directors: 5 members (elected)  
 Executive: based on geography  
 Major Positions: Regional representatives  
 (6)

Director  
 Assistant Director

## *Key Administrative Positions in Competitive Ultimate (U.P.A.)*

<i>Open (male dominated; not exclusive)</i>	<i>Women's</i>	<i>College (Open/Women's)</i>	<i>Coed</i>
National Director	National Director	National Director	National Director
Regional Coordinators	Regional Coordinators	Regional Coordinators	
Sectional Coordinators	Sectional Coordinators	Sectional Coordinators	

Key:  
 U.P.A. - Ultimate Players Association; American based but permits Canadian teams into its competitions  
 C.U.P.A. - Canadian Ultimate Players Association; Canadian based and does not allow American teams to compete  
 N.U.A. - National Ultimate Association; American based, no regulations on entry into competitions

**Figure 1.1** Organizational Structure of North American Ultimate Associations

order in the current age of sport to have such figures in positions of power and the absence of this recognizable way in part creates discomfort and credibility issues amongst outsiders about this unfamiliar activity. For North American Ultimate, the adoption of accepted institutional elements in the future would contribute to the perception of the game as legitimate and might enhance prospects of generating highly sought after resources. For example, competitive Ultimate in Sweden is part of their government sport delivery system and has seemingly become institutionalized without much consideration of a commodified form or the experimentation of rules. This may be a result of their social and economic system coupled with social and governmental interest in sport and successful international competition. National and select competitive teams receive funding in Sweden and most have a non playing coach.

Instead of mere subordination to authority, a high value is placed on responsibility, respect and agency within the North American community. Additionally, the culture of the sport is characterized by norms of individual expression, through means such as dress and the highly social nature of the community. Tolerance of members extends to what is certainly "deviant" behaviour as defined by broader society and the mass sport community (Sacco, 1988). Cross dressing and naked play are examples of such action. As a result, the familiar in Ultimate may seem foreign to those socialized through the traditional structures and conservative ideals which have come to define modern team sports (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993).

Typically, Ultimate does not exhibit an ideology of maximizing excellence or commercialization. Kidd (1995) argues that these considerations have the effect of muting

voices of resistance and change in mainstream sports. The emphasis on quantifiable outcomes creates a rational mechanism whereby athlete and administrator interests are legitimated as furthering the pursuit of victory and wealth. Questioning the prize or end reward upon which the entire mainstream sport system has evolved is unacceptable in what Kidd (1995) suggested is a rather homogenous dominant sport culture.

### ***Organization in North America***

Organizationally in North America, Ultimate is supported by a non-profit association, the Ultimate Players Association (U.P.A.), which is based in Colorado and its affiliate the Canadian Ultimate Players Association (C.U.P.A.), which has no base or head office (Figure 1.2).

In the United States, there is a vast network of player volunteers acting as sectional and regional coordinators for the juniors, college, women, open, masters divisions- which supports the two person staff in the head office of the U.P.A. These affiliated organizations represent over 10,000 competitive players in North America. Their responsibilities include finding sites, facilities, and tournament directors as well as disseminating necessary information about the required competitions which are part of the U.P.A. series of tournaments. Coordinators must ensure that all U.P.A. revenues, raised by player and team fees for competitions, are collected and sent to head office.

In Canada, the Canadian Ultimate Players Association (C.U.P.A.) is based upon regional representation and meets only once a year. Competitions are organized by independent volunteer tournament directors and supporting staff with little involvement from C.U.P.A. representatives. There is no C.U.P.A. series of competitions. The

## FORMS AND CHARACTERISTICS OF ULTIMATE

### ***Characteristics: structure, team size, officiating, uniforms and other relevant elements***

#### ***Recreational***

Coed: typically a ratio of four men to three women; varies greatly  
Women's (only): increasingly popular

- played in community or city leagues
- approximately 12 members/team, although this varies
- self-officiated, facilitated by Captains
- no uniforms required; range from matching T-shirts to cross dressing
- very loosely scheduled game times
- highly social
- some local sponsorship

#### ***Competitive***

Open: men's division, although women can compete  
Women's: restricted to women  
Coed: new series; first championship in 1997  
\*features sanctioned and unsanctioned tournaments; those with organizational affiliation (*i.e.*, U.P.A., C.U.P.A., N.U.A.) are subject to the influence of the respective association, primarily in the form of rule changes

- typically two day weekend tournament competitions; open and women's occur at the same event
- approximately 20 members/team
- self-officiated, except N.U.A. and College (as of 1998) who employ varying levels of officiating
- uniforms required at National Championships; range from matching shirts to theme teams to cross dressing
- loosely scheduled game times
- very minimal sponsorship
- typically feature Spirit of the Game team awards

**Figure 1.2** Forms and characteristics of Ultimate

organization does deal with ongoing issues such as qualifying tournaments for the Canadian National Championships and player eligibility.

The U.P.A. and C.U.P.A. specifically represent the sport of Ultimate. They have a relationship with the World Flying Disc Federation (W.F.D.F.). In 1994, the W.F.D.F., which also represents other disc activities such as Frisbee golf and freestyle, received full voting membership status in the General Assembly of International Sports Federations (G.A.I.S.F.) as well as the International World Games Association (I.W.G.A.) (Source: U.P.A.).

The recently formed American-based organization called the N.U.A. or National Ultimate Association, consists of players and volunteers unhappy with the current state and direction of the sport and the U.P.A. Generally, the U.P.A. and C.U.P.A. prioritizes steady participant growth and maintenance of the status quo, in terms of established elements of the sport such as spirit of the game and existing rules, as its objectives. The N.U.A.'s mandate is to promote and market the sport based on the highest and most competitive level of play. N.U.A. supporters must be U.P.A. members as the U.S. Championship is a U.P.A. series event and membership is a requisite for participation in this series. The N.U.A. has as of yet no formal membership and organizes only a few competitions per season with N.U.A. rules in effect, including referees and different field dimensions. The organization's resistance to the past and current direction of the U.P.A., and the state of the sport in general, stems from a dissatisfaction with the method of operation of the U.P.A. which is based on serving its larger membership, only a small percentage of which compete at the elite level. The N.U.A.'s actions represent a form of

defiance which typically involves ignoring explicit norms and values and contesting rules and requirements within an organization (Oliver, 1991). The use of referees alone creates an essentially different experience of playing Ultimate. One consequence of this change is less respect for existing rules as an arbitrator is now empowered as the determining official of sportpersonship. The N.U.A. supports fundamental rule changes, corporate sponsorship of any kind and virtually any other means as a way to gain additional resources and exposure for the sport. This shift in values, an alignment with mainstream team sport values and practices, is a logical development when considering the many interests of this participant group, particularly given the importance of resource acquisition in emerging cultural practices (Friedland & Alford, 1987). What appears to be motivating this group is the perceived rewards of members of conforming to the practices of professional team sports.

From an institutional theory perspective, the issues of power and control are significant in terms of understanding the considerations regarding the sport's future direction from within the Ultimate community, that is all participants of the organized sport in North America. It can be argued that the founding philosophy of the sport's pioneers embraced player control as a necessary ingredient for the maintenance of the meanings and structures of the sport (U.P.A. Ninth edition rules, 1996). The modern sport forms evolved in what Guttman (1978) described as a gradual transformation from informal, unstructured play like activities to more rationalized activities, featuring increased bureaucratic regulation and orientation to record setting and quantitative assessments of the meaning of the sporting experience. This has contributed to the

erosion of participant and peer control in favour of commercial interests. Hockey, for instance, has been oriented toward commercial spectacle since the late 19th century as an intended use for bourgeois entrepreneurs and working class fans (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993; Harvey & Cantelon, 1988; Kidd & Mcfarlane, 1972).

That modern sport teams are now heavily controlled by multiple parties - owners, sponsors, media - is difficult to contest (Morgan, 1994). Mainstream professional sport is characterized by ownership power struggles and teams abandoning their communities, as with Quebec and Winnipeg of the N.H.L.; ticket and merchandise prices now virtually restricting attendance and sales to the middle class or more affluent populations; and supporters demanding quantifiable success and wins or the unemployment of leadership. As is commonly referred to in the industry, sport is business. With respect to hockey for example, Kidd and Macfarlane (1972) recognized trends in the sport and suggested that community hockey, built on love of the particular game, love of the sport generally and community loyalty lie closer to the true meaning of the game (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). Where Ultimate has differed from other team sport forms is in its preservation of certain residuals of amateurism, such as participant control, and the as of yet unfostered relationship of extrinsic rewards to success in sport competitions. These rewards, such as sponsorship, compensation and fame in the public eye, act as powerful influences and contribute to a different structure and quality to the game (Morgan, 1994).

### ***Locating the phenomenon: Institutionalization in a sport context***

As sport becomes more synonymous with commerce, and new sport forms enter

into the contemporary operational or business environment, there is a need within the fields of sport sociology and sport management to advance theory which informs understanding of the institutionalization of sport forms. Framing the development of Ultimate as potentially 'institutional', demonstrating change towards the adherence to characteristics and values of the dominant, legitimated sport practices, permits consideration of the forces impacting the sport as an 'organization' (Jepperson, 1987). This perspective allows for a broad lens through which the forces impacting upon the direction of the sport can be interpreted as informed by individuals directly affected in this case.

To date, no research has been uncovered on the significance of Ultimate as an emergent practice outside of the mainstream sport world. While related studies have been conducted with regards to sport subcultures such as the work of Pearson (1979) on surfing and surf life-saving, Crum (1988) on korfbal, Donnelly and Young's (1988) more general study of sport subcultures, Granskog's (1992) research on triathletes, Humphreys (1997) study of snowboarding and Beal on skateboarding (1995), there has been little research into non-traditional team sport forms. Of particular interest was the opportunity to study this phenomenon at this time and place given the sport's popularity. Additionally, the highly rationalized commercialization of sport and commodification of athletes have never been greater. A sport such as Ultimate, one which has embraced different values and developed outside of the dominant structures and traditions, stands as a vital example of an emergent practice with potentially different meanings of participation in sport. It may provide a different kind of sporting experience, embracing a different cultural system,

the significance of which has yet to be researched and theorized.

While the identification of the pressures and forms of resistance involved in the development and evolving direction of the sport is one objective of the study, another is to examine how these forces are interpreted by participants as influencing the future direction of the sport. As Morrow (1992, p.250) concluded following his historical study of evolution and institutionalization of lacrosse "more extensive studies should incorporate social and cultural changes into institutional processes". The goals of this study were achieved by investigating the competing perspectives and understandings of members within the community, giving voice to their experiences and meanings. This was critical because as player volunteers, they form the leadership of the sport's organizations and have the power to control the direction of the sport. Thus, they must consider the consequences of changes in direction. This control is part of the strategic choice of actors operating in institutional environments (Kikulis, Slack & Hinings, 1992). It is probable that the quality of the sport, the nature of the experience and the highly valued - by participants - symbolic and cultural nature of this game will be influenced by the outcomes or resolution of these current tensions. Conforming to the dominant order of sport is a significant shift in direction given the history of the sport and would represent an alignment with mainstream sport cultures, their structures and practices.

The popularity of the sport combined with resource and facility issues, mainly unsubsidized costs of participation for competitive players, limited access to fields, and a general pull by the marketplace towards its ideological and operational vortex, are luring the sport toward the mainstream and away from its distinctly grass-roots origins. These

pressures are part of the process of institutionalization of sport forms (Pearson, 1979) and represent a critical juncture in the developmental cycle of any cultural practice.

Institutionalization in the sociological tradition refers to a phenomenological process by which certain social relationships and actions come to be taken for granted, a state of affairs in which shared cognitions define what actions are possible and what has meaning (Zucker, 1983). DiMaggio (1988), focusing on the organizational level of analysis, emphasized that institutionalization is a process that is profoundly political and reflects the relative power of organizational interests and the actors who mobilize around them. Scott (1987), in attempting to deconstruct the political dimensions of the process, emphasized that institutionalization is a means of instilling value which in so doing, promotes stability and persistence of the structure over time. Jepperson (1987) simply viewed it as a particular set of social reproductive forces which attain a certain state or property - a social pattern that reveals a particular reproduction process. It should be noted that only those authors whose work was particularly relevant to this study are cited, and that others contributed to the theoretical framework of this study.

When adapted to a sporting context, institutionalization refers to the process by which a way of engaging in and valuing sport becomes *the* way of engaging in and valuing sport and includes the formalization of the boundaries of sport and the codification of its rules (Ingham & Loy, 1973; Morgan, 1994). The purpose is to sanction the dominant or accepted moment of sport as its proper, universal one and to discredit alternative moments as illicit ones. This will be the definition employed for the purposes of this study.

Guttmann (1978) considered institutionalization a process whereby one particular set of

patterns and rules of conduct has gradually emerged to define and regulate our contemporary sense of what sport is and how it should be legitimately played.

Institutions, the product of the process, are defined by Gruneau (1983) as distinctive patterns of social interaction whose structural features represent recognized, established and legitimated ways of pursuing some activity thereby ensuring that specific codified rules become widely accepted so that particularistic approaches to the activity can be incorporated into a more universalistic pattern, a dominant way. Gruneau's (1983) inclusion of recognition, establishment and legitimization as important criteria for the institutional order are additional contributions to the understanding of institutionalization.

#### ***Pressures and resistances in the institutional order***

For the purposes of this study, institutional theory provides an appropriate conceptual framework for understanding the evolution of Ultimate and the tensions which exist within the sport because of its sociological foundation, sensitivity to the complex environment in which organizations exist and operate and incorporation of organizational culture as a valued analytical element. Much of the research which has been done in institutional theory has investigated pressures to conform to accepted, legitimate practices and forces of resistance in the institutionalization process (DiMaggio, 1988; Oliver, 1991; Scott, 1995; Slack & Hinings, 1992). Modern team sports and their organizational structures are phenomena with research parallels to traditional organizational domains, principally the underlying interest in the relationships of structures to their environments and the roles and meanings of actors in these settings. Institutional theory is sensitive to

larger, macro issues and forces in the environment which impact upon organizations or groups. The more recent work in the field, termed neo-institutional theory, employs a more cognitive approach by examining the impact and significance of the individual in the process. Issues of individual autonomy (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), values and norms in institutional settings (Scott, 1995) and competing interests (Oliver, 1991; Scott, 1995) are themes in this sub-discipline and are important considerations in the identification and understanding of pressures and forms of resistance in the process of institutionalization. It is the recognition of both macro and micro perspectives (Heron, 1991; Scott, 1995) which makes the work in institutional theory ideally suited to the study of forces affecting the development of an organized cultural practice and the meaning it has to participants.

Given institutional theory's focus on the pressures and constraints of the institutional environment, forms of resistance to change (Oliver, 1991) and explanations of conforming tendencies in the context of taken-for-granted norms and beliefs (DiMaggio, 1988; Scott, 1995), there is great potential to enhance understanding of the institutionalization of sport via this approach. Additionally, an institutional perspective may suggest explanations of conformity when beliefs and practices are so externally validated and accepted as to be invisible to the influenced actors (DiMaggio, 1988). A coach's animated or irrational behaviour consistent with his or her role in the dominant order is an example of behaviour typification resulting in potentially diminished player agency within an institutional environment (Morrow, 1992).

While some authors contend that the values present in sport are a reflection of values of society (Blanchard & Cheska, 1985; Hyland 1990), counterculture ideals also

drive certain sporting practices such as skateboarding (Beal, 1995). The foundation of the dominant values in sport is linked to the capitalist system (Beal, 1995; Heron, 1991; Morgan, 1994; Sage, 1990) which greatly determines our roles and relationships in contemporary society. The values which have driven the emergence of Ultimate, embodied in the cooperative yet competitive nature of the sport, do not seem consistent with the mainstream sport order and have and may continue to influence the organizational structures of the sport. Bureaucracy, with its rigid order and clear delineation of power, is an example of a systemic tool which reinforces capitalist values of efficiency and rationality (Hall, Slack, Smith & Whitson, 1991) and determines actor roles within its framework. This structure, a symbol of specific organizational values (Morgan, 1986), has not yet characterized the organizational forms present in Ultimate. The prevalence of bureaucracies in Canadian sport organizations, part of the legitimated system of mainstream sport, has been documented (Slack, 1985; Slack & Hinings, 1992).

Gruneau and Whitson (1993) suggested that there is a tendency to concentrate less on the distinctive contribution of capitalist social relations and processes which contribute significantly to the explanation of sport and the cultures of the modern sport forms. Recognition of the greater social system and its forces is a requisite for the study of an emergent "counterculture" social practice such as Ultimate. Heron (1991) argued that as a culture becomes institutionalized in this environment, it acquires rational and technical values and loses expressive and creative values. Heron's position is supportive of Goldman and Wilson (1977) who suggested that rational institutionalism is a dominating feature of capitalist societies and that non-rational expressive recreational activities and

existential leisure are marginalized both within and outside of institutional orders.

The market, understood as the collective of commercial places, is a powerful and influential force in institutional environments. It serves as a relatively permeable, yet stable, allocative mechanism and an institutionally specific cultural system for generating and measuring value (Friedland & Alford, 1987). The N.U.A. representatives and supporters seem to view commercial forces and other strong influences as necessary partners in the development of Ultimate, and do not regard its qualities or potential impact as detrimental to the organization and development of cultural practices. The work of Friedland and Alford (1987) will be of importance for this study as much of their interest is in the ideological foundation and institutional character of phenomena outside of the typical organizational domain including religion, government and capitalism.

Additionally, in order for practices of any kind to become institutionalized, they must be sustained through some form of legitimacy (Morrow, 1992) and progress to acquire a normative character. Legitimization serves to bring compliance to the institutional order and further perpetuates the roles of actors in institutional environments (Humphreys, 1997). This is an issue for the development of any counterculture sport such as Ultimate.

In modern nation states, much institutionalization is carried by cultural rules (Jepperson, 1987; Heron, 1991) which exist as controls and function as means of maintaining order in society. Swidler (1986) noted that the presence of conflicting rules within a cultural system should lead us to expect skilled users of culture not passive cultural "dopes". The tensions which exist currently within the Ultimate community are

examples of contested interests and produce rich debates and discussions in the sport's publications, on the Internet and in informal settings throughout North America. Cultural rules exist in dominant and non-dominant groups but by definition of the qualities of the respective groups must be different. "Illegitimate" and deviant elements such as organized crime and political corruption demonstrate institutional characteristics particularly with respect to an accepted code of behaviour (Jepperson, 1987). Their institutionalized practices are unacceptable outside of their respective societies or cultures. This in part defines a subculture which can be understood as a group with a different cultural system (e.g., values, norms, symbols) than that of the dominant order in which the group exists (Beal, 1995; Crosset & Beal, 1997). The strength of "rules" within a culture or subculture will be important for this study as the fabric of Ultimate culture seems to have inherent conflicts with that of mainstream sport cultures. The degree to which the community will seek to mimic the dominant order is in part a function of the current strength or homogeneity of the sport's culture.

