Defining the Liminal Athlete:
An Exploration of the Multi-Dimensional Liminal Condition in Professional Sport

THESIS

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By

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Abstract

In the United States, professional athletes exist on a spectrum between "amateurs" and "professionals" determined by social and economic factors. Professional athletes who do not identify with the extremes of this spectrum are situated in liminal space. In an ethnographic study of professional Ultimate Frisbee in the United States, I build on the existing models of liminality from Turner (1969) and Thomassen (2014) and demonstrate that there are social, economic, and physiological dimensions of liminality for professional athletes.

This pilot study included three months of ethnographic fieldwork (May-July 2016), during which time I observed and interviewed members of two men's professional Ultimate Frisbee teams, the Cincinnati Revolution (American Ultimate Disc League) and the Boston Whitecaps (Major League Ultimate). Participant observation and interviews provided insight into the life of the "liminal athlete." Five common themes emerged from qualitative data: "Priorities Beyond Professional Sport," "Responsibilities of a Professional Sport," "Athletic Eating," "Budgeting and Planning," and "Different Definitions of Professional Athlete." Each theme describes a quality of the liminal athlete. These qualities define the liminal athlete and where they fit in the world of sport. For professional Ultimate Frisbee players, liminal status is indefinite and affects social, economic, and physiological aspects of their lives.

Liminal athletes demonstrate a need for a more flexible model of liminality in anthropology, one that includes expanded temporal dimensions for the liminal phase and analysis of the effects of the liminal condition. Traditional models of liminality (van Gennep 1909, Turner 1969) as a finite phase of ritual do not aptly outline the experience of liminality for professional athletes, such as Ultimate Frisbee players. By combining liminal models from Turner (1969) and Thomassen (2014), I create a flexible liminal model and critically examine the costs and benefits of status in professional sports for the athletes who play them. Understanding the liminal condition is important to the studies of professional athletics and elite athletes. The results of this study indicate that all professional athletes undergo a liminal phase. Future research measuring athletes' nutrition, stress, and energy expenditure would allow us to examine the degree of the physiological effects of liminality.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the students and faculty at The Ohio State University and to my family for their endless support. I would also like to dedicate this to athletes everywhere: amateurs, professionals, and everyone (stuck) in between. Finally, I dedicate this thesis to my best friends: your tenacity, creativity, and compassion inspire me every day. Thank you.

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Since its rediscovery by Victor Turner in 1960s, Arnold van Gennep's (1909[1], 1960) concept of the liminal period has been broadly explored in anthropology. Liminality, from the Latin word "limen" meaning "threshold," refers to the undefined transitional position between two distinct stages. Van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1969) both conceived of liminality as a finite phase of a ritual process. Recent research by Thomassen (2014) expands the scale of the liminal phase to include long or indefinite periods of time during which individuals, groups, or whole societies can be liminal. In this paper, I combine Turner's definition of liminality, derived from van Gennep, and Thomassen's expanded liminal phase to create a flexible model of liminality. A flexible model is necessary for furthering our understanding of the liminal condition. I build on Turner's (1969) ideas about the liminal phase and examine two groups experiencing different types and time periods of liminality: professional athletes and their sports. In an ethnographic study of professional Ultimate Frisbee in the United States, I use a flexible liminal model to demonstrate that there are social, economic, and physiological dimensions of liminality for these athletes. In addition to a theoretical contribution to the existing body of work on liminality, I establish a distinct lens through which we can look at professional sports and the effects of status on professional athletes.

Chapter 2: Defining the Liminal Athlete

Professional sports in the United States are defined by economic and social hierarchies. There are five "major" sports leagues which average over 15,000 fans per game and have national TV contracts that pay rights fees: Major League Baseball, the National Football League, the National Hockey League, the National Basketball Association, and Major League Soccer. Beyond the "Big Five" there are more than ten professional and semi-professional team sports played in the United States. All professional sports compete against each other for relevance and profit while the teams and athletes competing in each sport do the same. Athletes on these professional teams compete at the highest level of their sport. They are considered "professional athletes" because they earn money for their work as elite athletes. Typically when we think of the opposite of professional athletes, we use the label "amateur athletes," referring to those who participate in sports for leisure but do not earn their living as athletes. Not all athletes competing at the professional level are paid as professionals. The athletes who compete at the highest level but do not earn a living wage from their sport must find another means of income. How do we describe athletes who earn money for their work as elite athletes, but do not earn their living as athletes? They are not professionals or amateurs. They are liminal athletes. Straddling the categories of professional athlete and amateur athlete, they occupy an in-between category best described as "liminal."

The liminal state is a distinct condition. It carries its own unique set of opportunities and challenges for athletes. The liminal state is the transitional position between two other positions (van Gennep 1960). In other words, the liminal state determines a transitional space. Individuals are moving from one position to the next but, as liminal persons, they are not defined as either (van Gennep 1960). Like any liminal character, the liminal athlete occupies the boundary between professional athletes and amateur athletes. Liminal athletes are contracted and paid to play sports professionally, yet they have jobs or careers outside of sport and may participate in recreational sports. Liminal athletes cannot be defined as amateur athletes because they are paid to play sports and have job-like responsibilities to their sport. But they also do not earn enough from playing sports to be defined as professional athletes. The only label that suits them is liminal athletes.

Liminality presents unique opportunities and challenges. Athletes are able to maneuver between the professional sports world and the amateur sports world, which allows them to enjoy specific circumstances not afforded to professional athletes and amateur athletes. Unlike amateur athletes, they receive outside acclaim from the media and fans of their professional team. Unlike professional athletes, they can play sports recreationally and invest time and skill into non-sport related work. The liminal state also presents difficulties. Liminal athletes must succeed in the professional sports world and the world of their profession, resulting in tension between the role of sport in their lives and the inability to earn their income from sport. They must commit sufficient time to their sport in order to play at the professional level yet work enough to support

themselves financially outside of sport. Additionally, their job outside of sport must be sufficiently flexible to allow them to train and compete at the professional level. Finally, liminal athletes are responsible for coordinating their work, sport, and personal schedules. Neither professional athletes nor amateur athletes are subject to the distinct conditions of liminal athletes.

The liminal space occupied by the athletes has socio-cultural, economic, and physiological dimensions. Critically examining these dimensions is important to our anthropological understanding of professional athletes. Liminal athletes have social lives defined by sport and in spite of sport. The inability to make a living from sport influences their economic status; they must have a way to support themselves that also allows them to play their sport. Their income, work schedule, sport schedule, and personal lives determine what kind of lifestyle they lead, including but not limited to: how much they spend on residence, transportation, and diet. By shaping athletes' schedules, incomes, and diets, the liminal state may affect their nutrition and the amount of stress their bodies sustain on a daily basis. Furthermore, their regular routine involves intense physical training, performance, and recovery. The physical toll of their daily responsibilities, in addition to the influence of sport and income on their diets, may affect athletes' physiology. Liminal status influences social, economic, and physiological aspects of athletes' lives. By examining athletes using an anthropological model of liminality, building from those of Turner (1969) and Thomassen (2014), we can critically examine the costs and benefits of status in professional sports for the athletes who play them.

Chapter 3: Liminality in Anthropology

The anthropological concept of liminality first appears in work by the French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep's *Rites of Passage* (1909, 1960). Van Gennep introduces the "rite of passage," as one's ceremonial passage from one status in society to another (1909, 1960). According to van Gennep (1960), rites of passage have a three-part structure: pre-liminal rites, liminal rites, and post-liminal rites. By labeling the three parts of rites of passage in terms of their position to liminality, van Gennep assigns significance to the process of transition. Van Gennep's contributions of rites of passage and liminality influenced the fields of sociology and anthropology. However, van Gennep's concept of the liminal phase does not gain attention in anthropology until 1969 when Victor Turner rediscovers his translated work and brings it to the forefront of his studies of the ritual process in West Africa. In the sixty-year gap between van Gennep and Turner's works, the liminal phase goes unmentioned. The connection of van Gennep and Turner is not accidental. It develops from a series of anthropologists each concerned with the function and organization of ritual in society.

Turner's work on ritual differs from that of his predecessors because he not only examines the role of ritual in society but also accounts for societal conflict. According to Turner (1969), the liminal phase in ritual allows societies to acknowledge and ultimately resolve conflict through the creation of *communitas,* the bonded community liminal

persons form before they are reincorporated into society. Since Turner's work, anthropologists, such as Bjorn Thomassen (2014), have expanded upon his model of liminality to include larger populations, extended time periods, and circumstances of modernity.

Van Gennep maintains that every society has "rites of passage" that accompany an individual's progression from one distinct life stage to another (1960). According to van Gennep (1960), there are many different occasions that mark these transitional periods from one life stage to the next, including pregnancy, puberty, betrothal, marriage, and funerals. For each of these events, there are rites of passage, which enable an individual to pass from one well-defined stage to another well-defined stage. Van Gennep maintains that the end goal of all rites of passage is the same, regardless of the occasion (1960). Therefore, he argues, all rites of passage should be structurally similar (1960). According to van Gennep (1960), all rites of passage have the same three periods: rites of separation (pre-liminal rites), rites of transition (liminal rites), and rites of incorporation (post-liminal rites). In rites of separation, one is separated from society and more specifically, one's current position in society. In rites of transition, one undergoes the transition from one position to the next. In rites of incorporation, one rejoins society in a new position (van Gennep 1960).