For research purposes, a combination of variance and process oriented approaches to understanding active institutional forces will be employed (Oliver, 1991; Scott 1995). Scott (1995) noted that the variance approach, which is essentially the identification of pressures involved in the process, is suitable for the examination and identification of which factors best account for the institutional characteristics or behaviours. The process approach, which attempts to determine the way in which the factors, such as timing and the power of actors, come together to produce the observed results (Scott, 1995), will offer a perspective which will assist in analyzing participants' interpretations of

institutional pressures and forms of resistance. It draws attention to the relationships and complexities of these factors of influence and enhances understanding of the meanings and interpretations of the actors involved, which in this case refers to the Ultimate community.

An in-depth study of the pressures and resistances in determining the direction and the impact of change of an alternative sport form such as this, one that has thrived outside of the traditional sport system, without significant funding, formalized bureaucratic organization or typical mainstream sport characteristics, contributes to the understanding of the sport of Ultimate and offers additional insight into the value systems and organization of sport generally and the significance of directional change of this sporting activity. Additionally, the current climate in Canada is one which sees scarce resources available to sport and as such there is value in studying a sport form which has emerged and prospered in an non-dependent environment all along. The socio-economic and cultural forces impacting upon emerging sporting practices in contemporary society were identified and interpreted by a sample of individuals with rich experiences. It is possible that the popularity of the sport, its symbolic meaning not excluded, represents a rejection by participants, on some level, of the modern institution of mainstream sport. Ultimate may also represent the most recent and dramatic example of a team sport which must deal with issues such as growth and development in what is a fully matured, commercialized sporting world. This industry is subjugated to the marketplace (Ingham & Hardy, 1984) and inextricably linked to the dominant economic and ideological tenets of capitalism.

### *Purpose*

The purpose of this study was to identify the pressures and forms of resistance in the institutionalization of a non-traditional team sport, Ultimate and to understand the meanings and impact of these tensions on players and administrators as they relate to the future direction of the sport.

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What meanings do insiders ascribe to the origins and evolution of the sport of Ultimate?
2. What are the pressures or forces on Ultimate to become institutionalized like mainstream team sports?
3. What forms of resistance to these pressures or forces are demonstrated?
4. How do participants interpret pressures and forms of resistance as influencing the future direction of the sport?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Institutional Theory: institutional elements and terminology*

Institutional theory, a sub discipline within organization theory, is grounded in the study of the reproductive tendencies and conformity of organizations and their actors (DiMaggio, 1988; Jepperson 1987; Oliver, 1991; Scott, 1995). What the research in this field suggests is that there are powerful forces which direct the operation and success of organizations in society, specifically in a capitalist system (Friedland & Alford, 1987; Oliver, 1991; Scott, 1987; Slack & Hinings, 1992). Institutional theory aided in the identification and explanation of the pressures and forms of resistances that are influencing the future of Ultimate. Participant interpretations of these institutional elements and their subsequent actions will be considered as the literature recognizes the role of individuals and the significance of organizational culture in explaining and shaping the degree of conformity to institutional pressures.

Institutional theory owes much of its foundation to sociology as there is an emphasis on social choices, social order, and the roles of actors and processes in society (Friedland & Alford, 1987; Zucker, 1983). It supports the notion that all human behaviour is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Geertz, 1973; Morrow, 1992; Sacco, 1988). While the term institution, the product of institutionalization, has been interpreted differently within the literature (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991), a number of common themes and defining characteristics are apparent.

A strong emphasis is placed on the perpetuation of established practices

(Jepperson, 1987; Morrow, 1992), stability and permanency (Oliver, 1991) as defining elements of institutionalization. This characterization refers to the enduring quality and power of the institutional process, whether it be in determining organizational forms and norms or instilling value in actors (Scott, 1987). Selznick (1957) suggested that the act of institutionalization is essentially the act of infusing value. The value which is typically sought or constructed is that which is consistent with the dominant, accepted way or order. The desired product of this process of value infusion is adherence and conformity to this established institutional way, not necessarily in merely a psychological way (*i.e.*, to simply infuse with certain value is not sufficient), but to have the behaviour change in such a way that it meets the institutional requirements. Consider the coach who drills his team each practice in order for them to understand the concept of discipline, an institutionalized tenet of mainstream sport, and to behave accordingly, with it as an accepted value in their minds. This process of conformity requires significant time, resources and commitment, each of which determines the institutional character of an organization and can be legitimately exercised by linking this character with success, which in highly uncertain environments is survival and stability (Oliver, 1991).

According to tenets of institutional theory, organizations in similar domains or organizational fields (*e.g.* banks, sport franchises) demonstrate remarkably similar characteristics with respect to structure, policies, strategy, practices and other features (Oliver, 1991; Scott, 1995). This is partly due to their location within a grander, highly interdependent and influential capitalist system (Friedland & Alford, 1987). Inherent tendencies produced by “free” market forces, such as competition and survival in the face

of complexity and survival, begin to explain the push for this form of reproductive phenomenon. Survival and predictability are, according to DiMaggio (1988), central in institutional arguments because they are highly valued principles in the rational organizational world and serve individual actor's needs for both financial and emotional security.

With consideration of the broader societal forces and observable institutional order, Scott (1995) proposed a classification system of research based on three institutional approaches: cognitive, normative and regulative.

Cognitive theory emphasizes the role played by unconscious, taken-for-granted assumptions defining social reality and draws attention to the roles of language and agency in institutionalization (Scott, 1995). With this pillar, social knowledge, once institutionalized exists as fact, part of objective reality that can be transmitted to individuals within the organization (Zucker, 1977). Attention is given to the understandings and conceptual beliefs shared by those in the situation and the meanings which are derived within the institutional order.

Normative theory has concentrated on the study of standards which exist in organizational environments, at societal and international levels and emphasizes the stability as well as the beneficial effects of legitimization on persistence of institutional elements (Scott, 1995). Norms which are accepted and understood as part of the successful operation of the organization will likely not be challenged and continue to perpetuate existing institutional practices. Values and behavioural norms are significant for this level of analysis, and may be particularly relevant in addressing the tensions

captured in the debates within the Ultimate community, as each informs understanding of institutional phenomena.

The regulative approach examines origins and functions of macro-scale rules including national, transnational and enforcement mechanisms which are developed to regulate economic behaviour of firms and individuals (Scott, 1995). Controls, an important consideration in regulative theory, are exercised by the evaluative expectations of others. There is recognition of multiple and competing rules which exist in an organizational field and of the role of individuals as interpreters of which rules apply in a given situation (Scott, 1995). The issue of control is significant to this study as changes to rules and accepted practices could fundamentally affect the experience of playing and organizing the sport.

Since the seminal work of DiMaggio and Powell (1983), who concentrated on the formal structures and the institutional character in organizations, the field has evolved and addressed economic and political themes in institutional settings including change, conflict and competition (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Friedland & Alford, 1987; Oliver, 1991). Additionally, the effects and impact of this phenomenon have been investigated in terms of social and cultural significance (Jepperson, 1987; Scott & Meyer, 1994). As such institutionalization is identified as a significantly powerful process influencing the development of organizations over time.

As a result of chaotic operational environments for most modern organizations, there is an augmented need for stability, a quest for certainty in the face of complexity and fear (Scott, 1987). Individuals and organizations attempt to deal with uncertainty by

developing and ritualizing organizational routines (DiMaggio, 1988), and by imitating the way of others (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995), thus creating what appears to be a rather homogeneous phenomenon. When dealing with the dynamic environment in which they operate, some organizations and their actors seek control and order in their activities. As Friedland and Alford (1987, p.251) explained "institutions set the limits on the very nature of rationality and by implication, of individuality."

### ***Conditions of institutionalization***

Legitimacy may be both a reward or condition of institutionalization often with the purpose of demonstrating social worthiness and mobilizing resources such as increased funding or additional clients (Oliver, 1991). Legitimization affects perceptions within the institutional order by ascribing validity to objectivated meanings and as such justifies the institutional order by giving a perceived normative dignity to its practical imperatives (Berger & Luckman, 1967). In this way, legitimization substantiates the social order and enables actors to function within a recognizable and plausible environment (Scott, 1987). Importantly, whose values define legitimacy is a matter of social power (Berger & Luckman, 1967). Schools, for example, receive legitimacy in a society to the extent that their goals are congruent with wider cultural values such as socialization and education (Scott, 1995). It is possible that this legitimacy is greatly determined by the ideology and practice which forms the marriage of the school's function (*e.g.*, not merely serving its role in terms of socialization and education but rather the manner in which this occurs with deliberate and heavily influenced processes and predetermined information and material).

A sport may gain legitimacy by espousing to or demonstrating a value system consistent with that which is ascribed by those dominant in the organizational field.

Resource acquisition including financing, materials, and other assets is another important consideration in the process of institutionalization, and often provides the most powerful source of motivation for action consistent with the dominant order (Scott, 1995). Institutionalization has even been suggested as a prerequisite for getting more resources (Hall, Slack, Smith & Whitson, 1991). As a reward for conformity, it may lead to additional funding and resource acquisition. Resource dependency theory, a field closely related to institutional theory, focuses on a range of actions possible for the manipulation of external dependencies or the exertion of influence over allocation or source of critical resources (Oliver, 1991). It assumes that organizations have strategic autonomy to negotiate the uncertain resources available in their environments, in the interests of organizational survival and power (Friedland & Alford, 1987). While this characterization may be accurate in some instances, it seems rather deterministic and oblivious to some of the realities in the operational environment such as financial constraints and the business climate in recessionary times. Other limitations of resource dependency theory are that it isolates organizations from their institutional or societal contexts, assumes a high degree of choice and awareness of paths of action and does not account for the complexity of the decision-making interdependencies. Political dimensions, for example, cannot be excluded from any sound analysis of such a desired commodity as resources which are highly contested but necessary for the organization to pursue its objectives and fulfill its legitimized existence.

Slack and Hinings (1992), in their work on environmental pressures and organizational relationships found that when conforming to institutional environments, an organization and its individuals demonstrate that they are acting in a collectively valued purpose, in an accepted manner. In the case of Canadian amateur sport organizations, this has resulted in positive or favourable evaluations by the funding agency. As funding is tied to adherence and conformity of government demands, the result has been a continued, although somewhat reduced, flow of necessary resources. What remains unanswered is the effect of this adherence on the functioning and administration of the given amateur sport organization and the resulting perceptions and attitudes of individuals within and outside of the organization as a result of conforming action. Forms of resistance to organizational pressures to conform are not alluded to in the work of Slack and Hinings (1992), possibly because they did not emerge as themes as a result of their disruptive and highly political nature.

The adherence of Canadian amateur sport organizations to the institutional pressures exhibited by powerful funding organizations which determine their operational survival is an example of the dependency which can exist in an institutional order (Slack & Hinings, 1992). Competition and the uncertainty surrounding the availability of resources are two forces which necessitate the employment of measures designed to counteract or be utilized in the pursuit of organizational and individual objectives (Slack, 1997). If resources are allocated based on the degree to which organizations demonstrate conformity to superordinate organizational desires, then action is determined by the weighing of consequences between fulfilling individual and organizational objectives and

adhering to institutional pressures. It is the reality of the existence of, and adherence to such measures, which precipitate the inclusion of given measures into institutional domains.

### ***Institutionalization in context***

The importance of situating both institutions and the process of institutionalization in time and place has been given attention in the literature. The importance of history, both generally (*i.e.*, the evolution and character of modern institutions), as well as specifically (*i.e.*, the story of each case), are recurring themes in the works of theorists including Selznick (1957) and Scott (1987). The contention is that individual choices and preferences in an organizational context cannot be properly understood outside of the cultural and historical frameworks in which they are embedded (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). DiMaggio and Powell (1991, p.11) suggested that, in society, institutions "do not just constrain options: they establish the very criteria by which people discover their preferences."

An important practical consideration for research is that different institutional spheres are associated with different belief systems (Scott, 1995) and additionally different assumptions, values and norms. Selznick's (1957) notion of institutionalization concerned with the instilling of value is a critical force in trying to understand the role of institutions and in attempting to explain their significance in the modern world. Friedland and Alford (1987) argued that institutions have inherent within them a central logic, which is in part a value structure, which acts as the foundation for the institution. They suggested that each

of the central institutions of the contemporary capitalist West - capitalist market, bureaucratic state, democracy, nuclear family and Christianity - have a set of material practices and symbolic constructions which constitute each's organizational principles and which is available to organizations and individuals to elaborate. These logics are summarized in the following passage:

The institutional logic of capitalism is accumulation and the commodification of human activity. That of the state is rationalization and the regulation of human activity by legal and bureaucratic hierarchies. That of the family is community and the motivation of human activity by unconditional loyalty to its members and their welfare (Friedland & Alford, 1987, p.36).

Traditionally, institutional theory concentrated on the regulative and normative dimensions alluded to earlier (Scott, 1995), while neo-institutional theory emphasizes the importance of the cognitive elements (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). The focus on the individual, internal human relations and the cognitive dimensions are related to the emergence of organizational culture as a phenomenon of study, and efforts to explain the increasingly complex organizational and work environments (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991). Scott (1995) suggested that the focus on cognitive dimensions of institutionalization is the major distinguishing feature of the neo-institutional theory. This has involved a more anthropological approach which embraces the concept of constructed symbolic reality and the value of shared cognitions, assumptions and norms (DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Schein, 1991).

The relationship of neo-institutional theory, guided by its cognitive emphasis to the organizational culture literature is significant as each seems to inform the other and

together bond to offer a more holistic perspective from which to address the needs of the study. Theories of organizational culture are particularly sensitive to the shared symbolic and cognitive dimensions of individuals, such as assumptions, values, attitudes and symbols, which in essence define the collective character of a group (Schein, 1991). As such it is work which informs research objectives of this study such as the meanings insiders ascribe to the origins and evolution of the sport. It is only within the last two decades that the phenomenon of culture has become the object of study as a means to achieve a better understanding of formal organization (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Morgan, 1986; Thompson, 1992). The literature offers a range of interpretations of culture, however, two frameworks stand out as particularly relevant for this study.

Allaire and Firsirotu's (1984) framework is based on a symbolic concept of culture with three interrelated components summarized as follows:

1. A Sociostructural system composed of the interworkings of formal structures, strategies, policies and management processes and all ancillary components of an organization's reality and functioning
2. A Cultural system that embodies the organization's expressive and affective dimensions in a system of shared and meaningful symbols manifested in myths, ideology, values and artifacts
3. The Actors with their individual experience and personality; contributors and moulders of meaning.

Cultural elements such as shared beliefs and values of community members are important in the determination of the future direction of Ultimate as they influence the degree to which participants conform to institutional pressures. The degree to which these elements are internally consistent and mutually supportive are important considerations in

determining the strength of the given culture and the predictability of outcomes of the organization (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984).

Schein (1991) proposed a different, somewhat more simplified model of organizational culture based on three levels including underlying assumptions, values and artifacts. Underlying assumptions are the unconscious, taken for granted beliefs, habits of perception, thoughts and feelings which are the source of values and actions. Values, both espoused and actual, are manifested in the strategies, goals and philosophies. Artifacts refer to visible organizational structures and processes.

The two models and underlying theory allow one to understand the complex construct of culture in an applied context (*i.e.*, an organization). Not only are elements isolated but their relationships amongst other cultural elements are identified. This form of analysis will prove to be valuable in the treatment of data regarding participant meanings and values by providing a framework, with supporting theory, to situate, make links and analyze the research data.

### ***Individual and group interests in the institutional order***

The role of the individual in particular is an important element in both the process of institutionalization and product or setting and has emerged as a powerful consideration for those leading the neo-institutional movement (Jepperson, 1987; Oliver, 1991; Scott, 1995). If we accept agency, the purposeful pursuit of one's own interests, and individual freedom as fundamental human values and that organization is a conscious human function then active agents must have an important role in the process of institutionalization. In

their discussion of leadership, Meyer and Rowan (1977) suggested that individuals or organizational members often play active roles in shaping what the authors call "institutional contexts". While individuals and collectives have options in this contested terrain which is the institutionalization process, there is certainly a way in which institutions act upon them and vice versa. Institutions operate primarily by "affecting persons' prospective bets about the collective environment and collective activity....through their effects on expectations, institutions become taken for granted, in some fashion" (Jepperson, 1987, p.147). The degree to which one's own values are promoted and consistent with those of the specific institutional order is an important determinant in terms of conformity to institutional pressures. Institutions can be fundamental in the production or influence of the establishment of identities and activity scripts for such identities. They have a role in the construction of legitimate texts, a tool which serves a conforming function, which are subject to interpretation by both insiders and outsiders of the institutional sphere (Jepperson, 1987).

Meyer and Rowan (1977, p.343), from their investigations of measures and determinants of institutional rules, concluded that:

norms of rationality are not simply general values. They exist in much more specific and powerful ways in the rules, understandings and meanings attached to institutionalized social structures.

March and Olsen (1984, p.139) expand on this theme and offer these thoughts on individuals and their relationships with institutions and rule structures:

To say that behaviour is governed by rules is not to say that it is either trivial or unreasoned. Rule-bound behaviour is, or can be, carefully considered. Rules can reflect subtle lessons of cumulative experience, and

the process by which appropriate rules are determined and applied is a process involving high levels of human intelligence, discourse and deliberation.

Rules act as deliberate measures to induce conformity in the change process. If institutionalization can be thought of as having degrees, conceived in terms of relative vulnerability to social intervention, then according to Jepperson (1987), when we have total institutionalization, the only distinctive contribution an individual can make is in the skill and style of performance, whether the setting be at work or at play. While formal rules are part of the institutional character of sport forms, they define what is acceptable behaviour within the realm of sport. The more institutional rules that exist within a cultural practice, the greater the challenge for action which is inconsistent with this order to be acceptable. Penalties in football and basketball - a formal means of sanctioning behaviour - for celebrating success are demonstrations of attempts to constrain behaviour. The degree to which attitudes, values and other cultural elements "conform" to the institutional order is secondary to action or behaviour which is judged appropriate and worthy of reward. As such there may be inconsistencies between espoused values and symbolic action. This theorizing incorporates an important element into the theory of institutionalization, the idea of motivation and its relationship to reward. Additionally, it addresses a criticism of institutional theory, that it lacked attention to the role of organizational self-interests and active agency in organizational responses to institutional pressures and expectations (Oliver, 1991).

Language is a significant aspect of the reproductive or isomorphic tendencies of institutions (Morrow, 1992). Discourse constructed around structure and rigid role

identification, which with supporting symbols such as the organizational chart can help to legitimate the actions and pursuits of an organization. Language is the medium that determines and reinforces the social order (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). It is one such tool which, while it has an inherent capacity to constrain, may be used as a deliberate form of resistance to institutional pressures by concealing or disguising nonconformity (Oliver, 1991). While each sport has specific jargon, counterculture alternatives may have a more specialized code about their activity as a means of distinguishing insiders, with shared ideals and values, from outsiders.

There is motivation for this reproductive nature which characterizes institutions and formal organizations, in the form of rewards or sanctions as means of influencing behaviour, both in social and organizational environments. Scott (1995) argued that organizations do not necessarily conform to a set of beliefs because they are taken for granted or represent some sort of constructed reality. Rather, they are rewarded for doing so through increased legitimacy, increased resources and greater survival capabilities (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 1995).

Departures from "normal" forms of action as defined by the organizational field are counteracted through routines (Oliver 1991), a symbolic tool common in all institutions settings as it functions with regularity and consideration of time and space. In sport, these may include the typical suspension for a player who challenges the coaches' authority or exercises too much autonomy in her/his actions during competition.

Clegg, Hardy and Nord (1996) pointed out that there is an emergence of new forms of organization, a fluidity or newly fluid structure in appearance which they attribute

to a range of factors including technological change, post modernity and trends in the marketplace. The volunteer based, loosely structured organizational forms which exist with Ultimate in North America, are different than typical institutional forms of organization. The fluidity referred to may also be a conscious strategy employed by management in order to achieve increased efficiency and effectiveness about business activity. This is in contrast to what Kikulis, Slack and Hinings (1992) identified as institutionally specific organizational archetypes which prevailed in Canadian National Sport Organizations. The first type was characterized by a lack of professionalization and bureaucratization and was labeled the "kitchen table". The second design demonstrated evidence of bureaucratic procedures and formal structure and was termed the "boardroom". Finally, the "executive office" had a bureaucratic structure supported by the professionalization of roles.

Influence tactics, such as the manipulation of belief systems, and control tactics such as domination, are additional measures employed in the face of defiance of institutional pressures (Oliver, 1991). Scott (1987) and Oliver (1991) are two institutional theorists who have contributed significantly to the understanding of responses to institutional pressures including resistance. Scott (1987) identified the range of possible responses including acquiescence, compromise, avoidance, defiance and manipulation. Oliver then built upon Scott's work by providing examples of tactics characteristic of each response and by explaining how the responses vary on a continuum from passivity to active resistance.

Acquiescence, the most passive type of response involves tactics of habit, imitation

and compliance (Oliver, 1991). Habit refers to unconscious or blind adherence to preconscious or taken-for-granted roles or values. Organizations reproducing widely institutionalized roles such as students and teachers, players and coaches or professional and clerical functions on the basis of conventional definitions of these activities is a form of this response. The role of the coach as a paternal superordinate figure is assumed and granted by subordinately willing players habitualized to this dynamic typically from a young age. Imitation refers to conscious or unconscious mimicry of institutional models (Oliver, 1991) including the modeling of sport delivery systems or practices after other nations systems or practices of the organizations deemed successful in an organizational fields (Humphreys, 1997). Compliance is defined as conscious obedience to or incorporation of values, norms or institutional requirements (Oliver, 1991).

Compromise refers to attempts to balance, pacify or bargain conflicts or inconsistencies with (organizational) objectives and institutional expectations (Oliver, 1991). Balancing tactics are attempts to achieve parity among or between multiple stakeholders and internal interests. The negotiation of sponsor and participant or team interests in sport is an example of this practice (Beal, 1995). Pacifying tactics are typically consistent with minor levels of resistance to institutional pressures and the appeasing or placating of the institutional source or sources being resisted (Oliver, 1991). Bargaining involves the effort to exact some concessions from an external constituent in its demands or expectations, assuming that relations with the environment are open to negotiation and the exchange or concessions.

Avoidance is understood as the attempt to preclude the necessity of conformity by

concealing nonconformity, buffering or escaping institutional rules or expectations (Oliver, 1991). Concealment tactics "involve disguising nonconformity behind a facade of acquiescence" (Oliver, 1991, p.154). Buffering refers to an organizations' attempt to reduce the extent to which it is externally inspected, scrutinized or evaluated. This may be achieved by distancing oneself from the source of institutional pressure. Escape refers to a more dramatic avoidance response where an organization may exit or significantly alter objectives within which there is pressure. If government regulations within an industry are suffocating an innovative firm then it may look to new, less regulated industries or niches.

Defiance, a more active form of resistance includes dismissal, challenge and attack as its tactics (Oliver, 1991). Dismissing or ignoring of institutional rules and values is an option typically exercised when the potential for external enforcement of institutional rules is perceived to be low. Organizations which ignore affirmative action requirements or pressures regarding the equitable employment of under-represented populations would be employing this tactic. Challenge refers to a more active departure from institutional expectations, often presented as a virtuous endeavour consistent with widely shared external constituents that express them. As a response to increased public criticism, sport franchise owners or general managers may attack the press and the media's representation of public opinion toward the franchise.

The most active response to pressures is manipulation, which is the purposeful and opportunistic attempt to co-opt, influence or control institutional pressures and evaluations (Oliver, 1991). Co-optation refers to the use of links or constituents which are imported in order to neutralize institutional opposition and enhance legitimacy. The

manipulation of belief systems via advertising is an example of an influence tactic which attempts to alter or shape the acceptable ideal or practices of performance within the institutional order. Controlling tactics are "specific efforts to establish power and dominance over external constituents that are applying pressure on the organization" (Oliver, 1991, p.158). This attempted domination is a function of organizational strength as compared with constituent vulnerability in this regard.

While resistance, depending on the form, may affect the organization's popularity, social support, legitimacy and stability, Oliver (1991) contends that it can enhance flexibility and the capacity to adapt and innovate. Resistance by definition refers to nonconformity, a result of which is exclusion or distance from the institutional order. This produces a higher degree of independence where values or norms have been rejected, and fewer interests must be served or minimal change enacted on behalf of the group (Oliver, 1991). Thus an environment is created which is more conducive to dynamic and responsive operation.

### ***The Institutionalization of Modern Sports***

While the traditional, mainstream sport forms and sport cultures demonstrate traditional and paternalistic (Hyland, 1990) even authoritarian and militaristic ideals (Brohm, 1978; Calhoun, 1987) as their foundation, alternate forms demonstrate patterns and phenomena varying from the norm. If one was to conceive of two models, the traditional and the non-traditional, they could be characterized in the following manner.

Traditional: more organized, highly structured and regulated;  
oriented to values of individual achievement expressed through pursuit of  
the record

Non-traditional: periodic, unorganized, localized, rule variance and "little sense of sport as an institutionally distinct activity" (Gruneau, 1983, p.12)

Studies such as Granskog's (1992) analysis of the Triathlete subculture and Crum's (1988) investigation of korfbal as a "non-sexist" sport are examples of research on sport cultures with characteristics one could label as non-traditional. These particular studies concentrated more on the interpersonal dynamics within the subculture and did not attempt to locate the phenomenon of the particular case within a broader socio-cultural context. Granskog focused on triathletes and their support networks including friends and family and the relationships which exist within this community. Crum's interest lied mainly with gender issues in sport and the example of korfbal, a competitive, coed sport is analyzed from a critical perspective. Neither researcher employed an institutional perspective as a means to understand the forces which are acting upon the respective practices.

While there is little mention of sport in the institutional theory literature, some research has been done in sport sociology and sport management which reveals common patterns. In their analysis of the development and institutionalization of hockey, Gruneau and Whitson (1993) addressed some of the fundamental issues regarding the role of contemporary cultural forms and practices in society. They proposed a line of questioning as follows:

What forces have influenced the development, availability and popularity of different cultural forms and practices? What kind of relationship is there between cultural production, pleasure, meaning and inequalities (or issues) of power? How have the structures, meanings and uses of different cultural forms and practices changed over time, and what significance, if any, can be attributed? (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993, p.5)

The authors framed their analysis around cultural production by concentrating more on the historical development and the tensions which surrounded hockey. They employed an institutional perspective by looking broadly at the significance of the development of hockey in relation geographical and commercial pressures, as well as the manner with which these pressures were interpreted and acted upon by participants and leaders of the hockey community.

Gruneau and Whitson's research provides insights into the development of mainstream team sports. Their data suggests that hockey has emerged out of a series of clashes which occurred "against the backdrop of Canada's development as an industrial and consumer society" (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993, p.6). They believed that there has been a fundamental change in hockey over the last twenty years with an increased business orientation influenced by social forces including multiculturalism, fair play, free trade, globalization and market segmentation (Gruneau & Whitson, 1993). That the "subculture of hockey has retained its own unique adaptations and forms of resistance to these movements and forces" (1993, p.7) is no surprise if we relate it to institutional theory's notions of resistance (Oliver, 1991; Scott, 1987). The sport remains a treasured vehicle for national identities to compete and demonstrate supremacy or nationalism. Additionally, it is still a game of physical prowess, virtually entirely played and controlled by white males and still largely of the hegemonic order. Fair play is an espoused moral tenant of sport, yet fighting is an acceptable practice. Gruneau & Whitson (1993) contend that the geographical, historical and social locations of the sport provide commonality of

experiences, places and feelings.

In a study of social resistance through the subculture of skateboarding, Beal (1995) arrived at many interesting findings with respect to differences in values and norms between skateboarders of the observed counterculture, and those skateboarders she labeled as members of the dominant or mainstream culture which she acknowledged did not research as soundly. Additionally, actual forms of resistance were demonstrated to perceived capitalist or corporate agendas and relations. Beal asserted that when popular cultural activities are structured by corporate bureaucratic social relations, the relations reproduce the dominant group's position by promoting and legitimating the values and norms that underlie capitalism. This also decreases the validity of alternative relations (Beal, 1995) as they are positioned in such a way as to appear outside of accepted, dominant practices. This research explains that, like many resistant subcultures, skateboarding was not singularly defiant and transformative but includes forms of challenge as well as forms of accommodation. Within a non-traditional sport community, it is possible to have both counterculture and dominant culture groups.

Beal concluded that skateboarders of the "non" mainstream variety resisted the values and norms of elite competition and authority by encouraging cooperation amongst participants, even sharing equipment, and creating a participant controlled activity. "Skaters" took control of formal contests and were not conforming to the regulations of the observed competition. They would attempt to sabotage organizer interests and in some cases did not make an effort to meet the performance requirements of the contest. Beal suggested that this represented a rejection of the National Skateboard Association

(N.S.A.) and affiliated branches responsible for contests. The goals of this organization were recognition, international growth, the establishment of headquarters and the professionalization of skateboarding in Western society (Beal, 1995). Humphreys (1997, p.152) reported a similar scenario within the snowboarding community:

But even though commercialism posed a threat to snowboarding's traditional philosophies, the debates over the worthiness of competition and professionalism which had racked surfing (Booth, 1995) never affected snowboarding.

The commercialization which characterized snowboarding produced compromise on behalf of the original subcultural community, increased popularity, money and sponsorship (Humphreys, 1997).

It is important to note that Beal concentrated on resistance within the subculture and virtually ignored individuals and actions which support the hegemonic or dominant order and represent an alignment of this activity with capitalist ideologies and practices. There was probably meaningful data as to why conformity wasn't resisted by adhering participants of the sport. This was obviously not her primary concern. Similarly narrow in focus, Morrow (1992) concentrated on the regulative processes and significance of rules of practice in his study of the institutionalization of Canadian lacrosse from 1844-1914.

The institutionalization of sport appears to interest those who approach the study of sport from a more critical perspective including Gruneau (1983), Hargreaves (1982) and Morgan (1994). Gruneau's early work emphasized the notion of sports as polysemic cultural texts, while locating the human experience within the broader social system (*e.g.*, the relationship to class structure). In discussing specifically the institutionalization of

sport forms, he highlighted the significance of residuals such as fair play, spontaneous enjoyment of games, non-utilitarian "amateur" ethos as forces which continue to exist but are being squeezed out of dominant conceptions of sport, in particular Canadian sport (Gruneau, 1983). He argued that because of its role in social reproduction, sport is often viewed as a kind of ideological product of capitalist social relations and productive forces. He suggested that:

as ideological forms, modern sport is seen to embody the values of hard work, discipline, and achievement demanded in a system of production geared to profit making through the exploitation of mass markets....institutionalization reflects the rational process which has characterized the overall development of the capitalist labour process. (Gruneau, 1983, p.24).

While there has been much work in the field of sociology concerning itself with the dominant institutions of our time, and with the process of institutionalization itself, the theme has been scarcely explored in the sociology of sport literature (Slack, 1997). Given its profound significance, this seems unwarranted. Decades ago, Loy (1978, p.75) recognized the importance of the process when he wrote that:

I can conceive of no topic having greater significance for sport sociologists than that of the institutionalization of modern sport. Yet one can find few insightful analyses of this general process in the sociology of sport literature.

While it is true that Loy made this assertion some time ago, there has been relatively little research on the topic as it concerns North American sport forms over the last two decades. Loy (1978) suggested that the growth and popularity of sport and an increased business orientation have produced increasing rationalization and

bureaucratization which has arguably led to a degeneration of humanistic concerns and legitimations.

Although it is dated, the work of Pearson on sport cultures and subcultures including surfing and surf life saving, remains particularly relevant for the proposed study. In a work entitled "The Institutionalization of Sport Forms", Pearson (1979) discussed institutionalization in terms of two contrasting types of sport subcultures: play-sport which is characterized by a different set of values and beliefs; athletic-sport which is competitive and highly organized. He noted the importance of the role of the innovators in the early development of surfing in particular. Their innovations occurred in a cultural setting which proved harmonious with ancient roots and values of the activity which was historically based in Hawaii. A summary of his conclusions are outlined in the following chart (Pearson, 1979):

Some Dimensions of Contrast between Play-sport (P-S) and Athletic-sport (A-S)

	P-S	A-S
Degree of organizational complexity (social systems measures)	Low	High
Coherence of central values and norms (cultural system measures)	Low or High	High
Rationalization of techniques geared to the achievement of precisely specifiable performance outcomes	Low	High
Emphasis on qualitative aspects of performance, including value place on 'flow' experience (process rather than product)	High	Low
Importance of (formal) social competition	Low	High
Complexity and specificity of formal games rules	Low	High

The value for this study was mainly Pearson's recognition of the "coherence of central values and norms" as a significant element of institutionalization. Additionally,

consideration of the experience of sport in terms of “flow” and emphasis upon rationalization and formalization as important themes are valuable contributions. While his analysis is useful it represents only a starting point from which to further develop the study of institutionalization of sport. It does shed light on the differences which can exist between sport forms when one examines them through an institutional perspective, but does little in the way of accounting for the impact of these differences. For example, what is the effect on the sporting experience or the meaning to the individual or group participant as it relates to these measures?

Morgan has observed that what distinguishes the most recent phase of the institutionalization of sport is “the scope of its meddling in the internal affairs of sporting practices” (1994, p.145). What this suggests is that given the multiplicity of forces which now affect the development and direction of a sport, there is increasing impact on the intrinsic elements of given sport forms. In order to accommodate institutional pressures, change to fundamental elements may be necessary. Rule changes to make a sport more marketable and audience friendly is an example of conformity based on changes to intrinsic elements. Data may point to the resolution of tensions in the Ultimate community dramatically changing the nature, culture and organizations of the sport, its popularity and the quality of experiencing this unique cultural practice.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The chosen research methods which formed the design of the study effectively gave a voice to the community of participants of Ultimate and fostered the identification of forces involved in shaping the future of the sport. The research techniques included focus groups, e-mail discussions and document analysis and were selected to achieve between-method triangulation (Denzin, 1989; Mathison, 1988) in order to access different groups of participants, raise new issues and verify the replicability of observations and interpretations (Denzin, 1989; Yin, 1994). As the study sought to explore a range of factors, meanings and contexts, a single data collection method was unacceptable (Yin, 1993). Mathison (1988) asserted that the use of different methods is an effective means of researching different domains of knowledge, in this case, perspectives of members of this community. This design served the purpose of the study and provided rich data and different perspectives on the relevant issues in the institutionalization of Ultimate in North America. The design allowed for research aimed at retaining the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events while contributing to knowledge of individual and social phenomena (Yin, 1994).

### *Role of the researcher*

As an insider in the Ultimate community, it was important to locate myself in the research process. My own personal history with the sport has spanned seven years, six of which I competed at the National Championships, twice representing Canada at the World Championships. Over this period of time, I have come to know many players who have

competed at the elite level and have developed a sense of what some of the critical issues affecting the future direction of the sport. My position enabled me access to subjects and resources, and with many of the relationships already built, the research process was facilitated (Marshall & Rossman, 1995).

While my position provided me with knowledge related to the interests of the study, my feelings and beliefs with respect to what I feel is the best course for the sport were and remain largely undetermined. I would like to experience the game with rule alterations before passing judgment. My view is that any scenario will be highly problematic, and each possible one has advantages and disadvantages. I am interested in Ultimate always providing a unique sporting experience and hope that this can be maintained in the future.

Throughout the research process I was extremely sensitive of my assumptions and experiences which affected my role as researcher in this study. I acknowledged that my position as insider in this community required me to constantly be involved in a process of reflection about my sentiments which surround the critical issues of this study. As such, I worked very hard not to draw conclusions prior to or during the research phase but attempted to use the experience of the study as an opportunity to inform beliefs about the future direction of Ultimate. My focus was on producing sound research and providing a thorough and holistic account of the developmental problems facing the sport (Thomas & Nelson, 1990).

Given the nature of the research design and my familiarity with the community, I decided not to keep a journal. I believed that this would have been necessary had I been

involved in different fieldwork such as participant observation. I am now convinced that this would have been a valuable exercise, particularly as a resource which would have been helpful in the treatment of data regarding participants' opinions about the future direction of the sport. Notions of a distinct split in terms of different playing forms for recreational and competitive play could only have been further informed by immediate and regular documentation of impressions and sentiments on my behalf.

My insider position permitted me to structure the study in a manner which I felt addressed the most interesting and significant tensions in the community. It contributed to the accurate identification of important stakeholders in the process of the sport's development. Knowledge of who to access, the language of the community and a sense of the culture helped with research and the interpretation of data.

### *Site and sample selection*

#### Organizational support

In the early spring of 1997, I contacted the U.P.A. and made them aware of the purpose of this study. This was done primarily to access resources and American based players and administrators. As the officials I spoke to were supportive of the project, a working relationship was established at this time primarily with Bob Byrne, Executive Director. A letter was sent to the organization (Appendix A) explaining the purpose of my inquiry, my recruitment procedures and an assurance of confidentiality if so desired by participants. The U.P.A. contributed to the research process by providing suitable candidates, potential e-mail participants, for participation in the study.

## Site

The Vancouver region was identified as a suitable site for the focus groups. It has an established Ultimate community, featuring many competitive men's and women's teams, and has demonstrated commitment to the sport including hosting the World Championships in August, 1997. As well, members have initiated many high school outreach programs to introduce youth to the sport. All competitive teams, including the unfunded University of British Columbia men's and women's varsity teams, compete regularly in the United States and are confronted with many issues that were critical to this study.