Van Gennep specifies that the rites of transition are the threshold of change between two different positions (1960). Rites of transition are preceded by separation from society in one position and followed by incorporation into society in a different position. During the rites of transition, an individual is liminal because he/she "wavers

between two worlds" (van Gennep 1960: 08). Since the transformation of the individual takes place during the rites of transition when one is liminal, van Gennep proposes to call the rites of separation "pre-liminal rites," the rites of transition "liminal rites," and the rites of incorporation "post-liminal rites" (1960). By labeling the three parts of rites of passage in terms of their position to liminality, van Gennep assigns significance to the liminal condition and develops a framework for understanding transition rituals.

Transition from one life stage to another involves change, which van Gennep maintains could be disruptive to both society and the individual (1960). According to van Gennep, societies regulate transitional periods with rites of passage so that "society as a whole will suffer no discomfort or injury" (van Gennep 1960:03). He posits that since transitions from stage to stage are inevitable in human existence, societies developed rites of passage during transitional periods to create order (1960). Van Gennep's *Rites of Passage* (1909, 1960) pre-dates functional anthropology but his arguments are explicitly functional: rites of passage exist to regulate periods of change within societies (Kimball 1960). Regulation functions to cushion both the individual and society from the disruption and possible injury caused by change. Van Gennep's pre-functionalist assertions may have been the product of positivism, which influenced French sociology in the early 20th Century (Kimball 1960). Like Emile Durkheim, van Gennep was influenced by Auguste Comte whose doctrine of positivism maintains that society operates under natural laws and general laws that can be derived from empirical observation rather than introspection, intuition, or metaphysical speculation (Kimball 1960, Durkheim 1982). We see the influence of positivism in van Gennep's law-like

proposals: all societies have rites of passage, all rites of passage aid in the transition from one life stage to another, and all rites of passage are made up of rites of separation, rites of transition, and rites of incorporation. Even van Gennep's "functionalist" assessment that the purpose of rites of passage is to regulate periods of change within societies can be read as a positivist argument for a general law of society.

Early 20th Century French sociology, growing out of the tradition of positivism, directly influences British anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s (Kimball 1960, Kuper 1996). While van Gennep anticipates functionalist arguments, it is Durkheim who is credited with influencing British functionalism and structural functionalism (Kuper 1996). Durkheim views society as a system in equilibrium (1960). According to Durkheim, society, like a system, is made up of many parts, such as cultural institutions, which function to meet social needs (1974). Functionalists and structural functionalists both subscribe to the Durkheimian idea of society as a system of interrelated parts (Kuper 1996). However, for functionalists, such as Bronislaw Malinowski, cultural institutions function to meet the needs of the individual (Malinowski 1948), while structural functionalists, like A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, believe cultural institutions function to meet society's needs as a whole (Radcliffe-Brown and Kuper 1977). Both Malinowski (1948) and Radcliffe-Brown (1977) analyze the social function of religious and magical rituals and rites in their works. Malinowski (1948) maintains the function of magical and religious ritual is rooted in the needs of the individual whereas Radcliffe-Brown argues magical and religious ritual serves the needs of the larger social structure (Radcliffe-Brown and Kuper 1977). Despite this important distinction, both theoretical frameworks

examine social institutions in terms of their functions and both share a fundamental flaw: the inability to account for social change or conflict within the societal system (Kuper 1996).

Max Gluckman, a student of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, refines functionalism and structural functionalism to account for the social conflict which was underreported in their analyses of societies (Kuper 1996). According to Gluckman, rituals should be understood:

> …not simply as expressing cohesion and impressing the value of society and its social sentiments on people, as in Durkheim's and Radcliffe-Brown's theories, but as exaggerating real conflicts of social rules and affirming that there was unity despite these conflicts. (Gluckman 2004:18)

In "Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa," (1954) Gluckman examines societies in Southern Africa in which constant tensions overpower threatened the social order and hierarchy. He observes that "rituals of rebellion" play a key role in maintaining social order through the expression of social tension (Gluckman 1954, Kuper 1996). He describes an annual tradition for the South Eastern Bantu of Zululand, in which the women dominate over the men as part of a ritual to bring an abundant harvest, and the Swazi *incwala* ceremony, in which the Swazi king is humiliated and threatened by his constituents (Gluckman 1954). Gluckman argues that both of these "rituals of rebellion" proceed "within an established and sacred traditional system, in which there is dispute about particular distributions of power, and not about the structure of the system itself" (1954: 3). Gluckman maintains that ritual allows people to acknowledge tension and provides a regulated catharsis. Unlike his predecessors, who saw ritual as functioning to

strengthen relationships at the individual and societal level, Gluckman argues that ritual could function as a platform for conflict, and subsequently, conflict resolution in societies (Kuper 1996).

Gluckman's functionalist view about the relationship between ritual and social conflict is reminiscent of van Gennep's views concerning the relationship between rites of passage and social change. In 1969, Victor Turner, a student of Gluckman, rediscovers van Gennep's translated *Rites of Passage* (1909) and combines van Gennep and Gluckman's approaches in his studies of ritual among the Ndembu in Zambia. Turner (1969) used van Gennep's rites of passage structure to develop his own three-part sequence of the ritual process: separation, liminality, and reaggregation. Like van Gennep, Turner saw the liminal phase as key. From Turner (1969), we gain an expanded definition of liminality and an outline of the liminal phase, including the establishment of *communitas,* the unique community formed by liminal people.

Turner described liminality as:

> Necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. (Turner 1969: 95)

The liminal persons are figuratively invisible; they are no longer classified as one position in society and not yet classified as their next position in society (1969). As declassified and invisible, the liminal fall outside of the structure of society in what Turner calls "anti-structure." Anti-structure is an alternative to the social order in which liminal persons may create their own set of rules and norms outside of the hierarchy of

society (Turner 1969). Within the anti-structure, the liminal become an undifferentiated community of equal individuals. Turner (1969) labels this community "*communitas*." He argues that *communitas* can only form outside of the social structure because the anti-structure offers the liminal blanket autonomy and equality, which are not conditions of the structure (Turner 1969). According to Turner (1969), liminal persons form *communitas* because they are separated from society, its rules, and its hierarchy; as equals they are able to make up their own rules and norms and bond over their unique circumstance. While the anti-structure is a necessary condition for the acute bonding experienced in *communitas*, the liminal phase also prepares the liminal for the final phase of the ritual process: reaggregation into society (1969). According to Turner (1969), the group affirms the social structure during the reaggregation phase, due in no small part to the positive experience of *communitas*. As with Gluckman and his "rituals of rebellion," Turner saw anti-structure as a ritual expression of opposition to the structure acted out during the liminal phase. However, this anti-structure occurred within a larger ritual process, in which participants, post-transition, ultimately affirmed the structure during reaggregation phase (Schroter 2003). Thus, Turner appropriates Gluckman's "ritual of rebellion" by characterizing it as a formal phase (the liminal phase/anti-structure) of the ritual process (Schroter 2003). Additionally, Turner provides us with a definitive element of the "necessarily ambiguous condition" of liminality: the formation of *communitas*.

According to both van Gennep and Turner, liminality is finite. The liminal state is a threshold of change and ambiguity between two defined states and as such, it has a clearly defined beginning and end (van Gennep 1960, Turner 1969, Thomassen 2014). It

is worth noting that Turner's work on liminality focuses on the function of ritual processes and *communitas* in small-scale tribal societies. Turner's conception of liminality as finite is based on his assumption that ritual holds a different social function and meaning for "tribal" or "traditional" societies than for Western "modern" societies (Turner 1983). Similarly, van Gennep's work involving liminality refers to specific rites of passage events for "semicivilized peoples" (van Gennep 1960: 3). Bjorn Thomassen (2014) points out that in these contexts, liminality has definite spatial and temporal dimensions, a way in and way out. In the ritual process of small-scale societies, "members of the society are themselves aware of the liminal state: they know that they will leave it sooner or later, and have 'ceremony masters' to guide them through the rituals" (Thomassen 2014: 210).

However, Thomassen argues that in liminal periods of a larger scale, such as society as a whole, the post-liminal future is unknown, and there is no "ceremony master" who has gone through the process before and that can lead people out of it (Thomassen 2014). Thus, the "classical anthropological usage" of liminality does not apply to all situations we may define as liminal (Thommassen 2014: 210). Society is made up of many structures for which there are corresponding anti-structures and different types of liminality may exist simultaneously on different spatial and temporal scales. Since van Gennep's original analysis defines the liminal phase as a threshold of change, we may argue that liminality lasts as long as it takes for change to occur and may be ongoing as individuals transition through life.

In Thomassen's (2014) examination of liminality in modernity, he contrasts the finite model of liminality with a model that has extensive spatial and temporal dimensions and can be applied to a variety of subjects. Thomassen creates a matrix for "types of liminality" in which he classifies moments, periods, and epochs of liminality for individuals, groups, and whole societies (See Table 1). In this matrix, a period of liminality for a group is defined by action: "ritual passage to manhood, which may extend into weeks or months in some societies, and group travel" (Thommassen 2014: 90). An epoch of liminality for a group, on the other hand, is defined by population: "religious minorities, ethnic minorities, social minorities, transgender, immigrant groups betwixt and between old and new culture, groups that live at the edge of 'normal structures', often perceived as both dangerous and 'holy'" (Thommassen 2014: 90).