Communication, with many parties involved in this study, was facilitated by the Internet which has become the communication tool of choice with representatives and players all across the continent linked via newsgroups, billboards or direct communication. The Internet serves as an organizational tool. It is a collaborative network of resources useful in the dissemination of critical administrative information (Kikulis, Slack & Hinings, 1992). As such, it proved to be the ideal means for research concerned with significant contributors to the sport which were located in a variety of geographic locations across the continent. This medium, while limited to privileged users, was a valuable resource in terms of accessing many key decision-makers in Ultimate. This process would have been otherwise extremely difficult and time consuming.

## Sample

One objective was to interview three founders of the sport in order to hear about

the creation of Ultimate and its very early stages. Attempts to locate members of the founding group at Columbia H.S. in New Jersey in the late 1960s were in conjunction with the U.P.A. As was anticipated, this proved to be extremely challenging. The mere identification of individuals who were instrumental in the founding of Ultimate proved to be very difficult in a community which relied heavily on oral history as the means to record experiences (Source: U.P.A.). The archival information on the sport had reportedly not been in the possession of the U.P.A. for many years. I felt that while researching the origins was an initial objective of this research, it would not be adequately treated given the primary interests and focus of this study. As Marshall and Rossman (1995) substantiated the integral nature of design flexibility in qualitative research, the decision to alter the scope of this research was justified. The data which addressed the origins of the sport as background to the research questions of this study came exclusively from document analysis.

#### Vancouver players

Focus groups were set to be comprised of six to eight individuals who were currently competitive players in the sport. Most competitive players play in a recreational league in addition to their commitment to a touring men's and women's team. I was able to identify competitive teams and contact their captains by telephone. Names of potential subjects were accumulated in conversations with captains and the respective individuals were contacted by phone. Those who were interested and could commit were identified as participants. Participants were then given a consent letter (Appendix B) detailing the

purpose of the study, their involvement and assuring them of confidentiality. The men and women selected for participation in the study were between the ages of 18-39 and had an average of approximately five years experience as players at the competitive level. These individuals shared significant knowledge, experience and seemingly interest in the critical issues of this study.

One focus group was comprised of women, another of men, in order to reflect the gender makeup of competitive teams. The focus groups took place at my home as it was centrally located and offered a spacious and comfortable environment. Seven participants were confirmed for each, however one woman was ill on the day and another confused the time which reduced the female sample to five participants.

#### Key decision-makers

Historically, the decision-makers for the sport, the volunteer administrators, team captains, U.P.A. and C.U.P.A. representatives, are or have at one time been players of Ultimate at the competitive level. It is estimated that in North America, there are over one hundred men's and women's teams with captains, competing at the top level of their respective divisions (*e.g.*, open, college).

Identification of suitable candidates was done with the help of the U.P.A., in particular Bob Byrne, who provided a list of sixteen potential participants who met the required criteria (see Appendix A). The list was completed with twelve additional individuals I identified based on information provided to me by insiders in the community and my knowledge of individual's contribution to the sport. A list was compiled in

approximately two weeks. Twenty eight individuals were selected and asked to participate in Internet discussions in the form of questions and answers. Ten agreed to participate. This list amounted to a convenient sample of suitable participants for this process. Further details are discussed in the data collection analysis section.

### ***Data Collection Procedures***

The data collection procedures occurred in the following stages:

#### ***1. Analysis of relevant documents***

Initial research was conducted in order to find out the kinds and quantity of documents that would inform this study. When this was determined, the U.P.A. Newsletter (1994-1997), and primary sources such as newspaper articles on the sport were collected and analyzed (Appendix C). This provided background information and data in the early stages of the research process. For example, player and administrator letters and survey information, which related to issues including sponsorship, rule changes and the role of Spirit of the Game were valuable resources. It proved to be an extremely valuable technique in the study of the developmental process of this sport and its organization.

#### ***2. Focus groups with Vancouver competitive players***

##### **Pilot focus group (Spring, 1997)**

A pilot focus group lasting one hour was conducted in my home primarily as a means to test the questions for clarity and comprehension. Notes were taken during and subsequent to the focus group. Additionally, determination of the suitability of the

location of focus groups was also served by this process as participants seemed comfortable in this environment. The pilot featured both men and women as opposed to the actual focus groups which were differentiated by gender. This was a logistical decision largely determined by the availability of volunteers.

The pilot focus group proved valuable as feedback contributed to the fine tuning of questions regarding how change would impact upon the counterculture appeal and meanings of the Spirit of the Game. Direct access to data and insights that come from group interaction was confirmed at this stage (Inglis, 1992). When one woman reflected on her recent experiences at the college level, it prompted others to discuss their similar experiences. This produced a brief debate on the role of coaching in the sport, a phenomenon which some believed was on the rise. Some questions were identified by members of the group as requiring clarification. Participants felt that focus groups with mixed sexes or that were gender specific were equally valid.

The setting and administration of the focus group environment was informal. This environment seemed to be a comfortable forum for expression as it is one which is sensitive to the lifestyles and characteristics of the participants and allowed both investigator and respondents to become engaged in the research process (Inglis, 1992).

#### Focus group with male and female players

The focus groups were carried out in the months of May (male) and June (female) of 1997 respectively. As this coincided with the start of the competitive season, participants had much interest in the issues surrounding the sport and were willing to

commit time to the process. Focus group discussions were recorded onto audio-tape and subsequently transcribed into hardcopy form within the two week period following the focus groups. Both groups exceeded the ninety minute period allotted for the focus groups. No one departed when I intervened and permitted anyone who would want to leave.

The dialogues were initiated by open-ended questions (Appendix D). This was done in order to promote participants self-disclosure through the creation of a permissive environment (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The feedback and discussions were animated, seemingly unconstrained. Judging by the thanks given to me for allowing participants an opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns in what is certainly a vocal community, the process seemed valuable to all parties involved.

### *3. E-mail discussions with key decision-makers*

Over the summer, three sets of two question correspondences were e-mailed to those individuals who had agreed to contribute in this capacity (Appendix E). Participants were given up to one week to respond although some, possibly due to busy work schedules, took longer. Ten of the twenty eight decision makers who were solicited for this portion of the study agree to participate. Five addresses were returned as incorrect. It is probable that due to the nature of the e-mail medium, with its dependency on the receiver for transmission of message, that some did not see the correspondence. Additionally, the three week commitment may have deterred some from participating in the study.

There were no requests for clarifications of questions. The average response was approximately equal to the length of a long paragraph. As questions were framed in order to solicit individual opinions on the issues in question, the data reflected this and had a personal quality demonstrating a range of experiences and perspectives. I checked e-mail responses daily throughout this phase of data collection. Hardcopy transcripts of responses were produced and filed as soon as data was made available to me. As e-mail data began to compile, it was categorized based on the week of inquiry and corresponding set of questions.

### ***Data Analysis Procedures***

The data analysis process involved many stages. I followed the strategy components as described by Marshall and Rossman (1995) including organizing the data, generating categories, themes and patterns, and searching for alternate explanations. The methodology and design of the questions, emphasizing the identification of forces involved in the institutionalization of Ultimate, helped the process of identifying meaningful classes of information of this sample of players and administrators.

I used a seemingly conventional approach in analyzing the data. This was a much thought through decision which I felt would be effective for me as a researcher and a valuable contribution to the design of the study. The systematic character of the analysis reflected my vision of how best to examine the data.

Data, when transcribed into hardcopy form, was read and re-read. Familiarity with the sentiments of participants was essential. Later readings focused more on themes and

subthemes that were addressed directly by participants. Some data was more easily classifiable than other. For instance, the e-mail feedback was easier to analyze than focus group or document analysis data. I believe that this was a result of the structuring of the questions and the make-up of that respondent group. It seemed as though team captains and administrators had a greater understanding of the issues and tensions within the community. This is understandable given their functions as representative decision makers in the sport, whether they represent the players generally or their respective competitive teams. I primarily used the e-mail data to form the initial classifications of themes of results. This data addressed most directly the pressures and resistances to institutionalization.

After many re-reads, and much reflection with the help of the evolving theme index tree (Appendix F), data were grouped and coded with a preliminary number scheme which identified and associated quotes and data with a dominant theme or themes and subsequent subtheme. Initial analysis featured the production of a summary of data based on the selection of most compelling and relevant portions of data. The first classification included the major themes of player issues, sport issues, unique elements, sources of tension and consequences of change. These were crude initial titles which I gave, with the expectation that the major themes would evolve and crystallize throughout the analysis process. Over time, these broad categories narrowed. Subthemes were merged and the analysis focused on data which represented and defined the community and identified institutional forces or considerations. This was a direct reflection of participants addressing issues identified by the research questions. Player issues, sport issues and

unique elements were subsequently merged to describe and characterize the Ultimate community. When data addressed the development or state of the sport, it was classified as concerned with forces of influence, pressures or resistances, on the sport. The majority came from the preliminary theme of sport issues. This data was merged with the sources of tension grouping in order to produce the initial class of pressures and resistances now featured in the results section.

Data was revisited and subjected to much scrutiny as passages which were relevant to the study were highlighted and coded further in order to be classified under the emerging major themes. For instance, the theme of culture, which gave way to identity and character of the community, the meanings and significance of Spirit of the Game and other subthemes, had an initial group of data segments or quotes numbering 25 from focus group data alone. Ten references were from the women's group and fifteen were from the men's group. Cote, *et al.* (1993, p.131) referred to these text segments as "meaning units" which Tesch (1990) defined as segments of text that are comprehensible by themselves and contain one idea, episode or piece of information.

Data segments were labeled and analyzed further in what amounted to a "cut and paste" form of gathering and documenting (Appendix G). A letter was used to designate the source of data. "M" and "W" represented the men's and women's focus groups respectively. "E" referred to all e-mail responses and "D" represented document analysis. A number was assigned to each portion of text in order to label and move them to the appropriate theme or themes. Further examination, with consideration of the theory which informed the study, produced preliminary results which addressed the major questions of

the study. The final stages of analysis demanded greater focus and the rejection of ideas or concepts which were determined to be less relevant than those themes and subthemes which were finally determined as significant. Final themes and subthemes were generated from the raw data in order to focus the data and identify patterns which emerged from sources and participants of this study (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). This determination was based on the quantity and quality of data segments which addressed the given topic either directly or indirectly. What evolved with further analysis is the existing discussion of results.

With the data amalgamated, I began to link the information with theory which had informed the study. The data regarding the pressures and resistances was strongly connected to the institutional theory literature. The data which addressed the community, its systems of meanings and subcultural elements had strong links with the literature on sport subcultures and organizational culture literature. Analysis was completed when final categories were determined and relationships among them established.

### ***Methods of verification of data***

This study emphasized the principles of credibility, confirmability and transferability (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) in the design and analysis of this research.

#### **Credibility**

Credibility, where the goal is "to demonstrate that the inquiry was conducted in such a manner as to ensure that the subject was accurately identified and described"

(Marshall & Rossman, 1995, p.143) was of particular importance to this study given its interpretive and analytical requirements in addressing its purpose and research questions. The measure of between-method triangulation or the collection of data from numerous and varied sites (Denzin, 1989) was taken to enhance credibility in the findings of the study was taken to enhance credibility in the findings of the study. This permitted the exploration of multiple perspectives from different types of individuals associated with the sport. The methods combined to overcome individual shortfalls. For instance, the free flowing dialogue which characterized the focus groups featured reflection, discussion and argument which brought out personal feelings about issues and what was meaningful to individual players. Whereas e-mail data from influential decision makers reflected an attempt to generate information from more holistic perspectives concerned with the overall development of the sport and issues affecting the sport as a whole.

### Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the concern and assessment of subject objectivity and researcher bias (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). As was my responsibility as researcher, I treated my position in relation to Ultimate and its community with seriousness and sensitivity. The framing of questions and manner of research sought to give voice to the community, permit the expression of participants positions and minimize the amount of interpretation and subjectivity brought to the research process. Closer record keeping of my own sentiments, possibly in form of a journal, could have enhanced the efforts made in this regard.

### Transferability

Transferability, the task of demonstrating applicability of one study's findings to another context, rests with the investigator who seeks to make that connection (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). The study produced interesting data for future investigations into the institutionalization of emerging cultural practices and the development of alternate team sport forms. In judging how other's research contributed to this study including that of Beal (1995) and Humphreys (1997) on sport subcultures, it is possible that similar themes and patterns may occur under similar circumstances (*i.e.*, emergent team sports which face similar challenges in the face of the mainstream, capitalist driven system of western sport). This is because of the evidence of the strength of institutional pressures and their capacity to meddle, change or co-opt the affairs of developing sporting practices (Beal, 1995; Morgan, 1994). This strength is exemplified throughout the system and culture, from the assumptions which form dominant ideology, to the reward and compensation system, to the accepted practices and norms.

### *Limitations*

This study did have limitations which affected both the research design and the data collection process. The difficulties researching the origins of the sport, which arose primarily as a result of a lack of archival information, limited the examination of participants' sentiments regarding the origins of the sport. It was hoped that the e-mail discussions would involve more subjects. The lower than expected number of respondents

meant that fewer voices informed this research. As no members of the N.U.A. participated in this study, the perspectives from individual members were not part of this research. However, efforts were made to include this organization and its members as significant and influential participants in determining the future direction of Ultimate.

### ***Communicating results***

As this study would not have been possible without considerable assistance from the U.P.A. and study participants, the communicating of results is an attempt to give back to the Ultimate community. A summary of findings will be mailed to the organizations which contributed to this study. These include the U.P.A., C.U.P.A., N.U.A. and B.C.D.S.S. (British Columbia Disc Sport Society). Focus group participants are members of B.C.D.S.S. and C.U.P.A. This summary will be a resource which is available to all who participated in the study. Additionally, an article outlining the study, its results and its value to the Ultimate community of North America, will be submitted to the U.P.A. and C.U.P.A. for publication in their newsletters.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

This study met the criteria set by the U.B.C. Ethics Committee as the basic requirement guiding this research. "Informed Consent" from participants was necessary prior to data collection. Participants were granted the necessary components including background information on the study, procedures, potential risks and benefits and the right to inquiry and withdrawal (Berg & Latin, 1994). A letter or statement describing the

details of the study was given to all participants who either signed the consent form (e.g., focus group participants) or expressed their willingness to participate through e-mail correspondence. Inquiries or clarifications were addressed throughout the data collection phase. Confidentiality was ensured by coding e-mail responses by time of response (e.g., e-mail 1 refers to the first set of questions, in week one) not author and using pseudonyms for both e-mail and focus group participants.

Reciprocity was an important consideration in this research process. Any organizations interested in receiving a copy will be able to do so. A summary of the results will be submitted for publication in the two major North American Ultimate newsletters. The value of this effort is in the provision of a condensed analysis of the forces currently impacting the sport and its athletes at this critical time in the sport's development. With more knowledge and shared understandings, a more informed perspective will be brought to discussions or initiatives, with respect to change processes, that individuals or groups may seek in the future.

## RESULTS

This section includes profiles of the study participants, an examination of the Ultimate community and the identification of institutional forces impacting upon the sport and its development. Finally, a brief description of the future of the sport is postulated.

### *Background of participants in the study*

#### Focus Group Participant Profile

The following individuals participated in the two focus groups which were conducted for this study. They have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities. All participants were "white" except for Tina who appeared to be of Asian descent.

#### *Men:*

Art - mid-thirties, carpenter, approximately fifteen years club experience, national team member

Angus - early thirties, retail manager, approximately seven years club experience, national team captain

Gord - early thirties, American doctoral student, approximately ten years club experience, National team member

Ed - early twenties, university student, approximately four years club experience, national team member

Malik - early twenties, university student, approximately three years club experience, member of second ranked team in Canada

Tom - mid-twenties, unemployed, approximately five years club experience, member of second ranked team in Canada

Jack - early twenties, marketing/service representative, approximately five years club experience, national team member

### *Women:*

Gina - late twenties, school teacher, approximately four years club experience, national team member

Joanne - early twenties, university student, approximately three years club experience, national team member

Tina - early thirties, school teacher, former national team captain, approximately ten years club experience, no current team affiliation

Nora - late twenties, university student, approximately six years club experience, no current team affiliation

Sue - early twenties, research assistant, approximately three years club experience, national team member

### E-mail Respondents Profile

This group of individuals was comprised solely of top ranked team captains and U.P.A. and C.U.P.A. administrators. N.U.A. representatives were solicited for participation in this study but did not respond. This might be explained by the possibility that the N.U.A. representatives were college students who are relatively mobile and may have new addresses or e-mail accounts. N.U.A. representatives may feel that their sentiments and position have been voiced in the community, primarily on the Internet and in the U.P.A. Newsletter, and that they did not need to contribute to this study via this research method.

The following list identifies e-mail participant's positions and relevant data. Only two e-mail respondents were female which, although lower than was hoped, approximates the breakdown of U.P.A. and C.U.P.A. administrators. This is generally a three to one

ratio of men to women (U.P.A. Newsletter, 1996, V16, #2). Confidentiality was not sought as it is impossible to truly guarantee with this research technique. However, participants' quotes were not given authorship in order to maintain a degree of anonymity.

*American respondents (U.P.A. members)*

Elvis (male) - U.P.A. Board Member; over five years experience as a U.P.A. administrator

Jim (male) - Co-captain of U.S. Men's National Team Captain; approximately ten years experience in competitive Ultimate

Jerry (female) - U.P.A. Coed Director; over five years experience in competitive Ultimate

Sean (male) - Co-captain of U.S. Men's National Team and current number one ranked club team; over 15 years experience in competitive Ultimate

*Canadian respondents (C.U.P.A. and U.P.A. members)*

Jesse (male) - Director of C.U.P.A.; approximately 10 years experience as an administrator of Ultimate in Canada; recreational player

Lilly (female) - Canadian Women's National Team Captain and current number one ranked club team; approximately five years experience in competitive Ultimate

Johnny (male) - Captain of Ottawa Men's club team; over five years experience in competitive Ultimate

Alex (male) - Co-captain of Canadian Men's National Team and current number one ranked club team; former C.U.P.A. representative

Marc (male) - Co-captain of Canadian Men's National Team and current number one ranked club team; over five years experience in competitive Ultimate

Sal (male) - C.U.P.A. representative for the West Region; over ten years experience as an administrator of Ultimate; recreational player

*Document Analysis*

The following is a list of the documents that were analyzed: U.P.A. Newsletter

(1994 - 1997); U.P.A. Ninth edition rules (1996); sample of newspaper articles on the sport of Ultimate (see Appendix C for complete references).

### ***The Ultimate Community***

This section combines data which addressed a number of subthemes in order to characterize and represent the general Ultimate community. The identity and character of the Ultimate community, the representation of mainstream sport and the meanings and significance of Spirit of the Game are briefly examined and combine to demonstrate countercultural qualities. The value and role of sportspersonship and player autonomy are subsequently explored. This is necessary for understanding and appreciating the identified forces influencing the development of Ultimate and their impact upon the participant community.

#### The identity and character of the Ultimate community

With respect to the sport itself, participants cited many reasons for competing. These are necessary considerations as they represent ideas, values and beliefs which are potentially threatened by a change in direction for Ultimate. Virtually all individuals sought a competitive outlet and peer respect from within the group.

*I've come to points where it's getting too intense, getting too intense and I just want to back off but then it keeps coming back to, do I want to win, do I want to be the best I can be....I'll take this opportunity now. (Tom, Focus Group 1)*

*That's why people play right now, recognition within the community is sort of the pinnacle of the game right now. Like we all know who the best players are, and that's good enough for the people who play. It's sort of the Ultimate reward that all players who play respect and know who the*

*best players are. (Jon, Focus Group 1)*

Individual and team development were also valued by participants of this study. Ultimate was recognized as a sport which provides an opportunity for the development of personal skills and character.

*I know a lot of us got into this because it's a new sport that we could grow in. (Sue, Focus Group 2)*

*I don't do it for the social aspect of our team anymore. I don't do it for the exercise, and I don't do it for anything else. I do it for the tournament aspect of the game, and if the team keeps improving then I'm totally into playing. (Angus, Focus Group 1)*

Ultimate players were described by participants as very social and friendly. It is a group which is supportive and cooperative as evidenced by the accounts of shared accommodations during competitions and communal parties.

*It is still as you say, you still get to be friends with the other team. It's not arch enemies. You get to meet a lot of people that way. A lot of it is social. (Gina, Focus Group 2)*

*The way teams, even at the end of major tournaments, the way that teams all party up together. You have pretty much everybody there until the end of the whole thing. (Jon, Focus Group 1)*

In attempting to explain the "glue" which unites such a group both socially and recreationally, one woman asserted:

*There is a direct relationship between education level and people's tendency towards cooperative behaviour. Ultimate depends on individual commitment to cooperation (with one's own teammates, with the other team and with the sport itself) than any other sport - not surprising since until now, Ultimate has been mostly spread through Colleges and Master's programs. (E-mail 2)*

It was thought that more education leads to enhanced ability to appreciate others' situations and considerations. This would ultimately lend itself more readily to cooperation and the prioritizing of multiple agendas rather than uncooperative or strictly selfish behaviour.

One participant compared Ultimate to the emergent computing industry that also has come of age in the last twenty years. She suggested that *"both were characterized by networks, relationships, true teamwork as opposed to the glorification of one hero"* (E-mail 1).

#### The representation of mainstream sport

The identity of this group was clarified when respondents contrasted Ultimate with other sports. Participants viewed mainstream sport and the dominant sport culture as different than their community and subculture. In general, "popular" or "mainstream" sport was described unfavourably by many participants who drew on their competitive sports backgrounds for examples. Many had experienced success, some at the elite level, in sports such as hockey, soccer, basketball and badminton. However, legitimized cheating, disrespect, violence and the "competitor as enemy" ethic were cited as problems that were prevalent in these sports.

*Well, and it's part of the game right. In hockey, you kick it in and you pretend you didn't. Everybody does it right. (Jack, Focus Group 1)*

*I've played other team sports and I find when you get to a competitive level people tend to start fighting and looking at the other team as their enemy as opposed to a peer who is also enjoying the sport and playing to be the best they can be. And I think a lot of sports lost that and I think*

*that Ultimate, that's what Ultimate has that other sports didn't. (Tina, Focus Group 2)*

Competitors' and coaches' attitudes and methods were major reasons for individuals leaving these other sports. The relationship of coach as authoritarian and athlete as subservient was another dynamic cited as a dissuasion to playing traditional team sport. The theme of control surfaced here and was addressed by Tina who is also a high school basketball coach.

*When you compare Ultimate to other team sports, you have coaches, and you have referees and we don't have that in Ultimate. It brings out aspects that (Gina) said, that players have to be more intelligent. Well I think it forces each person to think about the game rather than just being led through the game, telling them what to do from the bench, the coach or having the official tell you no, you're wrong. And we have to actually think about it. It forces us to take onus. (Tina, Focus Group 2)*

She continued on to say that there is a possibility of Ultimate going in a direction which might facilitate the development of similar norms (*i.e.*, conforming to accepted practices of mainstream sport).

#### The meanings and significance of Spirit of the Game

The most commonly cited principle that was felt to permeate the community was the Spirit of the Game principle. This historically fundamental ingredient of Ultimate is somewhat analogous to an organization's mission statement. As such, it is a tangible expression of the vision for the community and organization (U.P.A.). It is a value-laden clause written into the rules which outlines a philosophy and suitable practices for the sport:

*Ultimate has traditionally relied upon a spirit of sportsmanship [sic.] which places the responsibility for fair play on the player himself [sic.]. Highly competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of the bond of mutual respect between players, adherence to the agreed upon rules of the game, or the basic joy of play. Protection of these vital elements serves to eliminate adverse conduct from the Ultimate field. Such actions as taunting of opposing players, dangerous aggression, intentional fouling, or other "win-at-all-costs" behaviour are contrary to the spirit of the game and must be avoided by all players (U.P.A. Ninth edition rules, 1996).*

Spirit of the Game has managed to maintain its status as credo to the community, with its meaning largely associated with the sport's traditional grassroots origins and the cooperative principles exhibited during play. It is part of the value system of Ultimate as confirmed by the U.P.A. Board Mission Statement which was "*to promote, maintain and safeguard the sport of Ultimate and the Spirit of the Game, and to serve the needs of players*" (U.P.A. Newsletter, 1995, V15, #1). Spirit of the Game awards are generally given out at tournaments and major competitions. However, teams and players play with varying degrees of "spirit". Some do not respect the rules as much as others and knowledge of abusive players tends to produce similar behaviours from opponents as a means of levelling the playing field. There is opportunity in this sport to gain advantage by abusing rules or privileges. However, this is typically viewed as violating the Spirit of the Game principle.

The data suggested that the majority of players do honour this code and respect the instrumentality of its role to the sport in its current form.

*It's a different society where the onus is placed on yourself and you have no out really, if you do something stupid or wrong against Spirit of the Game you can only look at yourself and I think that that is a fundamental part of Ultimate and I think that is what we would lose if we wanted to be,*

*if our goal was to be more like other sports.....I think a lot of people stopped playing other team sports for certain reasons - you know the coach, the attitudes on the field or whatever and came into Ultimate for the reasons they got out of it and are now seeing that shift back, you know, do I really want to shift back to that? (Gina, Focus Group 2)*

*The original concept of Spirit of the Game must be maintained. Otherwise, Ultimate just becomes another competitive sport. (E-mail 3)*

One player/administrator went so far as to say that “*the Spirit of the Game is what makes Ultimate what it is*” (U.P.A. Newsletter, 1994, V14, #5). Some participants referred directly to their fears surrounding the potentially altered role of the principle in the future:

*I've always dreaded the day when we would have to trade in this unique and fascinating aspect of our sport in favour of a higher caliber of play. (U.P.A. Newsletter; 1994, V14, #5)*

The majority of study participants addressed the positive value of Spirit of the Game to the sport and community. However, some articulated opposing sentiments confirming that it is not always universally embraced:

*Spirit of the Game is just a clause written in the rules that says you should be sportsmanlike. (Tina, Focus Group 2)*

The ideal of Spirit of the Game seemingly evolved so that the sport would have a guiding principle, both symbolic and concrete, which identifies values and practices which are desirable in the sport. The rules and structure of Ultimate are a reflection of this.

With phrases in the actual Spirit of the Game clause such as “*spirit of sportsmanship*” [sic.], “*mutual respect*” and “*other win at all costs behaviour are contrary to the Spirit of*

*the Game and must be avoided by all players” (U.P.A. Ninth edition rules, 1996), it is evident that the sport has a meaningful foundation which is fundamentally different than that of dominant sport cultures.*

### Sportspersonship

There is a strong relationship between Spirit of the Game and the concept of sportspersonship in Ultimate. The emphasis on sportspersonship is critical to the maintenance of the sport's self-officiated, player-controlled structure of play. This ideal is reinforced in the Spirit of the Game clause.

*Ultimate has a lot to teach the North American culture about sportsmanship[sic.]. The concept of sportsmanship[sic.] has been lost in North America. Athletes are more concerned about winning (due to sponsorship and prizes) than about competing. Ultimate teaches athletes how to compete and respect your opponent. These are lessons that must be taught to all athletes and perhaps as early as possible (E-mail 3)*

Values such as respect, honesty and fairness were linked to the notion of sportspersonship. The value system or those values predominant in the community seem not to have been significantly altered since the sport's creation in the late 1960s. This response emphasized the retention of the values of responsibility and respect which are integral to the sport:

*The fact that we make huge sacrifices in time and money to play at its highest level for no monetary gain is truly unique in modern sport. So, I would say the sport is of a higher consciousness. There is a laden sense of responsibility amongst players to retain respect for the game and for their opponents. Fleeting characteristics in most other sports. (E-mail 1)*

The response did capture a feeling of the sport as "other" which seemed prevalent throughout the data analysis phase. In a letter published in the U.P.A. Newsletter, one player described the importance of sportspersonship and integrity in the sport:

*Ultimate has always been a vehicle for bringing out the best and worst in me....Your team played with spirit and fairness and deserved the same from its opponents. In the scheme of things we all lose if any one of us allows the pressure of competition to bring out the worst in us rather than the best in us. (U.P.A. Newsletter; 1996, V16, #3)*

In terms of sportspersonship's unique role in Ultimate, one participant felt that:

*It is less competitive with a greater emphasis on sportspersonship. There are less people playing Ultimate so that is one reason for being less competitive, however, I think that the roots of the sport with the Spirit of the Game also make it a little less competitive at all but the top, top competitive level. This definitely is an advantage but I'd like to see the high level of sportspersonship while raising the competitive level. (E-mail 1)*

#### Player autonomy and the amateur state of Ultimate

*A lot of us have found a place where we can be competitive in some more pure way than other sports. (Sue, Focus Group 2)*

The references to "purity" seemed to be addressing a quality which exists and has a range of meanings. For some, purity meant that Ultimate should continue to have few significant relationships with corporate sponsors or sport governing organizations which could lead to a more commodified form of the sport based on sponsor interests or media and spectator demands. One respondent asserted that Ultimate is still a "*pure amateur sport*" (E-mail 2) which implied a meaning of embodying principles which individuals identified as ideals of what sport ought to be and mean. These principles seem to

represent a form of sport that is comprised of traditional amateur ideals such as respect and participant control.

*In hockey especially, it can be very dirty. I know people on my own team that I am glad are on my team because they will go out specifically to take someone down, and there is that mutual respect in Ultimate that I feel is lacking in other competitive sports. (Joanne, Focus Group 2)*

Participants asserted that the self-officiated nature of the sport has an empowering effect for players and contributes to a sense of ownership and a unique identity. This dynamic was believed to have positive effects beyond the game itself:

*I think society's going to change along with it - people are going to realize that the sense of personal responsibility is something that everyone can do. People can be taught that when they're young, you can empower the individual to make the calls on the field, or the calls in society. (M. Kaweski, Georgia Straight, 1992, V26, p.10)*

Player autonomy creates a balance of power between players in the sport. Authority is granted to captains largely in a strategic capacity rather than a political one. Their primary responsibility is to strategize and call offensive plays or defenses. Each player is accountable for his or her own behaviour including calling fouls, contributing to the pace of the game and other responsibilities that typically fall under the jurisdiction of the referee. This situation is a phenomenon which one participant suggested parallels the existing social climate which she believed was reflected in the changes within organizations, possibly part of the movement to empower employees and rethink the value of human resources.

*I really like the fact that this sport doesn't have referees, I think that's what makes it so unique and I like it because it makes each player more autonomous and if you look at society, like I always relate sport situations*

*to the workplace, or work situations or how it fits in society cause rules in sport also apply to rules within society, and workplaces, they want you to be more autonomous as well and I think you know this is a new age sport and we're fitting right in with the new age workplace. (Tina, Focus Group 2)*

### ***PRESSURES AND FORCES OF RESISTANCE AFFECTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF ULTIMATE IN NORTH AMERICA***

The data regarding influencing pressures and resistances involved in the evolving direction of the sport was rich and demonstrated an awareness of the challenges facing the sport on behalf of participants of this study. The following portion of the chapter is devoted to analysis of these pressures and forces of resistance and the implications that they carry. The discussion is framed in relation to the commercial marketplace which was viewed as having a strong pull effect on emerging sporting practices.

#### ***Pressures on the development of Ultimate***

Players and administrators alike identified the following forces as active factors in the development of Ultimate toward the mainstream. The pressures could be summarized under two main subthemes: i) growth and popularity, and ii) commercial market forces.

##### **Growth and popularity**

The growth of the sport in North America was perceived to be dramatic. When asked what was pushing the sport toward the mainstream, one respondent replied "*from outside, sheer growth in numbers as the sport becomes more well known*" (E-mail 2). Another player felt that there needed to be significant technical or structural change in

order to accommodate the increasing number of players:

*I think the best and easiest way for the game to grow is to allow a more mainstream version of the game to evolve. This version would be more palatable to media coverage, and large-scale media coverage will do more to get the public to play than a million individual messages. (E-mail 2)*

Participants pointed to the recent strides made at the high school and college/university levels. There are now junior or high school championships in many states and provinces. Additionally, there are approximately 200 colleges or universities that have varsity teams which represent their schools in their respective championship series (Source: U.P.A.). There are both Canadian and American University Championships which are independently organized by the community and Canadian universities do compete in the United States College Championship Series. The following quotes are from an exchange in the first focus group:

*I think College Ultimate is going to be the next big thing, you know if you think about college basketball, they've got all those teams ranked in the tournament. (Art, Focus Group 1)*

*College Ultimate is getting big now. (Malik, Focus Group 1)*

*It's also bringing people into it much younger, like I started playing when I was 25 and a lot of people started at that age. When I started it was more typical of people to be starting at somewhere around that age, you know after University. Now so many people are starting so much younger. (Art, Focus Group 1)*

*You know, people will consciously choose to play Ultimate. (Ed, Focus Group 1)*

*It's not like just coming out to throw the Frisbee, you know, woop dee do, now people will watch it and go okay, that's what I want to do, go to University for three years and play Ultimate. (Jack, Focus Group 1)*

The affiliation with established institutions such as colleges and universities seemed to be a positive consideration for most. Participants' awareness of potential benefits of relationships with established mainstream institutions including recognition, legitimacy, and increased funding potential seemed to drive the dialogue around the growing popularity of Ultimate. While this type of growth will no doubt benefit the sport by offering more opportunities to younger players to play Ultimate competitively, participants seemed to speak simply to the increasing numbers of players as the important criterion for legitimizing the sport and possibly mainstream acceptance.

#### Commercial market forces

While growth and the multitude of commercial forces have existed within the scope of the community for some time, they now seem to be more powerful influences. The institutionalization of Ultimate, and corresponding conformity to mainstream commercial ways still presents a predicament. In order for change to be produced, there must be reconciliation with the many factors which appear to be strong impediments in this process.

*I think its gonna come down to money. (Ed, Focus Group 1)*

*Yeah (Tom, Focus Group 1)*

*Like you know, if it comes down to ten thousand dollars then that foul in the endzone becomes a little more blatant. And money in terms of sponsorship and the rules, you know how much time you have to make a call. So I think that's, you know, the whole aspect of money is gonna change the way the sport goes. (Ed, Focus Group 1)*

While the sport of Ultimate has made many strides over the decades, the one area that has clearly remained undeveloped is the commercial side of the sport. There was a time in the late 1980s/early 1990s, when Jose Cuervo Tequila co. and the U.P.A. sponsored a tournament series, offering cash prizes to the winners in return for permission to modify the rules in an experiment to make it more spectator friendly. However, in a general player vote which included all U.P.A. members, most of whom do not compete at the elite level, the sponsorship of any U.P.A. events by liquor or tobacco companies was rejected (Source: U.P.A.). Ultimate has been governed democratically and this process enabled those who do not face significant travel expenses and loss of work for competitions to have the same voice as those who do.

Select teams have had some success in obtaining sponsorship from companies such as Nike and Kavu but these occurrences have not been prevalent and often carry limited reward for the respective clubs such as free team shirts or uniforms.

For participants in this study, commercialization referred to money and the professionalization of the sport in some form and the marketing and marketability of Ultimate requiring new relationships with institutions such as the media and television in particular. The data from virtually all sources did reveal a desire on behalf of players and administrators to have increased commercial opportunities for the sport. This was particularly evident in conversations regarding the marketing of Ultimate. Several remarks similar to the following were heard in reference to new relationships or partnerships which have potential for the sport.

*I think personally I would love to turn on the t.v. and see Ultimate you know and watch a game - having been able to play. I would love to watch*

*it. (Gina, Focus Group 2)*

The enthusiasm which was demonstrated with respect to any discussion of commercial avenues for the sport was balanced with a cautious perspective which is at the heart of the tension of this discussion:

*Well I think that commercialization is generally not conducive to promoting the sport as a whole. Sponsors will generally get behind one team, and this is our team, and let's go our team, and let's not get beaten our team. (Gina, Focus Group 2)*

### *The marketing of Ultimate*

A very interesting discussion ensued in the first focus group. It essentially focused upon the manner in which Ultimate should market itself. The argument was whether efforts should be made to market the sport based upon its existing counterculture or non-traditional practices and image or whether changes need to be made to produce a more marketable product.

*Yeah, marketers and people who want to associate themselves with Ultimate will want to associate themselves with counter culture. (Angus, Focus Group 1)*

*You can grow a market around people that are not offended by nudity (Angus - in reference to the practice of naked play or general nudity which exists in the North American community, Focus Group 1)*

A number of participants did support the view that the sport in its current form offered marketable elements. The recent Mountain Dew television campaign depicting free spirited "extremists" pursuing less conventional sporting activities was cited as an example of a promotional strategy based on comparable ideals. These individuals shared in the

belief that there is a sufficient enough niche for Ultimate in its current form for it to become a marketable product.

*Spirit of the Game is a great selling point to parents and schools - they love it because they are so disillusioned by the ultra-win-oriented consumer-driven sport attitude which is so predominant (E-mail, 1)*

*Spirit is our media hook. Spirit of the Game is just what the media likes about Ultimate....revealing character is just what the media wants and no sport provides it like Ultimate (U.P.A. Newsletter, July 1995, V15, #3)*

Analysis of the data suggested that the community is divided in terms of its vision for the marketing of the sport. The following passage, describing the reluctance some players would feel with sponsors products, captured the sometimes subversive nature of the members of the community:

*I think people want to sell products right. They won't sponsor unless they think they're going to sell product and they're going to sponsor when people are playing Ultimate, when people are going into the stores to buy Frisbees with Kinesys on it or whoever is going to sponsor. And if they see that they are going to be able to sell their products by sponsoring this sport, then they will. But I think ironically a lot of Frisbee players that are playing the sport right now would not buy a disc with Kinesys on it because it's part of the mainstream and not the counterculture. And they'd rather buy it from the Snapple guys or the Furious George guys so - and that's not like 'we like to be counterculture'. (Jack, Focus Group 1 - The team Snapple is named after a player's grandmother not the beverage company)*

The lack of regulations on players and the free spirited community culture contribute to an environment that some study participants thought would be unattractive to the media and sponsors.