Using Thomassen's matrix, we can classify athletes like professional Ultimate Frisbee players as a group in an epoch of liminality. Although we rarely think of athletes as "social minorities," liminal athletes fall under the category because of their unique status. Since they are "betwixt and between" (Turner 1969) the professional and amateur sport or non-sport structures, they are social minorities in both structures. As a population, they are figuratively invisible in society and form *communitas* as described by Turner (1969). But for athletes in a liminal position, the time period of their liminal phase is undetermined and their liminal phase is not associated with a specific action or ritual passage that they can complete to accomplish their transition. Thomassen's model of liminality, unlike van Gennep and Turner's models, allows for extended spatial and temporal dimensions of liminality for different populations, such as professional athletes.

By combining Turner and Thomassen's perspectives, I develop a flexible approach to the concept of liminality with which we can assess the influence of status on professional athletes.

Chapter 4: Professional Ultimate Frisbee Players as Liminal Athletes

To understand professional Ultimate Frisbee players as social actors in a liminal space and time, it is imperative to define how Ultimate Frisbee creates liminality. In this section, I provide an overview of Ultimate Frisbee in the United States.

Ultimate Frisbee is a growing sport. In 2012, the Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association reported nearly 5 million people participated in Ultimate Frisbee in the U.S., which was more than lacrosse and hockey combined. Worldwide, there are more than 7 million participants in 56 countries (WFDF Newsletter 2013).

There are several levels of amateur Ultimate Frisbee. USA Ultimate, the non-for-profit organization that governs Ultimate Frisbee in the United States, lists five official competition divisions: Youth Ultimate, College Ultimate, Club Ultimate, Masters Ultimate, and Beach Ultimate. USA Ultimate also has a special division for USA National teams, which compete worldwide. Outside of official USA Ultimate teams, Ultimate players can compete in local seasonal leagues, intramural leagues, and pick-up games. USA Ultimate teams and local leagues include separate men and women's teams as well as mixed teams. Until December 2016, there were two professional Ultimate Frisbee leagues in the United States: the AUDL, the American Ultimate Disc League, and Major League Ultimate (MLU). Neither league is affiliated with USA Ultimate. The MLU closed operations in December 2016. The AUDL continues to operate as the only

professional Ultimate Frisbee league in the United States. Distinctions among the AUDL, MLU, and USA Ultimate will be discussed in more detail following an overview of the sport of Ultimate Frisbee.

A standard Ultimate Frisbee field is seventy yards long and forty yards wide, making it slightly smaller than an American football field (USA Ultimate 11th Edition Rules 2017). A single goal is scored when one team catches the disc in the opposing team's end zone. Players cannot run with the disc; it can only be moved by passing. If a pass is incomplete (not caught), caught out of bounds, caught by a defending player, or knocked out of the air by the defense, it is a "turnover" and the opposing team immediately gains possession, playing to score in the opposite direction. A regulation outdoor game is played with seven members of each team, with substitutions allowed between points and for injuries. Games are played to a goal limit (USA Ultimate) or a time limit. There is usually a half time break and an allowance of two timeouts per half for each team (USA Ultimate 11th Edition Rules 2017).

Ultimate is a non-contact sport, meaning non-incidental physical contact is not allowed (USA Ultimate 11th Edition Rules 2017). Non-incidental physical contact is considered a foul; the consequences of a contact related foul depend on how players in the specific league interpret the situation. The game is usually self-officiated, relying on the players to call their own infractions and play within the rules (USA Ultimate 11th Edition Rules 2017). It is assumed that players will never intentionally violate the rules and will be honest when discussing fouls, points, and so forth with opponents. Players

call this the “Spirit of the Game” and it is written into the formal rules of Ultimate Frisbee:

> Spirit of the Game: Ultimate relies upon a spirit of sportsmanship that places the responsibility for fair play on the player. Highly competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of mutual respect among competitors, adherence to the agreed upon rules, or the basic joy of play. Protection of these vital elements serves to eliminate unsportsmanlike conduct from the Ultimate field. Such actions as taunting opposing players, dangerous aggression, belligerent intimidation, intentional infractions, or other win-at-all-costs behavior are contrary to the spirit of the game and must be avoided by all players. (USA Ultimate 11th Edition Rules, 2017)

After a foul call is made, the players decide on an outcome, based on what they think happened and how the rules apply to that situation. One interviewee from my study described the relationship between The Spirit of the Game and self-refereeing:

> ... In the official Ultimate Frisbee rulebook, there’s a section called “The Spirit of the Game.” What’s cool about Ultimate at a pick-up, league, or club level is there are no referees. So you call your own fouls. You can contest or not contest fouls. Basically you can disagree with fouls: you can talk it out with the person. Then there’s fouls in the game that aren’t always cut and dry. Maybe you’re gonna go catch the disc and somebody hits your arm- that’s a foul. It’s a non-contact sport so they’re impeding your ability to catch the disc by hitting your arm. So you would say, “Foul, I call a foul.” And they would say, “I don’t think I hit your arm. I hit the disc.” Or “Maybe I did hit your arm, but I got the disc first so I’d already taken away your play on the disc” is what they would say. Like, “You didn’t have a play on it because I already had made the play.” Then you could say, “Yeah okay, I think you’re right. I think I agree.” So you could either say, “I contest” or “I don’t contest” and you could talk about it. So you could actually get the foul reversed on the field just by talking it out.

According to my informant, the Spirit of the Game is demonstrated when players, as their own referees, respectfully discuss a foul and come to an agreement.

Ultimate Frisbee’s system of self-officiating is unique to the world of team sports but not all Ultimate Frisbee leagues self-officiate. Professional Ultimate Frisbee leagues, (AUDL and MLU) use a different set of parameters than those established by USA

Ultimate and the World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF) in their games. Most notably, professional leagues use referees to call fouls. In professional Ultimate, the self-officiated component of "The Spirit of the Game" is maintained through the "Integrity Rule" which states:

> The ref's call is final, and arguing could result in an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. However, if the player is arguing against themselves, then it's encouraged. In other words, players can actually overrule a ref's call if the call was in their favor. Sportsmanship is fundamental to ultimate, and the integrity rule enables players to promote fairness while fiercely competing. (Integrity Rule, 2017)

Professional Ultimate also has an expanded field area of 80 yards long and 53 1⁄3 yards wide with 20-yard end zones (the same size as an American football field, but with the end zones taking up twice as much of the field) (2017 AUDL Rulebook). Rather than playing to a certain number of points, professional games are timed and include four quarters that are twelve minutes in length. There is also a formal halftime between the second and third quarter (2017 AUDL Rulebook). The team with the most goals at the end of the game wins. Other changes include: a drop in the stall count (amount of time a player can hold the disc) from ten seconds to seven seconds, a ten-yard penalty for traveling when catching the disc, no prohibition of double-teams, and 5/10/20 yard penalties for physical contact depending on the situation (2017 AUDL Rulebook).

The main distinctions between USA Ultimate/ WFDF and professional Ultimate have less to do with how the game is played and more to do with the players themselves. While the professional leagues and USA Ultimate/WFDF both aim to promote the sport of Ultimate Frisbee, they have different financial goals, audiences, and philosophies about how the game is played (Eisenhood 2014). USA Ultimate is a non-profit; it is

largely participant funded and therefore focused on the needs and wants of the participants (Korber 2012). Professional Ultimate leagues are for-profit organizations and spectator-focused (Korber 2012). Unlike USA Ultimate and WFDF, professional Ultimate leagues pay their players. Currently professional Ultimate is open to men only, unlike USA Ultimate and WFDF Ultimate, which have women's and mixed Ultimate teams. USA Ultimate and WFDF are self-officiated and professional Ultimate leagues use referees. These distinctions between the amateur and professional Ultimate leagues are contentious topics in the Ultimate Frisbee community (Eisenhood 2014, Weintraub 2013). In 2014, USA Ultimate released a statement announcing that they would not promote, partner with, or otherwise formally recognize or endorse the AUDL or MLU, specifically citing the use of referees as a contradiction to the principles of USA Ultimate and the Spirit of the Game (Eisenhood 2014).

Despite the division, the majority of the professional players I interviewed said they participate in both professional and amateur Ultimate Frisbee (USA Ultimate). While few players mentioned their feelings on self-officiating versus referees, several brought up the importance of "spirit," "playing with spirit," and the "community." These details are important: players are able and allowed to play both amateur and professional Ultimate and they distinguish between self-officiating and "The Spirit of the Game."

Although "The Spirit of the Game" is often tied to self-officiating in Ultimate, the two are not one in the same. Ultimate Frisbee has rules and when the rules are broken in a self-officiated game, the players, as the referees, are responsible for calling fouls. Research on self-officiated Ultimate demonstrates that self-officiating is subjective and

may vary from team to team or league to league (Robbins 2004, Crocket 2013, Griggs 2011). Players tolerate or get away with different infractions depending on the context. "The Spirit of the Game" guides this process but there is room for disagreement. Although it is described in the rulebook as a code of conduct, "The Spirit of the Game" is best described as an "ethos" (Griggs 2011). As a written code of conduct, "The Spirit of the Game" requires players play and referee by the rules and avoid unsportsmanlike conduct.

As an ethos, "The Spirit of the Game" has a deeper cultural significance relating to love and respect for the community and the sport itself (Griggs 2011). Within the written rule, "The Spirit of the Game" ethos is best captured by the sentence stating that highly competitive play is encouraged, but never at the expense of the "basic joy of play." Research on self-officiated Ultimate shows that players' interpretations of "The Spirit of the Game" vary but that players feel that it relates to players' attitudes in addition to how fairly the game is played and refereed (Robbins 2004, Crocket 2013, Griggs 2011). In other words, "The Spirit of the Game" is not simply a mandate about how to play and referee on the field; it is the lifeblood of Ultimate Frisbee. It is symbolic of players' characters, including their loyalty and respect for each other and the game. As the lifeblood of Ultimate, "The Spirit of the Game" exists beyond self-officiating.

The AUDL was founded in 2012 and included eight teams in two divisions, East and West: Buffalo Hunters, Columbus Cranes, Connecticut Constitution, Detroit Mechanix, Indianapolis Alleycats, Philadelphia Spinners, Rhode Island Rampage, and the Bluegrass Revolution. The MLU was founded one year later (2013) with eight teams in

two divisions, East and West: Boston Whitecaps, DC Current, New York Rumble, Philadelphia Spinners, Portland Stags, San Francisco Dogfish, Seattle Rainmakers, and the Vancouver Nighthawks. Since 2012, the AUDL has expanded to include twenty-four teams in four divisions, East, Midwest, West, and South. Of the twenty-four teams, only two of the original eight teams remain (See Tables 2 and 3). The MLU, which recently suspended operations, did not expand during its four-year history.

The AUDL is run as twenty-four independent franchises. Each team sets its own rules concerning how to draw players and fans (Jesson 2015). Each team has an independent owner who runs the franchise (Jesson 2015). Some owners commit more resources to the franchise than others (Jesson 2015). The MLU had a centralized organization and the league's leadership made most of the decisions. Without individual owners, the MLU received funding from individuals who invested in the league itself (Jesson 2015). Funds were then distributed evenly across the league and there was very little differentiation among MLU teams compared to the AUDL. Most notably, MLU player contracts were typically standardized, whereas in the AUDL players are paid differently depending on their team or skill (Jesson 2015). In the AUDL, teams with depleted resources close without much change to the league (Jesson 2015). The MLU relied on collective resources for league operation (Jesson 2015). The MLU cited financial insecurity as the chief reason for the cancellation of the 2017 season (Eisenhood 2016).

In this paper, I refer to Ultimate Frisbee as a "liminal sport," a professional sport occupying a liminal space until it can transition to being a "legitimate sport." What

makes a sport a "legitimate sport?" For the purposes of this paper, a sport's "legitimacy" is based on its cultural popularity and financial success on a given national or international scale. By this measure, a "legitimate" sport is both popular and financially successful, and competes with other sports for consumers. Although played internationally, Ultimate Frisbee is still growing in both cultural popularity and financial success (Eisenhood 2014). A major step toward legitimacy occurred in 2015 when the International Olympic Committee officially recognized the sport's international governing body, the World Flying Disc Federation (WFDF Newsletter 2013). Ultimate is now eligible for inclusion and I.O.C. funding in an upcoming Summer Olympics program (WFDF Newsletter 2013). Those involved in the sport are hopeful for Ultimate's inclusion in the 2024 Olympics (WFDF Newsletter 2013).

The sport continues to grow in popularity, but not without barriers. To begin with, Ultimate Frisbee does not have a wealth of detailed league statistics and individual player statistics (Bialik 2015). While the majority of professional games are streamed online, only select Ultimate Frisbee games are broadcast widely on TV. Finally, the professional leagues have proved difficult to maintain. The franchise nature of the AUDL teams creates a "boom and bust" system in which new teams open and close every year. The MLU, which shared costs equally across the league, was forced to suspend the 2017 MLU season due to an inability to cover the operation expenses (Eisenhood 2016).

Recognition by the I.O.C. indicates that Ultimate Frisbee has gained a level of popularity and media attention, but not enough to cross over the threshold into financial

stability or more mainstream recognition and financial support. Given the challenges that Ultimate faces to legitimacy, we may see Ultimate Frisbee as a liminal professional sport.

As a liminal sport, Ultimate provides very little upward mobility for its athletes. Thus professional Ultimate Frisbee players are liminal athletes trapped in a liminal sport. They compete at the highest level of their sport but that sport is not yet successful or popular enough to pay athletes a living wage. Building on previous research from Turner (1969) and Thomassen (2014) to inform my study, I discovered that their liminal position in relation to amateur and professional athletes influenced several aspects of their lives. There are social, physical, and economic dimensions related to their roles as liminal athletes. Outside of their professional teams, Ultimate Frisbee players have jobs, school, families, friends, and typically play on amateur Frisbee teams. They have busy schedules and limited budgets, both of which influence their physical stress and nutrition. Liminality forces professional Ultimate players to deftly maneuver both the world of professional Ultimate and the world outside professional Ultimate. Given this unique circumstance, players form *communitas* (Turner 1969*),* bonding as equals with those subject to the same conditions as them. Their transition to post-liminal or "legitimate" professional athletes, who make their living from sport, relies on the legitimacy of the sport they play, which means the scale of their liminal period is indefinite. They are in an epoch of liminality as described by Thomassen (2014). As long as Ultimate Frisbee is a liminal professional sport, professional Ultimate players' options are to remain liminal or revert back to strictly amateur athleticism. In this study, I build on previous analyses of

liminality to explore how status influences the lives of professional athletes, specifically professional Ultimate Frisbee players in the United States.

Chapter 5: Methods

My pilot study included three months of ethnographic fieldwork (May-July 2016), during which time I studied professional Ultimate Frisbee players and examined the social, economic, and physiological dimensions of liminal status. In this study, I observed two men's professional Ultimate Frisbee teams: the Cincinnati Revolution, located two hours away from my home in Columbus, Ohio, and the Boston Whitecaps, located two hours away from my parent's home in Western Massachusetts. I chose to study two Ultimate Frisbee teams, as opposed to one, to allow for limited comparison of what might be geographic differences between the Midwest and the East Coast of the United States and differences between the AUDL and MLU[2].

Study Sites

Cincinnati, Ohio

Cincinnati, Ohio is the third largest metro area in Ohio after Cleveland and Columbus (American Fact Finder 2017). Of Ohio's three major metropolitan areas, Cleveland hosts the highest number of major U.S. professional sports leagues: the Cleveland Browns, National Football League (NFL); the Cleveland Indians, Major League Baseball (MLB); and the Cleveland Cavaliers, National Basketball League (NBA). Columbus and Cincinnati each host two of the five major U.S professional sports

leagues. Columbus is home to the National Hockey League's (NHL) Columbus Blue Jackets and Major League Soccer's (MLS) Columbus Crew. Cincinnati hosts the Cincinnati Bengals (NFL) and the Cincinnati Reds (MLB). Three additional professional sport leagues are located in Cincinnati: the Cincinnati Cyclones, East Coast Hockey League (ECHL); FC Cincinnati, United Soccer League (USL); and until recently, the Cincinnati Revolution, American Ultimate Disc League (AUDL) (Professional Sports-Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber 2016).

The Cincinnati Revolution was a professional Ultimate Frisbee team in the American Ultimate Disc League (AUDL). One of the original eight AUDL teams, the Revolution was founded in Kentucky as the Bluegrass Revolution in 2012. In 2013, the team moved to Cincinnati, Ohio where it practiced and played its home games at the Sheakley Athletic Complex at the University of Cincinnati until 2016 (About- Cincinnati Revolution 2016). In September 2016, the Cincinnati Revolution announced it was closing operations and would not participate in the 2017 season.

Cincinnati has a thriving Ultimate Frisbee culture. The Cincinnati Ultimate Players Association (CUPA) acts as a regional resource. It organizes youth and adult Ultimate leagues, advertises area pick-up games, and coordinates volunteers for local Ultimate events (Cincinnati Ultimate Players Association 2016). Additionally, many Ultimate Frisbee club teams are located in the Cincinnati area including Steamboat, a competitive mixed Ultimate club team that placed fifth at the 2016 USA Ultimate National Championships (Club Mixed Results 2016).

Boston, Massachusetts

Boston is the largest city in the state of Massachusetts (American Fact Finder 2017). Boston is home to five major U.S. professional sport leagues: the Boston Celtics (NBA), the Boston Red Sox (MLB), the Boston Bruins (NHL), the New England Patriots (NFL), and the New England Revolution (MLS). Technically, the New England Patriots and the New England Revolution play in Foxborough, Massachusetts, but their stadium is located in the "Three Rivers Subregion" of Metropolitan Boston (Subregions-Metropolitan Area Planning Council 2016). Several other professional sports teams play in Boston: the Boston Cannons, Major League Lacrosse (MLL); the Boston Blazers, National Lacrosse League (NLL); the Boston Storm, United Women's Lacrosse League (UWLX); the Boston Breakers, National Women's Soccer League (NWSL); the Boston Blades, Canadian Women's Hockey League (CWHL); the Boston Pride, National Women's Hockey League (NWHL); and until recently, the Boston Whitecaps, Major League Ultimate (MLU).

The Boston Whitecaps were one of the eight original MLU teams founded in 2012 along with the DC Current, New York Rumble, Philadelphia Spinners, Portland Stags, San Francisco Dogfish, Seattle Rainmakers, Vancouver Nighthawks (About the MLU 2016). The Whitecaps practiced and played their home games at Hormel Stadium in Medford, MA, until the suspension of the MLU in December 2016.