*Like if we hope to televise the sport, we can't have people pissing in the*

*endzone. At almost every major tournament it seems - I remember two years ago Double Happiness had a bunch of people drunk in the endzone, and you had to scramble to get out of the ways as the disc flies in there right. (Jack, Focus Group 1)*

While there was support for the counterculture "niche" marketing argument, there was consensus that in order for the sport to achieve mass appeal, the sport and community must undergo significant changes.

*I personally feel that for elite Ultimate, if it wants to progress to the situation of becoming a professional sport and to get money for it, its going to have to lose its counterculture....I guess it really depends on where you want to go with the sport. If you want mass acceptance, you're gonna have to lose that. You're going to have people, I mean you might get the Christian Coalition saying that Ultimate is the sport of the devil. (Malik, Focus Group 1)*

While the issue of compromise seems to be at the heart of the discussion about the future of the sport, it remains unclear as to where participants believe is the rightful place for the sport in the consumer driven economy. One study participant framed the discussion as centering around the degree to which the sport is "Americanized".

*Americanization, you know t.v., money, I mean its like America's Most Wanted, you know, is it a talk show or a chase? ...yeah, it's all about entertainment in this society. For Ultimate, if it can appeal to that side of marketing... (Art, Focus Group, 1)*

*Marketing, I think might be a better way to describe, Americans are so good at marketing whether it be sports or shoes or whatever. I think that's what Ultimate is getting into, the whole marketing of the sport in order to create more spectators, more money. (Tom, Focus Group, 1)*

*Well, anything is like that in the States, cause that's where they can make the most money (Art, Focus Group 1)*

There is evidence of Ultimate moving in a direction consistent with the notions of participants of this study. The U.P.A. reported that it is very close to signing an

agreement with a sports marketing firm in hopes of exploring commercial avenues for the sport (U.P.A. Newsletter; 1997, V17, #2). Details of the agreement have not been released by the U.P.A. However, the U.P.A. Director of Marketing Frank Defazio Jr. recently wrote about that:

*After having studied the sports and event sponsorship industry for nearly two years, I am convinced that we need to lay important ground work relative to educating society about Ultimate before we can expect the type of major sports sponsorship that is truly in our future. This agreement would go a long way toward allowing us to lay this important groundwork through the development of a comprehensive Juniors program in grade schools and middle schools across America. This program will allow us to bring Ultimate into these schools as soon as the 1998 school year should all go well with the effort. I'll write more about this agreement in future issues of this newsletter as the agreement progresses. (U.P.A. Newsletter; 1997, V17, #4)*

### ***Forces of resistance to change in the North American community***

The following elements were identified as impediments to the movement of Ultimate toward the mainstream and commercial success: i) player values and norms, ii) lack of appeal for spectators, iii) image, iv) developmental stage of the sport, v) administrative and organizational inadequacy, and vi) status of sport delivery system

#### **Player values and norms**

It was the area of current player values and norms, a reflection of the group culture, which seemed to bring out the most animated discussion about resistant forces to change in the sport. Participants' sentiments surrounding the issue of control of the sport and the consequences of change (*i.e.*, the addition of referees, coaches, sponsor influence)

emerged as a dominant theme in this regard. The unconstrained behaviour of athletes was another powerful theme addressed by participants of the study.

The culture of the Ultimate community is not entirely uniform or homogeneous. It is characterized by individuals who are strongly committed to or deeply divided with respect to a position regarding the development and direction of Ultimate. Many share values in common, but their beliefs about the best course for the sport are challenged by their own self interests in seeing the sport move in a given direction. In addressing the matter of players sentiments regarding change, one player replied:

*Divided attitudes. Half of the people are going towards the N.U.A. and half of the people are clinging to the culture.....I'm torn as well.*  
(Sue, Focus group 2)

Additionally, participants citing the alternative, counterculture appeal of the sport as a highly valued yet threatened element revealed contradiction and vacillation on behalf of participants. This is further evidence that the sport is at a crossroads with respect to its future form.

Analysis of focus group data suggested interesting differences between competitive male and female players of this group. The dialogue in the women's discussion seemed to demonstrate a more holistic understanding of what was meaningful to them as athletes.

The following exchange demonstrates a tone that was unique to their group:

*I'm still having fun. When I stop having fun, I'll stop playing competitively. But thus far, it's fine. I like being competitive but I also like being able to, after we're finished being competitive, have fun with teammates.* (Gina, Focus Group 2)

*I'd have to agree with Gina. It's fun. Competition is fun. Winning is not everything, but it sure is fun when you do win. What I really like at the*

*competitive level is the athleticism is just amazing. To play with women that are so athletic and so skilled. It's just really fun to be amongst a group of that kind of people. (Tina, Focus Group 2)*

There was a different tone and quality in the men's focus group surrounding conversations about the commodification and professionalization of the game. The men used language such as "I'd love to sell out" (Angus, Focus Group 1) and at times seemed enthusiastic about the fantastical world of a new commercially institutionalized form of Ultimate. There was considerable time spent discussing N.U.A. initiatives with well over a dozen direct references as compared with two from the women's group. The men speculated about the future structure of Ultimate:

*But a huge majority of players would start out with the intent of becoming a professional player. Players will start in developing camps with the serious intention of going through College, which will probably be huge, bigger than it already is, and they'll graduate onto the National team or some other team and that would be your prime reason for starting to play in the first place. Like hockey players start when they're four. (Jack, Focus Group 1)*

The differences in responses point to possible differences in values about competitive sport. These values have a strong relationship to each individual's experiences within the world of sport. This situation may be enhanced by the lack of professional women's sport leagues which may be a factor in what each sex's sense of reality is with respect to the future of the sport. Additionally, the men's group featured more accomplished Ultimate players that had achieved higher levels of success in the sport. Data might reflect the current status of players on given teams. For example, players of a team ranked third in the world who are seeking a National championship may have

different concerns or motivations than one who is twentieth and seeking merely to be competitive.

#### *Ownership and control of the sport*

There was majority support for some form of officiating being adopted by the sport, provided that it was consistent with a movement towards a more commercial direction. Few participants went into detail about what exactly that might be although sideline observers used to settle arguments and active referees were cited as options. While support was demonstrated for this change, comments were often accompanied by a qualifying statement as revealed in the following quote:

*I think that there is a fine line that can be walked where the best of Ultimate's roots can be maintained while incorporating some new ideas from traditional sports. Referees, is the first concept that's outside of Ultimate but part of traditional sports. I believe that refs at some level (not sure what this should be yet) would improve the quality of play at the upper levels. However, I would still like the sport to maintain its strong emphasis on sportsmanship[sic.]. (E-mail 2)*

It is clear that those who partook in the study were aware of the pros and cons and consequences of such a change in their sport. Within the current structure, sportspersonship has strong appeal to players. This shared value would be threatened by any shift in direction, particularly one that conforms to the mainstream model. The feelings in the community are strong, particularly with respect to non-players becoming empowered to change the nature of the game. While officials and coaches would certainly come from the community, it is the creation of the role for the non-playing individual with its potential for powerful influence which posed the greatest threat in the minds of players.

*I think reffing will ruin Ultimate. It'll just change it. (Ed, Focus Group 1)*

*I agree, I think that would totally change the way the game is played and make it for the worse, but that doesn't mean it's not going to happen (Tom, Focus Group 1)*

One respondent astutely recognized the role of traditional officials as culturally produced symbols which contribute to the legitimacy of a given sporting activity:

*The lack of referees and team uniforms (in the traditional sense) do hinder mainstream America's embrace of Ultimate. However, I feel that the sport is growing and that given the age of the sport (in comparison to other more "popular" sports) it is doing fine. Certainly I think that player (mainly at the top levels) abuse of the "call your own fouls" and the current lengthy debates that can arise in top level games over calls will hinder its acceptance. For the time being, I am in favor of letting it progress as is. (E-Mail 2)*

The focus groups featured discussion as to what Ultimate might look like if it adopted traditional refereeing:

*People will play the advantage with a ref, like if the ref's not looking in Ultimate, you're going to be having strips [a violation in the sport], it'll develop into that sort of a game. I think that once the onus is off of individual players, you have this certain lack of responsibility, you don't really take anybody else into account. So you just, you cheat. (Ed, Focus Group 1)*

*But as soon as you take the onus off the players having any control over how the flow of the game goes, then you've got guys in the backfield maybe picking intentionally or you know getting in people's way or taking rules into their own hands. (Art, Focus Group 1)*

*I'm just saying that in reality, regardless of whether you have a ref or not I think that people extend the rules to the maximum. (Tina, Focus Group 2)*

There is no question that at the elite level there are instances, where the conscious

violation of rules is practiced as a strategic weapon in the pursuit of victory. This is typically viewed as unacceptable in both the formal rules of the sport and its informal code amongst competitors. The U.P.A. has established a conduct committee to regulate outstanding cases of inappropriate conduct (U.P.A. Newsletter, 1996, V16, #3).

While referees represent a new body that could one day have a stake in the sport, there were other groups who threaten the exclusively player-controlled status of the sport. For example, coaches and sponsors were identified as other groups who could bring different agendas to Ultimate. With respect to coaches, some participants recalled having played against teams with non-playing coaches and generally felt that while they did serve a purpose of administering and organizing the given team, this function could have been adequately done by players. In this instance, coaching outbursts and disruptions seemed to be prevalent and were cited by some as contrary to the essence or ideals of Ultimate. One study participant seemed to capture this feeling with the following assertion:

*I don't think that we necessarily need an external coach for that. I think that you can have two player coaches, one who is on the field and one who isn't. That can be worked out and set up but I think you do have to have something happen to speed up those interchanges and I don't know what the consequences would be but I think that Ultimate players as a whole should maintain that power as to what the consequences should be if there's an infraction (Gina, Focus Group 2)*

The increased number and complexity of offensive and defensive strategies of Ultimate do bring support for the argument of more traditional coaching expertise to the sport. As the sport is relatively new, teams are constantly developing new offensive and defensive plays and techniques in hopes of gaining an advantage in competition. An individual dedicated to the strategizing of the sport rather than sharing this duty with playing the game has its

advantages. One respondent seemed sure of the impending change in this area:

*There's no doubt that the increasing complexity of tactics will lead to more professional coaching (as well as the fact that there will be older players like me who will want to maintain a connection even when their bodies just can't do it any more) and this requires an administrative infrastructure to support, again staffed by retired players and, as the sport develops junior play, parents. (E-mail 2)*

Whereas coaches would likely be experienced or retired former competitive players, sponsors and other groups represent stakeholders from outside the community who pose a greater threat to the existing culture of Ultimate. As has been described, there are many complex issues involved in the marketing of the sport. This creates a uniquely sensitive environment, one that sponsors may not appreciate or support. The relationship between sponsorship and Ultimate will be one involving negotiation and compromise. The effects of significant change in this regard could be dramatic as sponsorship is arguably the necessary ingredient in determining the degree of adherence to the mainstream model of team sport.

*I think once you start getting into what sponsors need in terms of a tax write-off and what they're going to get out of it in terms of how much revenue they are going to make to have their name on t.v. or whatever, then it's going to have to come down to clear cut rules (Angus, Focus Group 1)*

### *Behavioural Norms*

The behavioural norms of Ultimate players was a subject which was addressed by the majority of participants of this study in terms of their effect on any potential change for the sport. As they exist currently, the norms in the community were judged to be a major impediment in any shift towards a commodifiable form of the sport. The behaviour of

competitive players was felt to hinder the legitimacy of the sport and reinforce the popular image of Ultimate outside of the community. This points to a disjuncture in the sport between high level Ultimate as weekend leisure activity or Ultimate as serious competitive sport. It is likely that Ultimate's social and informal nature fulfills the leisurely component whereas the athleticism defines it as a seriously demanding sport.

The climate within the community is one which is very permissive, accommodating and as was alluded to earlier relatively unregulated. As a result, players take liberties which seem to be unique and defining of the character of Ultimate. One player/administrator asserted her sentiments about the behaviour at competitions:

*Again though, the lack of self-control (cursing, swearing, using the sideline as a bathroom, smoking) by the players and spectators needs to be curtailed, in my opinion, if we are going to obtain media coverage needed to propel us into the mainstream. (E-Mail 1)*

The significance of this quote is that the existing norms which were alluded to are not acceptable practices in the eyes of mainstream institutions concerned with sport.

#### Lack of spectator appeal

*See right now the game is completely played for the players, on their schedule, for their benefit, every rule, every interpretation. There's nothing done for people who might want to watch (Angus, Focus Group 1)*

As the sport has been controlled and administered exclusively by the players and is without formal officiating, it is no surprise that it has developed characteristics which are more conducive to player demands than spectator needs. Participants cited the following characteristics as interfering from the potential viewing pleasure of the sport: players

slowing the pace of the game by extending the length of time of stoppages; player arguments in attempts to resolve rule disagreements; lack of experience and knowledge of the sport on behalf of spectators.

*Even as a player, I'm beginning to resent these blow-ups that last five minutes. (Angus, Focus Group 1)*

*[It] would make the game more appealing, because, like my parents came to watch Ultimate twice and my dad, he's really into sports and stuff and his major complaint is that it's not spectator friendly at all. For one thing, even a lot of major tournaments, is the scoreboards. Even if you're just a casual observer you come by, I know half the time I don't even know what the score is, and half the time, even in the most serious of games, no one knows the score and you have to hack it out and come at a best guess. You usually know the gap but you don't know if it's 8-6 or 9-7 right, and that can be one of the most competitive games. So that is one aspect that could be addressed. The one thing that I would like to see that sort of relates to Spirit of the Game in the way it is used right now, if we're going to have self refereed at the highest level then lets try and put a cap on how long an argument lasts like, that's all I try to do as one of the captains on our team, when there's an argument is to try and minimize the length of it as opposed to like taking sides. (Angus, Focus Group 1)*

In contrast, there was a strong feeling on behalf of some participants of the study that the actual physical playing of the sport of Ultimate was a marketable product. Many told stories of experiences they had bringing people who had never seen the sport and how much they marveled at the action in the sport.

*I think of the people that came out to see it and were just blown away by how neat it was to watch even though they didn't understand. My parents took the whole week off work just to come and watch us - "an exciting game". (Sue, Focus Group 2)*

The athleticism and excitement were cited as strengths of the sport by spectators as well

as visibly unique features such as the self officiating and sportspersonship which was demonstrated.

There seemed to be a feeling from players that spectators needed to be engaged in as direct a manner as possible in order to appreciate Ultimate and build a fan base. This referred to ideally having them actually see and experience the sport on the sideline amongst the competitors. The features of the sport, including the flow of the game, were felt to be best appreciated live.

*Can we take t.v. and push it ahead without having that base of people that have played the sport as a kid or even just played it a little bit so that they know what the game is about and than be able to watch it. I don't think it will sell to a public that hasn't played the game. (Nora, Focus Group 2)*

*In order to sell it to the public you have to have them see it live. (Sue, Focus Group 2)*

It was also noted that there has been limited effort and resources put into the promotion of the sport. In this case, market research, possibly a function of the emerging relationship with the U.P.A. and marketing company, might be an approach to better understand the wants of the viewing public. The U.P.A. as a collective players association serves its greater membership and not merely elite level players. It is possible that the perceived lack of initiatives in this regard is conscious and reflects a desire on behalf of organizational leadership of the association to preserve the nature of the sport.

### Image

The data suggested that the image of the sport and its participants is a feature

strongly related to any relationship with a mass audience. Image and perceptions have also been issues for competitive players who seemed disturbed by the way the sport is understood or represented by outsiders. Current competitive players reflected on their initial impressions of the sport:

*I think that's a really important issue. I mean I almost didn't play 'cause I thought it was a weenie game. I don't know how to put it. (Malik, Focus Group 1)*

*I understand perceptions, like I only started playing 'cause of a bet, like someone said Frisbee and I was just like yeah, whatever, you're not even an athlete. (Jon, Focus Group 1)*

*I still think that there is a perception that it is still a hippie sport. (Tom, Focus Group 1)*

Much of the image of the sport seems to have been constructed on the meanings associated with the object of the game, the disc or Frisbee. As a result of the game being stigmatized with associations of leisurely beach activity including Frisbee catching trick dogs or the marijuana smoking neo-hippie culture, the identity of the sport has yet to crystallize.

*I think one of the differences right now and one of the problems Ultimate faces in getting more recognition and getting the sponsorship that goes along with that is the actual equipment that goes with it is still viewed as not a real sports instrument. Whatever you say is that the frisbee, despite that we know that it takes high intensity, athleticism and smarts, it takes all these things, you're still playing with something that is regarded as a toy and until that changes I don't see the sponsorship coming as well as some of the bad things I suppose. (Joanne, Focus Group 2)*

Athletes seem unwilling to address the issue of outsider perceptions other than by demonstrating their skills and athleticism during competition. For instance, there is little

evidence that drug use at competitions is on the decrease. One younger player voiced this remark during one discussion:

*I think there's a lot more drugs in Ultimate than in other sports. I don't know if it's true...(Malik, Focus Group 1)*

The topic of discussion at the time was the undesirable or improper behaviour of players as judged by a mainstream sport community not by the Ultimate community. Participants recognized that the behaviour of competitors and the lack of traditional figures such as referees contributes to the image of the sport and feeds perceptions of the game as illegitimate or lacking credibility as a sport form.

#### Developmental stage of sport

Participants felt that Ultimate, having been invented only thirty years ago, is a sport which is still in its very early stages of development. While it has achieved high levels of growth, it has yet to produce or find a critical mass audience to act as the necessary demand for a commercial product.

*It's still in its infancy or younger adolescence in terms of how pervasive it is. (Gord, Focus Group 1)*

At an organized, competitive level it is still very much a first generation sport where the majority of players who have competed for championships - post 1980 - are still active. As time passes and this generation leaves the sport to make room for new and increasing numbers of competitive players, the demand for media coverage may grow.

*If people don't know what the game is then good luck to those trying to market it. The game will have to be understood by a significant portion of the viewer market before it's even worth putting out there as a spectator sport. (Jack, Focus Group 1)*

The commercial success will not only "depend on how much the sport grows" (Ed, Focus Group 1) but also on the manner and direction in which the sport develops. The desires of the community and existing culture must be carefully considered regardless of the volume of players competing.

#### Administrative and organizational inadequacy

Participants in the study did acknowledge that the North American community has made strides at the administrative level, but excessive bureaucracy would conflict with the self-regulated culture of the sport. As one respondent pointed out, the U.P.A. does provide a great deal for the community who comprise its paid membership.