Like Cincinnati, Boston has a vibrant Ultimate Frisbee culture. The Boston Ultimate Disc Alliance (BUDA) organizes youth, adult, and masters Ultimate leagues, arranges Ultimate Frisbee clinics, and coordinates volunteers for local Ultimate events

(Boston Ultimate Disc Alliance 2016). Many Ultimate Frisbee club teams are located in the Boston area including Slow White, a competitive mixed Ultimate club team that won the Mixed Club National Championship at the 2016 USA Ultimate National Championships (Club Mixed Results 2016) and Ironside, a men's Ultimate club team that won the Men's Club National Championship at the 2016 USA Ultimate National Championships (Club Men's Results 2016).

Study Sample

I observed the Cincinnati Revolution and the Boston Whitecaps, in practice and game settings. From the teams, I selected participants for semi-structured interviews through snowball and criterion sampling (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999, Schensul and LeCompte 2012). There was one criterion for inclusion in the study: participants had to be affiliated with one of the two men's professional Ultimate Frisbee teams being studied. Interview participants volunteered to be interviewed after receiving recruitment emails (Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999). Additional players volunteered to be interviewed when they observed their teammates and realized it was a safe and interesting opportunity to talk about ultimate. Written consent was obtained from all interview participants.

There were 37 players on each team according to 2016 rosters, including official and practice players. In addition to my observations of the players on the two teams, I also observed the teams' staff and fans. In order to develop a broader understanding of Ultimate Frisbee players, I included these non-athletes in my study population. During

my game observations, I interacted with more than 50 athletes and team staff and hundreds of fans.

My interview sample of Ultimate Frisbee players was a small, pilot-sized convenience sample of eight male participants (Creswell 2003, Schensul, Schensul, and LeCompte 1999, Schensul and LeCompte 2012). Of the nine interviews with players, only eight were completed. In one interview, a player had to excuse himself early. The limited data from his interview was not included in my analysis. The age range of this sample was 20-31 years old.

Data Collected

I developed a semi-structured interview to guide conversation topics that would help define the liminal experience of the players (Spradley 1979). These topics included: participant's demographic data, participant's background and experience with Ultimate Frisbee, participant's predictions about the future of Ultimate Frisbee, participant's perceptions about professional athletes and food practices (Hubert 2004).

I focused on the topic of food for two reasons. First, food is a necessary element of human survival and a crucial factor in athletic performance (American College of Sports Medicine et al 2000). Athletes' food choices and relationships with food are important to their athletic identity and my research goal was to understand the qualities that defined the identity of the liminal athlete. Second, and based in my political economic framework, I wanted to examine the relationships among diet, economy, sport, and liminality (Mintz 2002, Besnier and Brownell 2012). The social, cultural, and

economic elements that surround relationships and decision making around food made diet an ideal lens for examining liminality among professional ultimate Frisbee players.

Data Collection and Analysis

Participant Observation

From May 2016 to July 2016 in Cincinnati, OH and Boston, MA, I conducted five sessions of participant observation that ranged from two to five hours at Ultimate Frisbee practices and games in Cincinnati, OH and Boston, MA (Schensul and LeCompte 2012). In Cincinnati, I attended and observed one three-hour, non-mandatory Cincinnati Revolution practice at Sheakley Athletic Complex. The Sheakley Athletic Complex is a large football stadium. The stands fill one side of the stadium and tower above the field below. During practice, I observed the team from the field level. I sat on the team bench next to the "locker room" (an equipment storage room with an adjacent bathroom located next to the field) watching the players interact and occasionally chatting with or interviewing players.

Additionally, I attended and observed two Revolution home games at Sheakley Athletic Complex. Each game was over three hours in duration. The first home game I attended was a Saturday evening game against the Indianapolis Alleycats (IN). Before the game, I observed warm up from the field, again sitting on the team bench next to the locker room and interviewing players. During the game, I sat in the stadium stands and observed the fans and the event. Following the game, I attended and observed the team's post-game celebration at Adriatico's Pizza, one of the team's sponsors. I also attended the

Revolution's last home game of the season, a Sunday afternoon game against the Madison Radicals (WI). The midday sun made playing conditions hot and difficult and the stadium conditions uncomfortable. Prior to the game, I observed players complete a limited warm up and hustle back into the locker room to keep cool and hydrate. During this time, I interviewed one player outside the locker room because he wanted to acclimate to the heat. After the interview, I returned to the locker room to observe the team's interactions in a limited space and the players' adjustments to their pre-game rituals to cope with the heat. During the game, I again sat in the stadium stands and observed the fans and the event.

In Boston, I attended and observed one three-hour, mandatory Boston Whitecaps practice at Hormel Field. Hormel Field is a standard sized football field surrounded by an outdoor track. The stands are on one side of the field and located at field level. Shortly before practice, I interviewed one volunteer participant. During practice, I stayed in the stands and observed the practice from my seat. I also attended one Whitecaps home game at Hormel Field, a Saturday evening game against the Washington D.C. Current. Prior to the game there was a scheduled Boston Area Women's All-Star Game at 4:30 p.m. I arrived at 4 p.m. to observe the women's game with hopes of comparing it to the Whitecaps game. When I arrived, I was told the Whitecaps game was postponed until 9:30 p.m. due to issues with the away team's transportation. The stands were filled for the women's game and I stayed to observe the fans and players during the event. After the Boston Area Women's All-Star Game, the stands emptied; some fans audibly promised to return for the Whitecaps' game while others stated they were done for the day. One

hour later, the Whitecaps' game was officially cancelled; my observation was not possible.

Semi-Structured Interviews

From May 2016- July 2016, I conducted semi-structured interviews with nine professional Ultimate Frisbee players. Participants volunteered to be interviewed via email or in person. Of the nine interviews, eight were completed and one was interrupted and could not be completed. Interviews were conducted in English and varied in duration from seventeen to ninety-five minutes. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for text analysis (See LeCompte and Schensul 2010; Ryan and Bernard 2003; DeCuir-Gunby et al 2011). The interviews were conducted in various locations: on the field before, during, and after practices or games; at cafes; in the car; and at players' homes. Each interview was transcribed and notes organized (Schensul and LeCompte 2012)[3].

Chapter 6: Results

Participant observation and interviews provided insight into the life of the "liminal athlete." Five common themes emerged as I spoke to players: "Priorities Beyond Professional Sport," "Responsibilities of a Professional Sport," "Athletic Eating," "Budgeting and Planning," and "Different Definitions of Professional Athlete." Each theme describes a quality of the liminal condition for professional Ultimate Frisbee players. These qualities define the liminal athlete and where they fit in the world of sport. As we see in Turner (1969) and Thomassen (2014), the liminal condition distinguishes athletes from those in adjacent positions. Professional Ultimate players are distinct from amateur Frisbee players and other professional athletes and their liminal position affects their lives in important ways.

The first and second themes, "Priorities Beyond Professional Sport" and "Responsibilities of a Professional Sport," demonstrate that the liminal athlete is caught between responsibilities of his/her professional sport and the responsibilities that lie outside professional sport. Themes three and four, "Athletic Eating" and "Budgeting and Planning," reveal how the liminal athlete is defined by his/her food-related choices including decisions about money and time allocation, grocery shopping habits, eating habits, and attitudes about diet. The last theme examines the opaque definition of "professional athlete." Liminal athletes are technically "professional athletes" yet they

have their own definitions of what a "professional athlete" is. They compare and contrast themselves to those definitions. In so doing, they inadvertently identify their liminal status. These themes demonstrate how professional Ultimate players are situated in a liminal position and how that liminal position influences the social, economic, and physiological dimensions of their lives.

Theme 1: Priorities Beyond Professional Sport

Liminal athletes have responsibilities and priorities outside of their professional sport. This is perhaps the most common theme that emerged from interviews with professional Ultimate Frisbee players. While professional Ultimate was an important and time-consuming activity in their lives, players viewed it as less important than their careers, schoolwork, or personal lives. Outside of playing professional Ultimate Frisbee, players coached youth or club Ultimate, played club, seasonal, or college Ultimate (i.e. amateur Ultimate), and volunteered at Ultimate Frisbee events. These obligations were as important as their professional Ultimate Frisbee responsibilities. All players made sure to specify that their commitment to Ultimate extended equally to the entire Ultimate community, not just the paid professional league. Their obligation to the sport of Ultimate over their own professional agenda demonstrates the resiliency of the "Spirit of the Game" ethos. It also illustrates their liminality; they are equally tethered to the professional sports world and the amateur sports world.

All but one informant reported having a job or career outside of professional Ultimate Frisbee. Three informants were in college (undergraduate) and one informant was a graduate student. Two informants were married and others mentioned their

significant others when talking about their weekly routines in and outside of the Ultimate season. Informants discussed the challenges of fitting professional Ultimate around their work, personal, and amateur Ultimate schedules. Two informants discussed their plans following graduation; both emphasized that their first priority was finding work. Playing professional Ultimate was a very far second or even third priority:

> The plan is to graduate in December and then get a job doing something. That something, what I will be doing eight months from now, is very much up in the air...And it might not be compatible with playing ultimate.

These informants both said it would be nice to be able to continue to play Ultimate, especially at the professional level, but they were not going to plan their futures around Ultimate.

Several informants brought up club, seasonal, and college Ultimate teams and the social value they played in their lives. Some informants had been members of the same club, seasonal, or college team longer than they had been on their professional Ultimate team so they felt a commitment to their amateur team(s) that they didn't share with their professional team. On these teams they made friends, played the sport they loved, and learned about "The Spirit of the Game." One informant said he often eats with his club teammates and they tend to go out to dinner together after practice or games. Another informant told me that he met his wife on his mixed club Ultimate team and most of their best friends were their club teammates:

> I do think I have a bias toward that [team], for many reasons: my wife I met on the co-ed team; we had at our wedding...we got 40 people from different years- over the years we played- on a boat at our wedding. Got a picture. And just, symbolically that represents more of what that means to me than what this has meant to me. So I absolutely have a bias to say that my preference is towards that.

> But my goal is to continue trying to see what this experience has, like give this a chance and not let my biases influence how I react to this experience.

Professional Ultimate Frisbee players have busy, full schedules. In addition to professional Ultimate Frisbee, they have responsibilities to their jobs, schoolwork, relationships, and more Frisbee. Often, these responsibilities take priority over professional Ultimate Frisbee. This is a fundamental quality of the liminal athlete: not only do they have priorities beyond their professional sport, but also these priorities tend to come before their professional sport. The prioritization of their other responsibilities over Ultimate is their choice, but it's also indicative of their liminal condition. The inability to make a living from their sport forces players to find work or attend school. The reliance on a steady income or grades from a source outside of Ultimate Frisbee results in the prioritization of work or school over professional sport. Their liminality is defined by their priorities beyond professional sport: work and school are things they need to do and professional Ultimate is something they want to do.

Theme 2: Responsibilities of a Professional Sport

Despite their other priorities, athletes in liminal positions are professional athletes. Even the busiest professional Ultimate player must fulfill his role or risk losing his spot on the team. Professional Ultimate players are responsible for staying in shape and attending practices, which are typically three hours in length. The Cincinnati Revolution and the Boston Whitecaps hold practices during the season. The Whitecaps have a weekly formal practice (more or less mandatory) and several optional team workouts

throughout the week. Players typically attend the weekly Whitecaps practice and club practices on the other days of the week. Since the Cincinnati Revolution is a regional team with players from multiple states, their practices are optional and only occur on the evenings before home games. Most players attend the team practices and are expected to keep in shape and practice on their own.

Perfecting skills and staying in shape are very important since they determine whether or not a player will have a chance to play. Additionally, players on both the Revolution and Whitecaps are required to try-out for the team every year.

Not only are players largely responsible for maintaining an active workout schedule, they are also responsible for their own transportation. For players with cars or those who live close to their team's home stadium, this is not too much of a burden. However, some informants rely on public transportation to get to and from practice and home games and described it as time consuming and challenging. Other informants lived over an hour away from their home field; for these players practices and games consumed a large amount of their day and budget since they pay for their own gas.

Professional Ultimate Frisbee players are also responsible for attending and playing in games. Games are typically three hours in length and may require a bus ride between three to twelve hours. Often away games are scheduled as "double-headers" which require players to travel over a weekend. In season, professional Ultimate players attend at least one practice and one game per week. They are expected to arrive early for games and often to stay after. As with many professional athletes, official competition is time consuming and physically draining. While many professional athletes draw a steady

salary, professional Ultimate Frisbee players typically make $25-$35 per game, with approximately $25 per diem for away games. Even for home games, this works out to roughly ten dollars an hour. In fact, players who have weekend jobs likely will lose money playing professional Ultimate.

The liminality of their role can be observed in the tension between the professional athlete's responsibilities and the ways in which these responsibilities are met. Practicing and staying in shape are necessary for the professional athlete to maintain their status on the team, yet they often practice and work out on their own or with another team because of their busy schedules. For all players, attending practice and staying in shape involve costs; in particular players spend time and gas money or bus fare on their team and in general pay for gym memberships and amateur team dues to stay in shape on their own.

Professional Ultimate Frisbee players do get paid and that separates them from amateur athletes. Professional Ultimate leagues pay their players far less than what we may imagine professional athletes make. But Ultimate Frisbee is an expensive sport (Harkness 2014): team dues, tournament entry fees, travel, and gear all cost money. Professional Ultimate teams cover most of those expenses for their players, so even though players do not earn a lot of money, theoretically, they save a lot of money. Unlike amateur Ultimate players, professional Ultimate players do not have to pay to play. Compared to amateur Frisbee leagues, professional Ultimate Frisbee is a bargain. With their contracts, professional Ultimate players get paid per game, a per diem during travel, travel accommodations to away games, paid accommodations during travel (hotel

rooms), complementary team uniforms, including a custom jersey, and articles of team merchandise. Players are responsible for their own cleats and other gear as well as getting themselves to practices and home games. However, the benefits of their professional contract cover the expenses associated with their amateur leagues, plus team dues and fees to enter tournaments (Harkness 2014). Professional Ultimate Frisbee players are uniquely liminal because they are not only distinct from other professional athletes, they are also separate from amateur Frisbee players.

Why then, do professional players still participate in amateur leagues? If they are talented enough to play in professional leagues that cover most expenses and pay them a small sum, why should they spend time and money on amateur Frisbee leagues? As mentioned earlier, players usually play amateur Frisbee prior to or concurrent with making a professional Ultimate team and value the interpersonal relationships formed with the members of their amateur teams. They are committed to "The Spirit of the Game" and therefore they are loyal to the whole Ultimate community. Beyond that, however, it seems that this is yet another piece of the liminal athlete puzzle: professional Ultimate players also play amateur Ultimate because they have to. In order to stay in professional shape and practice their skills year round, players join teams that play during the months their professional team does not play or practices when their team doesn't practice. At the heart of Ultimate Frisbee is community; while the bonds formed in the Ultimate community are important, equally important is having a group itself. You would be hard pressed to find someone able to play Frisbee alone. Frisbee players need other people. "The Spirit of the Game" is essential to Ultimate, especially at the amateur level,

because it puts the focus on the collective enjoyment of all participants in order to build community.

The professional teams do not have the resources to hold practices every day. They cannot pay their players, coaches, or facilities enough to demand the commitment. Instead, they put the onus on the players to stay in shape throughout the season and throughout the year. Players can work out on their own, but in order to practice and refine their skills, they seek out local club teams and seasonal teams that play in the off-season or on different days than their professional team. While it is possible for players to make professional teams without being on a club team, the majority of my informants reported playing on between one and three other teams. Playing on at least two teams allowed them to play and practice Ultimate five to seven days per week in the spring and summer and at least three days a week in the fall and winter. Like professional athletes, they must constantly practice and stay in elite shape, but unlike most professional athletes, they are responsible for doing this on their own. Their liminal sport obliges them to perform as professionals, but practice as amateurs.

A positive product of the liminal condition is the formation of *communitas* (Turner 1969). Turner (1969) describes *communitas* as the bonded community liminal persons form during the liminal phase of ritual; once separated from their daily lives, the liminal are not obligated to abide by their regular rules, norms, and hierarchies. For professional Ultimate Frisbee players, *communitas* forms out of the unique circumstance of being liminal athletes in a liminal sport. Professional Ultimate players have professional Ultimate responsibilities, amateur Ultimate responsibilities, work

responsibilities, and personal responsibilities. They are stretched thin by their multiple schedules, but they are aware that the same is true for their teammates. They can bond over their shared experience as liminal athletes. Since their liminal sport makes it necessary for them to participate in amateur Frisbee, they all regularly participate in self-officiated games during which all the people on the field, including their teammates, monitor them and hold them accountable to "The Spirit of the Game." Players then bring this "spirit" to the professional leagues, even though there are referees who monitor them. The professional players form *communitas* by bringing "The Spirit of the Game" from their individual amateur league experiences to their collective professional league experience. It is *communitas* because players take the central rule from the amateur Frisbee world and appropriate it for their own context in the professional Frisbee world. "The Spirit of the Game" for professional Ultimate players then becomes distinct from that of amateur Ultimate players. Playing according to "The Spirit of the Game," also distinguishes professional Ultimate Frisbee players from other professional athletes whose sports do not have such a rule. The liminal state subjects professional Ultimate Frisbee players to a unique set of circumstances but those circumstances then allow them to form *communitas*.

There are less positive dimensions of liminality, such as the economic constraints caused by the responsibility to perform like professionals by practicing with amateurs. Earlier I mentioned professional Ultimate Frisbee being a "bargain" for professional Ultimate players. But that was before factoring in the hidden costs of playing professional Ultimate: the time and money invested in amateur leagues because of the need to

practice, the time spent away from amateur Ultimate friendships while playing professional Ultimate, and the juggling of amateur and professional Ultimate schedules in addition to personal and work schedules. Once we examine the realities of playing professional Ultimate, we see that they do not have a net gain over amateur Frisbee players, even though it may appear that way because they get paid to play.

Professional Ultimate Frisbee created a system of political economy where professional players are placed above amateur players in the sport hierarchy. Yet in this system, professional players also participate as amateurs to gain the skills that will earn them their spots on the professional teams. In return, they are "rewarded" with a modest paycheck per game and coverage of expenses associated with amateur Ultimate. As both amateur and professional Ultimate players, these liminal athletes dedicate twice the amount of time to Frisbee compared to amateur athletes, but invest the same amount of money into the sport as the amateurs, with the exception of their paychecks. In the meantime, they also work fulltime jobs into which they must invest time and effort. Professional Ultimate Frisbee, on the other hand, gains top performing players who develop their skills on their own time with their own money. The professional leagues also get rewarded because players promote the sport of Ultimate Frisbee outside of their professional role, which still helps to promote the professional teams. Professional Ultimate Frisbee, as a liminal sport, must grow in popularity to transition to a "legitimate sport." But in relying on players and their talent to achieve this growth while requiring players to train on their own time and dime, professional Ultimate Frisbee compounds its players' liminality.