*The UPA delivers a whole host of services -- most particularly: the running of 30+ sectional tournaments twice per year (college and open), the many regionals, and two nationals -- as well as the other sanctioned tourneys -- all of which are insured. This, of course, is spread out all over the country (continent) and these series tourneys are run by volunteers, and the whole thing is put together by an organization of just 2.5 employees and a \$250,000 budget. Much of this work, of course, is done "behind the scenes" -- contributing to a sense that the U.P.A. may not be delivering goods and services that are expected. (E-mail 1)*

However, the consensus was that it is still an area in need of change in order to accommodate a shift in direction for the sport. The fact that the organization and administration of the sport, which falls into the hands of volunteers, did not meet the demands of elite players may be a reflection of the vacillating nature and competing

interests of participants who remain uncertain as to how the sport ought to be administered or what might fulfill their expectations.

*I enjoy the grassroots feel to the organization and the sense of community that exists because of that, but I also feel that it makes the sport come across as more of a leisure activity than a competitive sport. (E-mail 1)*

*Structure tends to facilitate quality of play and quality of administration -- who knows whether that is "good" or "bad". (E-mail 1)*

As can be expected, the existing structures and administrative network are rather telling of the community which it serves and characterizes.

*This lack of a solid organizational structure may be in part due to the fact that the sport has traditionally attracted players who don't want to be restricted by "too many rules". Players often react badly when they are forced to follow rules which they perceive aren't in their best interests (e.g., starting games on time, adhering to time caps, playing with a certain gender ratio). (E-mail 1)*

While virtually all participants who commented on the volunteer group of administrators had positive sentiments, there seemed to be critique surrounding the lack of professionalism. Poor communication and a lack of administrative background or training were two factors which respondents addressed in this regard. This seemed to be acceptable to participants given the current reward structure for administrators who do it largely out of love for the sport but given any shift in direction would need to be improved upon. The rate of development in this area was thought to be hindered by individual agendas which did not seem to embrace change or experimentation and were satisfied with the current rate of development for the sport.

*These volunteers come in with lots of enthusiasm and exert a great deal of effort to further the sport. But I believe that many (if not most) have little*

*or no previous experience doing these organizational tasks. They therefore end up doing things in a very inefficient way. There also seems to be very little organizational knowledge being adopted from other organizations or indeed from other sports. I think that Ultimate organizers are constantly "reinventing the wheel". In the long run, this has slowed the development of Ultimate. (E-mail 2)*

Conversely, the flexibility and adaptability of tournament directors and administrators were viewed as a strength by some participants. With teams dropping out the day of competitions or when field privileges were suddenly taken away, administrators have typically responded admirably to very demanding situations. Some participants however, were less sympathetic to the contribution of the administrators.

*I find that the majority of the tournaments come across as being put together at last minute, even though planning has been put into them. This comment is probably a reflection on individual organizers or groups. (E-mail 2)*

Given the criticism directed at this area of the sport, organizers are ultimately dealing with and are judged based upon expectations of competitors. Many of these individuals come from other sports which have more highly evolved administrative structures that are often funded heavily by government or the private sector. As more resources come into the sport, it was felt that this area will be addressed.

It should be noted that the U.P.A. fairs well in their annual membership feedback poll. This survey covers all areas of services delivered by the association including the promotion of the sport, quality of tournament organization, quality of newsletter, etc. (U.P.A. Newsletter; 1996, V16, #2). Respondents to this survey are elite level players, other competitive players, as well general U.P.A. membership.

### Economic conditions and the status of sport delivery system

This form of resistance can be understood as the current economic climate which is not conducive to organizations such as government or universities and colleges spending highly precious resources on a newly emerging sport, one which brings other issues to any decision making process including its unfavourable image and legitimacy concerns. The promotion of new sports is not on many institutional agendas. As one respondent explained:

*From outside, sport organizations have to increasingly do more with fewer resources, thus are trying not to include new sports like Ultimate in their responsibilities. (E-mail 3)*

This same individual went into further detail regarding the sport's relationships with formal institutions:

*[There is] increasing difficulty of finding sufficient field space in the prevailing neo-conservative regime of declining resources for frills like sports, thus requiring accommodation to the bureaucratic institutions which control those resources. (E-mail 3)*

Understanding this dilemma may explain the seemingly low of expectations levels demonstrated by elite players for resources being put into their sport. As such, the corresponding willingness and ability to pay the costs of participating, which for competitive players can approximate \$3,000 - \$4,000 in travel expenses alone, currently addresses this impediment.

### ***Consequences of change: speculation as to the future of Ultimate***

The purpose of this section is to draw on the data which addressed the

consequences of a shift in direction toward an institutionalized, commodified version of the sport. Consideration must be given as to how certain elements can be mediated with one another (*i.e.*, traditional elements of Ultimate such as the Spirit of the Game principle in relation to outside sponsor interest and audience demands).

The majority of participants believed that the consequences of change would affect the fundamental elements of the sport: i) technical and structural elements of the sport (*e.g.*, rule changes, officiating, roster size, etc.) and, ii) cultural elements of the sport - values, norms, meanings (*e.g.*, player characteristics, shared values, etc.)

#### *Technical and structural elements of the sport*

The majority of participants in the study who speculated as to the future form of the sport and its competition structure were of the belief that the sport would undergo a distinct split.

*I think there is room for both views on the game. Many other sports have two-tiered structures. The players on the pro golf tour have quite a different reputation from the weekend golfers. Pro tennis players don't follow the same rules...If a certain group of players wants to do something different with the game, they shouldn't be harassed. I find it extremely hypocritical that the (stereo) typical Frisbee player is liberal and sprouts off how the individual should have all these choices and rights, yet when someone disagrees with his concepts, he tries to crucify that someone. (E-mail 2)*

The competitive tier would incorporate commercial demands, become commodified and embrace mainstream values and practices. The recreational tier would maintain existing structures, including the role of Spirit of the Game, and would be true to the origins and ideals of the sport in its grassroots form. It was felt by some that this development ought

to be initiated by the administrators in the sport.

*I suppose, I wish that "they" ("they" being the ones who shape the development of the sport and organize it, U.P.A., W.F.D.F., etc.) would have a more open mind to changing the sport for the better. I wish that making the sport popular, having more people playing, would be higher on their agenda. I feel that, similar to other sports, there can be, roughly speaking, two tiers of play - competitive and grass roots - and that agendas to promote each can be developed separately. This would include the issues of refs, sponsorship, etc. (E-mail 2)*

The split or formation of "two different alternatives" would certainly create tensions and involve rule changes to accommodate the interest of outside parties including sponsors and spectators. While the current lack of spectator appeal was identified as a barrier to change, participants in the study feel that it will eventually be eroded. This will involve further experimentation with rule changes. Although what participants seem less certain about is the effect of this change:

*But I think that the more vocal people in the sport believe that changes to the rules will undermined that and in the long run will get rid of it. And I really don't think that's true. (Angus, Focus Group 1)*

The context of this statement was in reference to a discussion about Spirit of the Game and Ultimate's unique character. The experimentation with rule changes on behalf of the N.U.A. is an example of technical change. Very few participants addressed this directly which may be indicative of the limited success the association has had. What this implies is that this group of experienced players and administrators seem convinced that there will be a fracturing of levels of play to create two distinct forms that will seemingly adopt different ideologies, agendas and methods of playing the sport of Ultimate. This

would be the product of responses and resistances to institutional pressures and will undoubtedly be problematic.

### *Cultural elements of the sport*

The domain of cultural elements refers to the shared social and subcultural aspects of the sport, including participant characteristics, and the shared values, beliefs and practices which define the group. It was believed that this domain will undergo dramatic change given a shift in direction.

The first area that is believed to undergo significant change is the player makeup of the sport. Focus group data indicated that the commercial version of the sport, given its different foci will attract a new kind of player. This type of individual was thought to be attracted to the sport not because of its non-traditional or subcultural principles and culture but rather by its athletic demands or elements consistent with mainstream sport and dominant sport culture including the win-at-all-costs ethic. This player, while probably being more athletic, will be more removed from the roots of the game and will have a limited sense of the original ideals of the sport.

*If there's a radical change in direction, we are going to attract new people to the sport and I think that those people who will be attracted to the sport are going to be higher level athletes that are not going to smoke dope before they go out and play. I assume they won't. (Nina, Focus Group 2)*

Although this portion of the dialogue was fairly tongue and cheek (smoking marijuana before serious competition is extremely rare), the point is well taken. Gina's comment about the use of other commonly abused substances drew laughter from the

group. Several players believed that as the sport becomes higher in quality, with an influx of top-level athletes, that this will make top club teams very difficult to make. One player described the current situation in the sport:

*In Ultimate, if you are athletic, you can make an internationally competitive team within two years, which is pretty unheard of in mainstream sports. (E-mail 2)*

With this shift in direction for at least one tier of the sport, there is bound to be change in the shared values and incentives for new elite level players. Existing incentives of peer respect and individual and team development were believed to become secondary in the new form of Ultimate.

*Yeah, the motivation will become extrinsic as opposed to intrinsic because now we are not doing it for the cash, we're doing it for the love of the sport whereas if there is money involved or a big prize then there is a shift in motivation. I mean you may not want it to and there will be teams that still do it for themselves and there is always that aspect of it, but when there is the lure of money people will change their attitudes. (Joanne, Focus Group 2)*

As values and attitudes change, as manifestations of the degree of adherence to ideals of the marketplace and mainstream sporting practices including efficiency, profitability and the win-at-all-costs ethic, the behaviour of Ultimate players will most certainly change. The amateur quality and unconstrained practices will be challenged or compromised. This, participants believed, will create a new environment and culture that incoming players must be socialized into. Norms will reflect the culture of the community as well as those values and ideals of the new kind of individual to be attracted to the sport. "Deviant" practices including drug use and disrespecting property will have to be curbed. These emerging norms will include behaviours consistent with a win-at-all costs mentality

which is not currently as strong a force at the elite level.

*We all like winning but that's not what we brought up. But I think that if it does move in that more commercial direction or a much more win based direction that that will necessarily seep through, that's what's there....snarky games would have become that much worse, much more win-at-all-costs. (Joanne, Focus Group 2)*

*I can see it becoming much more of an individualistic sport. (Nora, Focus Group 2)*

The tone of the focus groups seemed to be one where participants seemed grateful for their association with the sport at this time in its history. Although this was not explicitly stated, timely comments such as "*I maintain that if you commercialize it you might lose spirit of the game*" (Nora, Focus Group 2) after having praised the virtues of the principle and "*when I stop having fun, I'll stop playing competitively*" (Gina, Focus Group 2) leads one to believe that the future of the sport could look and mean something very different than its current form.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

From an institutional theory perspective, this study represents a case of researching beyond the scope of traditional subjects such as large organizations or multinational firms and into the community of individuals who have a stake in the development of their sport and its organization. Institutional theory has much to offer to the analysis of emergent cultural practices which are faced with the prospect of mainstream acceptance.

The value of this perspective was in aiding with the identification and understanding of specific forces which exist and act upon the Ultimate community. Oliver (1991) in particular emphasized the types of resistances to institutional pressures, many of which were active in this community. It is important to remember that institutional theory emerged as an investigation into formal structures and institutional character in organizations (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Institutional theory's applicability to the case of Ultimate in North America is complimented by the consideration of participant's beliefs and opinions about development and change.

The organization of Ultimate, while democratic in principle, is not typical of highly bureaucratic sport organizations. The uniquely fluid organizational structure, facilitated by the Internet as a popular means of communication, presents a different form and character than is typically studied in sport organization research (Clegg, Hardy & Nord, 1996). Clegg, Hardy and Nord (1996) noted that such forms are increasingly characteristic of the postmodern age where technical change, and marketplace developments and interdependencies pave the way for less conventional structures. While this style of organization is one which is not part of the legitimate mainstream sport order

(Slack & Hinings, 1992), it reflects a subcultural community and its ideas of how best to represent itself and coordinate activity.

As a process which is fundamentally about individual and group conformity, of mind and body, any perspective must adopt appropriate considerations for research purposes.

### *The meaning and significance of the development of Ultimate*

A further contribution of this research is its emphasis on a particular relationship, one which may seem obvious but is strongly emphasized with the study of Ultimate in North America. It is the relationship between institutionalizing cultural practices and the capitalist system which dominates our social existence and determines the development of activities once they are within the scope of the marketplace (Ingham & Hardy, 1984).

Much of the theory informing the framework of this study is based on research of phenomena such as organizational forms and structures which exist within a capitalist system (Friedland & Alford, 1987). This is consistent with the taken-for-granted assumptions and consequences of this system. The case of Ultimate provides evidence of a subcultural community which at a level rejects many of the tenets of this system.

Having emerged out of the 1960s and seemingly representing ideals of what originators believed sport ought to be, Ultimate continues to have a strong sense of appeal for participants to that which is counterculture to the dominant ideals and practices of mainstream sport. This relates to Frisbee's is often association with the "New Leisure Movement" whose philosophy was cooperation, self-expression and anti-competition

(Donnelly, 1985; Humphreys, 1997; Kidd, 1995). Its uniqueness is further exemplified by the recent mentioning of Ultimate as a model for sport in a report by the Feminist Majority Foundation (U.P.A. Newsletter, 1997, V17, #2) which suggests that it might be a valuable forum for the investigation into gender issues in a sport which, unlike mainstream practices, has consciously embraced and explored the political dimension of gender issues within its framework and structure.

Ultimate's emergence in North America coincides with what Morgan (1994) suggested was the development of the now heavily commercialized sport/entertainment industry. Heron (1991) suggested that conforming to the rational and technical values of the capitalist system produces a loss of expressive, "non-rational" values such as self-expression and cooperation. Participants' sense of jeopardy about existing ideals is warranted given any tendency of change toward mainstream sport practices. It is as though many of those who have to date witnessed the changes of increased capital interests in contemporary sport (Morgan, 1994) (*i.e.*, emphasis on marketing and merchandising, increased media coverage), view their activity and community as existing outside the capitalist determined marketplace. Participants use of terms such as *"I'd love to sell out"* (Angus, Focus Group 1) when discussing the incentives outside of their sport and culture are indications of a desire by some for a new direction. This sentiment reflects a willingness for stronger ties to commercial forces. Significantly, these ties have even been described as damaging and not in the best interest of the sport. These relationships however do serve the interests of many top competitive or elite players who seek new developments in their sport.

### ***The impact of forces affecting the direction of Ultimate: an institutional perspective***

Scott's (1995) three institutional approaches, the cognitive, normative and regulative, allow for classification of the identified community characteristics and institutional considerations. Each approach emphasizes different characteristics of this research which address the developmental process of Ultimate. A cognitive approach emphasizes the importance of the knowledge and other facets of cognition of Ultimate community members as to their situation in time and place. The understandings on behalf of the participant base of this study were most likely enhanced by their educational backgrounds. Whereas cognitive theory emphasizes the unconscious, taken-for-granted assumptions defining social reality (Scott, 1995), it seemed as though these data reflected a group with a strong understanding of its reality as participants in a unique sport and community. Their ability to articulate ideas about the sport's development demonstrated assumptions surrounding the role of sportpersonship in North American sport and what the significance of Ultimate is in the realm of team sports. The shared understandings and beliefs which existed surrounding the values of individual autonomy expressed in the self-officiated game for example, reflect the cultural fabric which characterizes the community.

The Spirit of the Game principle, while partly a credo of sportpersonship in the community, serves an important technical function (*i.e.*, enabling the sport to be played without referees). Additionally, it has become the symbol, an objective reality which according to Zucker (1977) provides a framework of meaning to the community.

Commonly heard language such as "he has no spirit" or a sarcastic "nice spirit of the

game" exist as a means for others to exert influence and demonstrate their sense of meaning, about sportspersonship and the activity in general.

The image of the sport and the existing "deviant" practices are two elements which normative theory emphasizes and were identified as important elements in the institutionalization of Ultimate. Importantly, analysis of the data reflected much satisfaction with the existing state of social norms when contextualized from within the community. For example, it was only when discussing a more commercial direction that norms such as urinating in public or recreational drug use were criticized. This suggests that obviously such behaviours have been accepted within the community. Given the existing value system such actions are deemed permissible and within the range of practices endorsed by the community. However, in the determination of acceptable behaviour in the institutional order of mainstream sport, the perception is that the image of the sport must be different and participants' behaviour must be like that of athletes from legitimate sports which is typically conservative and constrained by tradition and authority (Gruneau, 1983; Morgan, 1994; Gruneau & Whitson, 1993).

The regulative approach brought attention to a critical result. There is a principle which is perceived to exist which determines the acceptance of a given practice within the greater order of professional mainstream sport. It is that a sport must be spectator friendly and must have or create what is judged to be a sufficiently large audience or target market. Ultimate in its current form which emphasizes and displays values of cooperation and sportspersonship has not achieved this. While these values seem to be essential ideals of sport, they have not created or contributed to the emergence of a significant audience.

The necessity of having entertainment qualities which may in fact conflict with those very qualities espoused by endorsers of sport may be an axiom or truth which cannot be circumvented. Alignment with commercial demands represents a critical ingredient in the mainstreaming of a sport and goes a long way to legitimizing the environment in which it operates (Beal, 1995).

The results of this study do support Morgan's (1994) theory regarding the process of institutionalization as it exists currently in the North American sport world. He emphasized the degree of change and disruption of existing practices about the activity as a result of powerful institutional forces. As Morgan would have surmised, there is data which indicated that capitalist interests could sufficiently influence the sport in order to produce a different form and quality of game. Rule experimentation done for the purpose of making the sport spectator friendly and the ongoing player and administrator debates in the community as administrators and players seek a direction and possible mainstream identity are evidence of this. While Morgan's leftist perspective facilitated a critique of capitalist processes, the case of Ultimate does demonstrate disturbing consequences of the process of institutionalization. Recall that many players seemed resigned to and prepared to commit to a commercialized form of the game despite the fact that they felt it was detrimental to the sport and would profoundly affect the overwhelmingly positive experience of playing the sport currently. This sense of inevitability may reflect recognition by participants of the influence of pressures of growth and commercial forces. It speaks to the power of political and economic forces in influencing the development of emerging cultural practices. These forces have influenced the mainstream sport forms. As

the data regarding the representation of mainstream sport suggested, participation in some sports, with dominant sport cultures, provided an unsatisfying or problematic experience for some participants of this study.

### ***The significance of resistances***

The range of responses to institutional pressures are based on research which has typically dealt with organizational demands and their relationship with employee considerations (Oliver, 1991). Organizational members confronted with the challenge of adhering to pressures would conceivably have a great deal at stake, that is maintaining employment or professional success. The nature of the Ultimate community and the manner in which it is organized featuring elected leadership and player ownership and control creates a different dynamic. This situation arguably features less at stake for participants (*i.e.*, volunteer employment, leisure activity, than typical organizations and their employees). However, the community displays resistances none the less. Hall, Slack, Smith and Whitson (1991) asserted that institutionalization depends less on the character of the activity and group but more on political and economic resources that could be mobilized by its practitioners and sponsors. This could be challenged based on our knowledge of this participant community. Much resistance can be linked directly to the character of the group including player values, behavioural norms and divided attitudes.