Theme 3: Athletic Eating

In this study, I tracked professional Ultimate players' grocery shopping habits, food choices, and attitudes about food. Food is a vital aspect of human life and our relationships with food typically exist at the intersection of biology and culture. For athletes, diet is a critical component of preparation, performance, and recovery (American College of Sports Medicine et al 2000). I hypothesized that athletes would have unique attitudes about food because of their liminal position in relation to professional and amateur athletes. In asking professional Ultimate players about food, I hoped to gain further insight into their liminal status and ideas of self and sport. The main theme that emerged was that professional Ultimate players do not think of their diets as athletic diets. However, their status as athletes does influence what they choose to eat.

The majority of informants indicated their food choices and eating habits were not based solely on their sport. Their status as professional athletes did not dictate how they shopped or ate. However, when asked about their schedule and habits, it was clear that Ultimate Frisbee indirectly influenced many of their food related choices. The majority of informants indicated their meal times were dictated by Ultimate Frisbee. Two informants indicated their diet was influenced by their Ultimate Frisbee teammates. One informant reported that he ate everyday with his college Ultimate teammates during the school year. He maintained that dining as a team created peer pressure to eat in a particular way: everyone usually ate a salad with their dinner and avoided soda. Another informant reported eating out for dinner most of the time because he typically ate with his club Ultimate teammates after playing. Eating dinner with his club teammates was an

important routine. The informant who ate with his club teammates at restaurants did not report that making healthy choices was a particular concern to the group. More important was the bonding experience of sharing a meal together after playing Frisbee. For both informants, the experience of dining with teammates helped them to develop quality personal relationships outside the context of playing, which in turn strengthens "The Spirit of the Game."

All informants reported having specific food preferences on game day and avoiding certain foods because of Ultimate. All but one informant maintained that their diet was different in season than out of season. This is notable because all informants reported spending very little time out of season. Informants stated that because of overlapping Ultimate seasons (club league, seasonal leagues, professional league), their time out of season was limited. Some reported that their "off season" was between a month and half to two months long, if that. As a result, we can conclude that while sport was not cited as the main influence on food choices, Ultimate Frisbee does influence eating habits of professional Ultimate players.

Despite the place of food in sport, informants did not think of themselves as eating like "professional athletes." When asked what kinds of foods they thought professional athletes consumed, informants stated general food categories (fruits, vegetables, meat), general nutrient categories (proteins, carbohydrates), or simply used adjectives such as "healthiest" foods. Four specific foods were mentioned: energy bars, energy drinks, eggs, and red meat. One informant said he thought professional athletes typically eat red meat, another said he has heard of elite athletes who avoid red meat on

game day, so he avoided it. When discussing the diets of professional athletes, some informants followed up their answers with statements of uncertainty such as, "I don't know," "I think a lot of guys are into that, whether or not that's right," and "I don't even know if there's any substance to that claim."

When asked what kind of foods professional athletes *should* eat, informants mentioned specific dietary habits they have adopted and think all professional athletes should adopt. Two informants mentioned specific foods athletes shouldn't eat when answering the question. Three informants mentioned general food categories when answering the question (fruits and vegetables, green food). Two informants mentioned specific foods when answering the question (sushi, avocados). Three informants mentioned general nutrient categories when answering the question (carbohydrates, protein). Two informants indicated a specific kind of carbohydrate including "complex carbs," and "not the bad kind, like white bread."

With the exception of the few specific foods, informants' responses about what professional athletes should eat fell under one of three general categories (nutrients, produce, "healthy") and it differed from the way informants discussed their own eating habits. Very rarely did informants describe their diet with general categories like "carbohydrates" or "fresh produce." More often informants told me specific fruits and vegetables they liked to eat or specific meals or types of cuisine that were typical. The foods they avoided were foods they were allergic to, foods they didn't like, or foods they tried to stay away from in season (very few mentioned foods that were banned from their diet completely for sport related reasons.). This is distinct from the answers they gave

about how professional athletes should eat which included restricted eating (no sweets, no dairy, no "bad" carbohydrates, no processed foods) and superlative eating (healthiest forms of eating, healthiest foods, all the right nutrients).

There may be several reasons for this distinction in description: they may imagine other professional athletes have a limited diet. Another possibility is that they consider themselves so removed from the category of "professional athlete" that the category of what professional athletes eat is abstract, hence the general categories and descriptions. Finally, they may be marginally familiar with the field of sports nutrition, via a workshop, book, website, etc., which focuses primarily on nutrients and how they are most efficiently metabolized by the body for peak performance. Perhaps their idea of a professional athlete is someone whose diet is dictated by sports nutrition and therefore has a diet most aptly described by nutrients, rather than specific meals.

While linguistic analysis was beyond the scope of this study, I noted the distinction between the way professional Ultimate players talk about their own diets and what they think of as "athletic eating." They also do not think of their sport as dictating their diet despite evidence to the contrary. This aptly illustrates their liminality: they don't identify as professional athletes in terms of their diet, but professional athletics influences their diets in a distinct way. Since their liminal identity extends to their relationship with food, we can say that for the liminal athlete, liminality not only has social and economic dimensions; it also has a physiological dimension. Liminal athletes subject their bodies to active lifestyles in which they train, play, and recover from sport in addition to their non-sport related activities. On top of their active lifestyles, liminal

athletes also have diets affected by their sport. In the next section, I examine how the social, economic, and physiological dimensions of liminality combine when athletes must make decisions about shopping for food.

Theme 4: Budgeting and Planning

It is important to understand what factors influence or limit athletes' decisions while shopping, since diet is such a crucial component of successful athletic performance (American College of Sports Medicine et al 2000). Ultimate Frisbee players were quick to mention cost effectiveness and convenience when talking about which factors affect the food they buy and where they buy it. Their responses also indicated that they were health conscious, but perhaps not as health conscious as they might be if Ultimate Frisbee were their full-time profession. Informants were also asked about food purchase and preparation to gain a better understanding of how much time they spend planning and prepping for consumption.

The majority of informants reported price was crucial to their decision-making. Following price, most informants also said healthiness or a related term(s) (healthy, organic, fresh, better for you, natural, not processed) was a factor when shopping for groceries. The majority of informants reported having a budget or price range for groceries. When asked about keeping track of their food consumption, the majority of informants reported they do not track calories or nutrients. Three informants said they don't count calories or tabulate nutrients but they attempt to be mindful of calories or nutrition when eating. When it comes to grocery shopping, professional Ultimate players

are price conscious and to a lesser extent, health conscious. This contrasts with their perception of how other professional athletes eat. When asked about what types of foods professional athletes should eat, several informants distinguished professional athletes' diets from those of Ultimate Frisbee players by indicating that other professional athletes have enough money to pay for the healthiest form of eating and/or a personal chef or dietitian. We can conclude that while healthy food choices are important to them, the athletes in this study consider money to be a limiting factor when it comes to their ability to eat like "professional athletes."

The majority of informants did the grocery shopping for their household. Three informants did not. Of these, one lives at home and has a parent who does the grocery shopping, one lives at home in the summer and otherwise eats in a dining hall at college, and one has a wife who does all the grocery shopping. Half of my informants indicated that location is critical to choosing where to shop. Of these informants, one did not do the grocery shopping in his household, but stated that location was the main factor for his family member who did the shopping. Three informants combined location, quality, and cost when deciding where to buy groceries. These informants frequented the grocery store closest to them that they determined had the best quality for the lowest price after ruling out convenient grocery stores with high quality and high prices or low prices but lower quality.

When asked about how many meals they prepared per week, athletes' answers ranged. Two informants indicated that because of their schedules, they frequently ate out but prepared some meals (such as breakfast), on their own. One informant who was still

in college prepared many his meals while home for breaks, but at school relied on the dining hall. Five informants varied in their responses but indicated that they tried to prepare the majority of their weekly meals themselves or with a significant other/spouse (as opposed to dining out).

Understanding whether or not Ultimate players grocery shop or cook for themselves and what factors influence their decisions to do so gives us a glimpse into the lives of liminal athletes. Professional Ultimate Frisbee players have tight schedules, grocery budgets, and other people who influence their food choices. They shop for and prepare most of their own meals so they put thought into where and how they will spend their money. It is important for us to acknowledge that, for liminal athletes, nutrition cannot strictly be understood as what is put into the body. Many other factors influence what liminal athletes consume: primarily convenience, cost, and the other people who eat with them. Food quality and "healthiness" are things they think about, but they also need to think about where the grocery store is located, how much time they have to shop, what their shopping budget is, what they want to eat, what they know how to make, and what the people they may share their meals with want to eat. Through the food data collected, we can also see that they perceive their experiences with shopping, cooking, and eating as different and unique from professional athletes'. They perceive their own food consumption as based on many different variables and not simply about maintaining a perfect, performance-ready body, which causes them to internalize their liminality: they don't eat like professional athletes because they don't need to, don't want to, and can't afford to.