The resistances which characterize this community are similar to what Scott (1987) had classified within his continuum of responses as moderate. The subcultural

elements, counterculture identity and unifying shared values such as respect within the community may contribute to the manner of response to institutional pressures. A large and educated community which places such value on cooperation and understanding would have seemingly less potential for radical change than other communities such as the skateboarding movement and its punk and anti-establishment roots (Beal, 1995).

Organization for change is more difficult with a geographically diverse population. Additionally, there is sharing of perspectives and tolerance of competing perspectives which might impede a movement for radical change. This from a community which may generally be older than other counterculture sport communities such as skateboarding, one which is further removed from its rebellious, youthful angst and nonconformist tendencies (Humphreys, 1997).

Defiance, both of the prospects of change and stability, has been a characteristic response of community members as suggested by data which referred to the N.U.A. initiatives and how this was interpreted by the community. As one respondent noted:

*A good example is seen by the number of rec. sport disc posts that condemn the N.U.A. for running tournaments with referees.... The players that are resistant to change (knowingly or unknowingly) send the message to society that Ultimate is happy to remain in its relative obscurity. (E-mail 3 - [rec. sport disc is an on-line Ultimate newsgroup])*

### ***Conclusion: The compromised future of Ultimate***

There is an obvious consideration which must be the starting point for any critical analysis of the future of the sport. That is the sport in its current form is a uniquely appealing team sport which continues to grow rapidly and be embraced by new

recreational and competitive players alike. What is essentially being discussed is change to what has developed into an existing success. Data suggested that many believe that change of a fairly drastic order is imminent. However, the type of change either alluded to or proposed by participants of this study is change which on the surface seems to offer compromise but may in fact produce end products which are more problematic. A competitive tier with mainstream ideals and roles and norms, similar to the vision of the N.U.A., would be a radical contradiction to the recreational tier which would remain grassroots. Advocates suggest that this split would offer agreeable alternatives to all kinds of individuals. However, each would foster its own culture, and with different cultural systems and values, the entire community would have to reconcile with competing perspectives and agendas. The two different forms would offer very different experiences.

The community is one which is faced with challenge. As it is characteristically cooperative and non-conformist, members seek resolution through experimentation and discussion. The community has yet to embrace and possibly consequentialize the value of compromise, arguably the most democratic form of response. It seems as though that with sport, compromise is an inevitable response mechanism (Oliver, 1991), a mediating factor for any counterculture practice (Beal, 1995, Humphreys, 1997; Morgan, 1994). Humphrey's study of the commercialization of snowboarding found that even a community which in general was supportive of a commercial direction as "professionalism did not pose a threat to snowboarding's philosophy, it became a goal" (1997, p.152), faced such a challenge and compromise to cultural aspects of the sport:

*Snowboarding's commercialization, like its professionalization, also meant compromise...Snowboarding's relationship with capitalism, then, consists of a maze of possibilities which are simultaneously restricting and*

*liberating....The relationship, however, is also dialectical: while the new flexibility benefited snowboarders directly by providing a greater range of accessible and cheaper boards and accessories, as well as mediating tolerance, snowboarding provided capitalism with a new source of styles to exploit. Post Fordism also facilitated capitalism's appropriation of snowboarding styles, meanings and values. (Humphreys, 1997, p. 152 )*

While this commercialization has occurred a number of times recently with activities such as skateboarding and mountain biking (Beal, 1995), there are few cases where there is a team dimension involved. This introduces a very different dynamic to the process. The considerations are obviously not only at the level of the individual but at that of the group. Player considerations in this study addressed "group" elements as integral to the experience of playing Ultimate. For example, cooperation and the social nature of the community were importantly collective elements and significant characteristics of this group culture. Top-level athletes in individual competitions have been socialized through a different system and structure emphasizing different elements and would likely adopt the different values of this system. Additionally, the dimension of communication that exists within a group with common goals permits discussion regarding developments which affect them individually or collectively.

A new commercial form of Ultimate at the elite level (Figure 5.1), regardless of its relationship to grassroots activity, ultimately will be the most visible and accessible for the

# COMPETITIVE STRUCTURE OF ULTIMATE IN NORTH AMERICA

<i>Level</i>	<i>Current structure (Amateur)</i>	<i>Future structure (Commercialized)</i>
<i>Recreational</i>	major league season in summer coed; emerging women's leagues	major league season in summer coed; increased popularity of both coed and women's only leagues facility and field availability primary concern
<i>Competitive</i>	tournaments -mostly in U.S. -unsanctioned and sanctioned events -very limited sponsorship	showcase tournaments with officials -private sector sponsorship -U.P.A. administered; role of N.U.A? -invitation only, cash prizes
	<i>Major Competitions</i> Canadian National Championships -C.U.P.A. regulated -3-4 day event -minimal qualifying	<i>Competitive Professional League</i> -east/west division; city teams -weekly games (minimum) -could be modification of U.P.A. series
	U.P.A. National Championship Series (over six weeks) -Sectionals -Regionals -Nationals	U.P.A. Competitive Series -modified to reflect elite level needs -demanding qualifying

Note: The following diagram is a representation of the current and possibly future structure of Ultimate in North America. Because of the great many forces and factors which will affect the development of the sport, it is extremely difficult to predict the path of Ultimate with much accuracy. This diagram reflects the data of this study and my knowledge of the competitive structures of the sport. It features increased relations with sponsors, the use of officials, and treatment of the sport as a commodity much like mainstream sport forms.

**Figure 5.1** Competitive Structure of Ultimate in North America

consuming public. If the sport appears just like other mainstream team sports, it will likely exist as such in the minds of the masses. This reality will be constructed based on the experience with a given form of Ultimate and for many, given acceptance into the mainstream, this will be communicated via popular media. This will involve the redefinition of rules or code for this version of the game (Sacco, 1988) including a different foundation on which to legitimize the new form of Ultimate.

This alignment with dominant, institutionalized sport cultures is deeply connected with capitalist ideology and therefore reinforces the lived practices and experiences not of the traditions and philosophy of Ultimate and the counterculture but rather of advanced capitalist relations (Beal, 1995). In order to achieve cultural integration with the broader North American Ultimate community, this group of participants would have to overcome prejudicial beliefs that a newly organized sub-group/division has nothing to offer to the sport and greater community (Partridge, 1982). We have seen evidence of this in the criticisms of the N.U.A. and the fact that they have struggled to launch a successful series of tournament competitions. In the case of Ultimate in North America, this involves reducing the perceived threat to grassroots Ultimate which would still be the form played by the majority of North American players. As participants in this study have substantiated, the original ideals of the sport are highly valued. One can only conclude that the playing out of multiple desires, from members with varying perspectives, will be problematic and threaten the existing character of Ultimate and its North American community.

### ***Recommendations for future research***

This study in many ways represented an attempt to forge new ground both from a theoretical and practical standpoint. This research was one of the few examples of an institutional perspective being used to contribute to our understanding of emerging or existing sport forms and possibly to predict their future development. Additionally, it appears to be the first major study in North America devoted exclusively to the sport of Ultimate and its community of participants. As a result, there are many opportunities for future researchers with respect to methodology, applications of theory and accessing members of sport subcultural communities. The following is a list of recommendations which are a result of the findings of this study:

*1. Research into the process of institutionalization of Ultimate in different countries, under different political and sport delivery systems, is needed.*

A comparative approach investigating the broader implications of the significance of Capitalist tenants and practices and their influence as contrasted with a Socialist method of delivering services and creating institutions. For instance, the North American development of the sport has been radically different from the development of the sport in Sweden where it has been embraced by the government funded sport delivery system. As a result, that community has been faced with different challenges than the North American community which is struggling for a future form and identity for the sport within or outside its commercial mainstream.

*2. There should be more empirically based studies of counterculture or alternative sports, particularly team sports.*

From the review of literature on sport subcultures, little was found in the way of research which gave voice to the participant community that is involved in these meaningful and powerful cultural practices. While the most useful material came from Beal (1995) and Humphreys (1997), both lacked a participant perspective sufficient to lend credibility to strong statements and representations of the cultures or subcultures of study which in this case were skateboarding and snowboarding respectively. I believe that by emphasizing participants' sentiments and experiences we are offered a perspective, an insight into their constructed realities, which is necessary in the study of sport from a cultural or institutional paradigm. Additionally, this would contribute to the legitimization and value of the study of sport as a telling and meaningful social and cultural practice.

*3. More studies should incorporate institutional theory or institutional perspective into their framework when studying the change or development of a sport form.*

Institutional theory does provide valuable insight into the tendencies of organizations and individuals. It is particularly relevant during a change or developmental process whereby groups or individuals must contend with the power and influence of existing and dominant (institutionalized) practices and structures. This is particularly relevant from a sporting context given that contemporary mainstream sport is now fused with the entertainment industry and has aligned itself with the values and culture of this domain.

The combining of voices of organizational administrators and participants of the

sport was a technique that was inspired by the institutional theory framework. Further use of this approach might uncover compelling consistencies or discrepancies between philosophies and practices of similar groups in other sports.

*4. More research is needed which is concerned with the meaning and experience of participation in sport in terms of: i) Gender differences and, ii) Age or generational differences*

*i) Gender differences*

The focus group discussions revealed evidence of different values and motivations for competing in the sport of Ultimate at its highest level. Further research ought to consider the relationship between the male dominated, professional world of sport and how that influences the “reality” of participants. This recommendation is based on the data which suggested that the men identified with the professionalization and commodification of Ultimate differently than the women who concentrated on other elements of the development of the sport such as the social aspect and its importance to the group.

*ii) Age or generational differences (historical perspective)*

Future research on the sport of Ultimate, particularly work employing a sociological or cultural perspective, ought to concern itself with the significance of the ages of participants of the study. The opportunities for entry into the sport have grown along with the game's popularity. There was some evidence that players socialized through recreational, coed league play were older and had a different appreciation of

Ultimate's traditional ideals than those who were younger and may have entered the sport via competitive high school or college teams. Perhaps a study employing a historical perspective, to uncover differences in values and attitudes and whether they have changed over time, given different means of entry into the sport and culture, is warranted.

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*Appendix A: Letter to the U.P.A.*

**Dear Ultimate Players Association,**

I am a graduate student in the School of Human Kinetics at the University of British Columbia and am working on a research project for my Master's thesis on the institutionalization of Ultimate in North America. My research seeks to identify the pressures and forms of resistance influencing the future direction of the sport and the significance of this in terms of the experience of Ultimate. The title of my research project is: *The **Ultimate** Alternative: A study of the institutionalization of an emerging sporting practice.*

My study requires the involvement of members of the Ultimate community. In particular, two groups have been identified that I need your assistance with. Three individuals who originally founded the sport and 15-20 current key decision-makers or leaders within the North American Ultimate community will need to be accessed. Three founders will be interviewed by me (possibly over the phone) and current key leaders will be asked to participate in e-mail discussions about the future of the sport.

The following criteria have been established for the respective groups.

Founders (interviews with three individuals):

1. Relation to early history: must have been part of the founding body (located in New Jersey)
2. Influence: individuals' impact and contribution to the conception and early development of the sport as determined by the U.P.A. staff with consideration of time involved and level of contribution

Key decision-makers (e-mail discussions with 15-20 individuals)

1. Current position: must be a team captain of a competitive, touring team or must be a representative on one of the Ultimate associations (U.P.A, C.U.P.A., N.U.A.)
2. Accessibility: must have Internet access; address known to the U.P.A.

The purpose of this letter is to request your assistance in identifying and contacting potential participants. Any information you could provide would be extremely helpful. Please contact me at [mj@unixg.ubc.ca](mailto:mj@unixg.ubc.ca) with a list of potential Ultimate founders and key leaders. A summary report of the study will be sent to the association as a resource for the Ultimate community. The document may prove useful as its findings could have implications in influencing policy or practice regarding the administration of Ultimate.

Thank you,

Michael Firth, M.A. student

I have read the attached letter of consent and have received a copy of it for my files. I understand what is requested of the U.P.A. in the study entitled *The Ultimate Alternative: A study of the institutionalization of an emerging sporting practice.*

I CONSENT to participate and assist with research objectives in the study.

Organizational Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I DO NOT CONSENT to participate and assist with research objectives in the study.

Organizational Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the attached letter of consent and have received a copy of it for my files. I understand what is required of participants in the study entitled *The **Ultimate** Alternative: A study of the institutionalization of an emerging sporting practice.*

I CONSENT to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I DO NOT CONSENT to participate in the study.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## *Appendix C: Document Analysis Sources*

### Sources for Document Analysis

1. Ultimate Players Association Newsletter, 1994-1997. Published by the Ultimate Players Association, Colorado Springs, Colorado.  
(Note: This newsletter is closer to a trade journal or magazine than what is commonly understood as a newsletter. Each issue is approximately thirty pages.)
2. Ultimate Players Association Ninth edition rules, 1996. Published by the Ultimate Players Association, Colorado Springs, Colorado.
3. Disc Drive, A. Zagoria. *Star Ledger*, July 30, 1997, p.57-58.
4. Original Frisbie, S. Polk. *Yale*, February, 1996, p. 46-48.
5. This is a metaphor, Z. Gartner. *Georgia Straight*, August, 1992, V26 #1285.

## *Appendix D: Focus Group Questions*

### Focus Group Questions

1. How were you introduced to the sport of Ultimate?
2. What initially attracted you to the sport?
3. What is your motivation for playing the sport competitively?
4. How is Ultimate different from other mainstream team sports?
5. Some feel that Ultimate should maintain its roots while others feel it should become more like traditional team sports in order to prosper. What are your views on this debate?
6. Do you foresee the meaning of Ultimate changing over time? If so, what is the significance of this potential change?

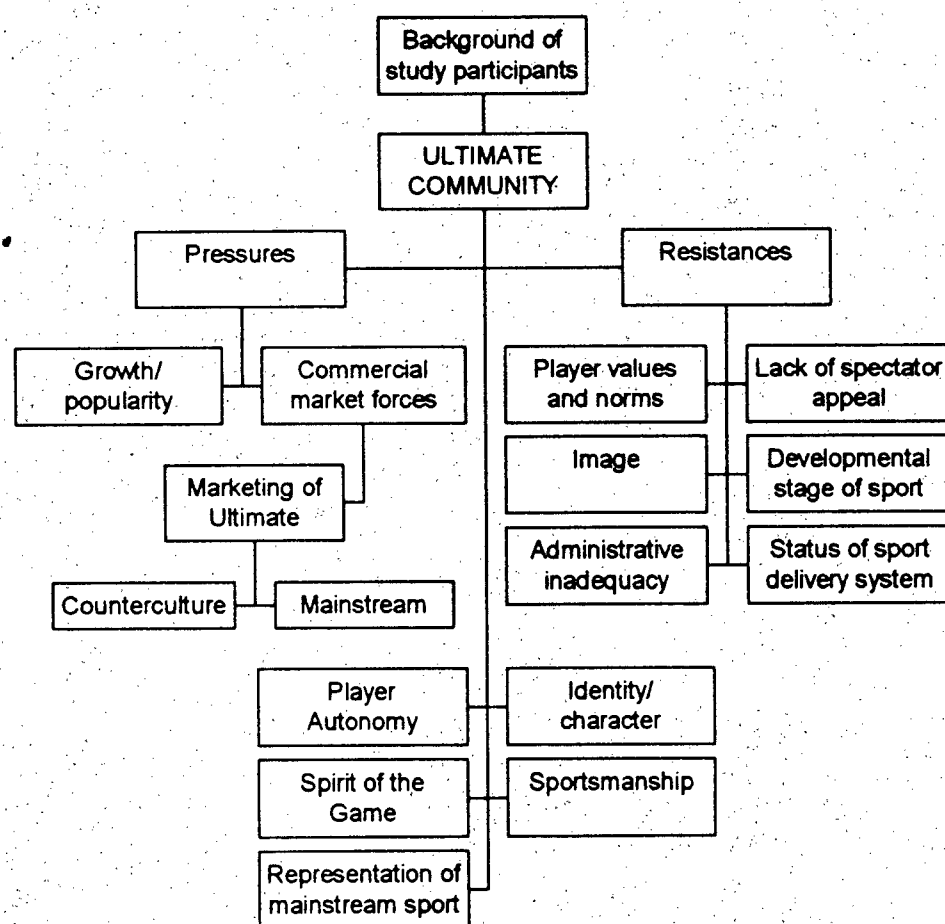
## *Appendix E: E-mail questions*

### E-mail discussion questions

1. What are your feelings about how the sport has developed and evolved i.e., the quality of the sport, the manner in which it is organized and administrated, etc.?
2. How would you compare competitive/club Ultimate with other traditional or mainstream team sports?
3. Some feel that Ultimate should maintain its roots and continue to develop as it has while others feel it should become more like traditional team sports in order to prosper. What are your views on this debate as it relates to the future of the sport?
4. Do you foresee the significance and meaning of Ultimate, for competitive/club players changing over time i.e., motivations, rewards, dissuasions, etc.
5. What is pushing and/or resisting the sport to change i.e., both forces within and outside of the player community?
6. The following issues have been identified as significant in the development of sport forms either from related literature or research as part of the study. Please comment on the importance of each, if applicable, to the North American Ultimate community. If you have additional issues you wish to speak to, please include them.

*Appendix F: Theme index tree*

Data Analysis Index Tree: Framework for change



## Appendix G: Data analysis example

### FOCUS GROUP DATA: Major themes and subthemes

#### 1. Culture (org.)/community (demographics, characteristics)

- grass-roots e.g. Worlds M17 concerns: growth, socialization M8

- shared elements M1, M11: informality M4, M6, M10; attitudes /values M17, W10, norms (deviance) M17; cooperative/supportive M19, W1; counter culture M22; inclusiveness W1, W3; love W3; social nature M4

- SOTG (like the sport's mission statement outlining espoused values and norms) M4 sportsmanship/respect W3, W7, W11

(demographics > racial M20; M21; educ/intelligence W3; changing W12)

#### 2. Ownership/control of sport: organization and structures including officiating and coaching

- M4, M7, behaviour changes M8, M10, W11

- links with formal institutions e.g. College M5, M12

- player control M20, autonomy W7 (SOTG); coaches W8

#### 3. Motivations/dissuasions or pressures/resistances (intrinsic/extrinsic)

- athleticism; competition, ind/team dev. M2,; peer recognition M19

- money M6, M13, W6, ideal M15; commercialization M15, W5/6, W10; "Americanization" M17, t.v./entertainment/marketing M17, M18, M22, W9, W13

- outsider demands e.g. sponsors M7; packaging W8

- dissuasions W2, finances W4; awareness W4; current rule structures e.g. speed of game M13, and resulting norms; counter culture M22, W11

- legitimacy M18, M21, W11 vs. anonymity M19; image W4/5

#### 4. Alternative or non-traditional status: elements

- "hook" M2, "unique" M11, W7; "a sport is a sport..." M11, "pure" W2