Theme 5: Different Definitions of Professional Athlete

The themes discussed define Ultimate Frisbee players as liminal in their position to amateur and professional athletes and how that liminality affects their lives. However, there is an unanswered question that remains relevant to my study: what is the definition of a professional athlete? Technically, all the Ultimate Frisbee players in this study were "professional athletes." They played for the highest level of their sport on professional teams and were paid to do so. Yet time and again their responses indicated that they thought they were distinct from professional athletes. When asked to define a professional athlete, informants all gave different responses. Some of their definitions were organized around character traits while others were focused on salaries (See Table 4). Directly after asking informants to define "professional athlete," they were asked if they considered themselves professional athletes. The majority of informants indicated that professional Ultimate Frisbee players were professional athletes. Two athletes said Ultimate Frisbee players were semi-pro but each gave different explanations for what made them semi-pro instead of professional athletes. One informant focused on time spent on sport while the other focused on payment.

> I wouldn't consider myself a professional athlete, no. Probably a semi-professional athlete in that it complements my lifestyle and requires not a full life dedication but a large chunk of life dedication outside of work.
>
> I'm not sure where the line between professional and semi-professional is. I think that there's probably a difference between what I make in a season and what another profession athlete makes.

Despite the majority identifying as professional athletes, all informants discussed ways Ultimate players were different from "other professional athletes." Informants

identified differences at the individual level and the sport level. At the individual level they listed time and personal priorities. At the sport level, they discussed payment, incentives, and size and recognition of Frisbee as a sport. To a few informants, sport-level differences such as payment and sport size were finite barriers between themselves and other professional athletes:

> So the things that are the same: we have a stadium, we have uniforms, we sell tickets, we have a crowd, we have half time events, like high school teams will play. After the game people will come out so I've signed a couple autographs, which is fun. Kids talk to you, kids say that they want to play Frisbee at this level someday. They buy- we have a merchandise stand- so you see people with our hats, with our replica jerseys, with our shirts, with our discs, stuff like that with our insignia on it. So stuff like that is similar. And then there's not a lot of things that are different, I mean, we travel as a team, when we show up for games we're supposed to look professional- we're not supposed to be in regular street clothes. We're supposed to be in something to represent Revolution, so we're supposed to be wearing our hats and our polo. We have a polo, we get a jacket, we have our shirts- we have all these things that we can wear as opposed to regular shirts or dress clothes or stuff like that. I don't think there's any differences other than the fact that other sports that have been around longer. A lot of athletes you hear about have these huge contracts with all this money and stuff like that and I don't think it's far fetched to think that somewhere in the future Ultimate Frisbee players will be getting the same contract, the same kind of pay as football, baseball, soccer players. So as of right now I think the only difference is what kind of pay you get as a player in Frisbee as opposed to other sports but I don't think it's outlandish to think that in the future it will be the same.
>
> Well, the sport just isn't a very big deal. But really, it shares a lot of the same qualities: we play in front of fans, we play a sport. But it's just really small.

For those who identified differences at the personal level, the distinction between themselves and other professional athletes seemed insurmountable:

> I think the big difference is, pay and incentives. And then, me specifically as a professional athlete? Again, priorities. I very much have a life outside my professional life as an Ultimate player and particularly grad school is a big part of that.

> I think I'm different in the fact that my life isn't based around my professional athleticism. I try to balance a lot of other things. This is the most important thing to me, but it might not be the most important thing to somebody else that I care about so I don't want to overpower them with this in case it shuts them out from what I do.

Perhaps one of the most complicated qualities of liminal athletes is that their status is determined by the world of professional sports, something over which they have little control. The unclear definition of professional athlete is a product of the tumultuous nature of professional sports. When the nebulous term "professional athlete" meets the variety of professional sports and their distinct levels of legitimacy, the result is a liminal identity. The liminal status of athletes is influenced by the status of their sport. If a sport is liminal, its athletes have limited upward mobility. For both liminal sports and liminal athletes, the transition to "legitimacy" is based on the popularity and financial thresholds a sport must pass to be considered a "legitimate" professional sport.

Professional Ultimate is the only paid, elite level of Ultimate Frisbee. It is distinct from amateur levels of Ultimate Frisbee in that teams are part of national leagues and players have paid contracts. However, players cannot make a living from professional Ultimate Frisbee and they play amateur Ultimate Frisbee during the professional season. In fact, professional Ultimate Frisbee players are involved with amateur Ultimate at many levels. They coach, they play on club teams and summer teams, and they throw around for fun. In other sports, this isn't necessarily common; contracts and busy schedules limit athletes' opportunities to play recreationally. Thus in other professional sports, there seems to be a bigger gap between professional and amateur. In Ultimate, the gap between

professional and amateur may be perceived as smaller than the gap between professional Ultimate and "legitimate" professional sports.

Ultimate Frisbee is growing in popularity as a sport. It is currently contracted with ESPN3 for championship broadcasts and may be played in an upcoming Summer Olympics. All informants told me the future of Ultimate is a bigger, widely recognized, Olympic sport. If this is true, we may see Ultimate players move out of the space of "liminal athletes" as Ultimate Frisbee transitions from liminal professional sport to legitimate professional sport. Yet, when I asked informants where they saw themselves in the future of Ultimate Frisbee, they didn't describe themselves as part of the popularized professional Ultimate landscape. All the players said they wanted to continue playing Frisbee as long as it was physically possible, mentioning playing at the Masters Club Level (Ages 30+). Some mentioned continuing to play professionally as long as it was convenient. Convenience, as they described it, was not focused on physical ability or limitations. Instead, they talked about new jobs, graduation, relationships: things that they would prioritize over the Ultimate schedule if need be. For my informants, transitioning from being a liminal professional athlete means returning to solely being an amateur athlete, not becoming one of the "other professional athletes" they mentioned in interviews.

Despite players' confidence in the growing popularity of the sport, there is no timeline for Ultimate Frisbee's transition from a liminal sport to a legitimate professional sport. Ultimate Frisbee as a liminal sport parallels its athletes: the amount of time it will take to cross the threshold to legitimate status remains undetermined. Both are in an

epoch of liminality and subject to indefinite uncertainty about the change in their status (Thomassen 2014). There are many cultural and economic variables that will be involved in Ultimate Frisbee's transition into a legitimate professional sport. The results of this study indicate that professional Ultimate players are not the only people who would be affected by this change. Given their current involvement in the amateur Ultimate community, we might expect to see the transition of professional Ultimate ripple change throughout the entire sport of Ultimate Frisbee.

Chapter 7: Discussion

Why should we care about liminal athletes? From an anthropological perspective, liminal athletes demonstrate an opportunity to expand our model of the liminal condition. Liminal athletes form *communitas* as defined by Turner's (1969) analysis of liminality. However, Turner's (1969, 1983) research limits liminality to a finite phase of ritual, specifically among tribal or "traditional" societies. Thomassen's (2014) research on liminality accounts for Western, industrialized societies as well as modernity. Thomassen's (2014) model also broadens the scale of liminality, which allows for multiple types of liminalities to occur over different periods of time. In this study, I combine Thomassen's broad temporal model of liminality with Turner's outline of the liminal phase to examine the influence of status on professional sports and the athletes who play them. I demonstrate that liminality is a multi-faceted condition with social, economic, and physiological dimensions.

The timeline for crossing the liminal threshold remains undetermined for both Ultimate Frisbee as a sport and professional Ultimate Frisbee players as athletes. This supports Thommassen's (2014) temporal model of liminality, specifically the "epoch" category of liminality. In the liminal state, athletes form what Turner (1969) describes as *communitas*. Liminal athletes form *communitas* bonding over the qualities they share that separate them from amateur athletes and professional athletes. Specifically, professional

Ultimate Frisbee players form *communitas* by bringing "The Spirit of the Game" from their amateur leagues into their professional leagues and creating a unique playing experience within the sport of Ultimate Frisbee and the professional sports world in general. Ultimate Frisbee as a liminal sport parallels the liminality of its athletes because it is subject to social and economic dimensions of liminality. With increased popularity and financial success, Ultimate Frisbee can cross the threshold to become a "legitimate" sport. Until then, Ultimate Frisbee players are liminal athletes enveloped in a liminal sport. By using a flexible model of liminality that incorporates research from both Turner (1969) and Thomassen (2014), we get the most detailed understanding of how liminality influences the lives of professional athletes.

Beyond the theoretical applications of this research, liminal athletes are important to our understanding of professional athletics and elite athletes. First, we must critically examine which sports are liminal sports and what qualities or barriers separate them from "legitimate" professional sports. Second, we must recognize that liminal sports are built on the backs of liminal athletes. Therefore, liminal sports- struggling to gain recognition, popularity, and resources- are further marginalized because their athletes' priorities are split between sport and livelihood. Finally, and most importantly, liminal athletes demonstrate that the majority of athletes have experienced a liminal period. All athletes who train and compete at an elite level but who must support themselves via another means, be it school or work, find themselves in a liminal space. They are caught between their athletic and non-athletic worlds and this liminality influences their bodies, budgets, social lives, and futures. This is something we cannot ignore, especially at the highest

level of athletic performance. Even the highest paid, most athletic professional athlete was once a liminal athlete pursuing a dream. Thus, we may use the findings of this study to further explore how status influences social, economic, and physiological dimensions of athletes' lives. Future studies may also investigate the short and long-term outcomes of the social, economic, and physiological dimensions of liminality for athletes.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and Future Studies

In its current state, professional Ultimate Frisbee is a liminal sport, a sport in transition. Its players, however, are liminal in a different way: they are caught between the world of professional sport and the world of amateur sport. They are vital components of amateur and professional leagues, as well as vital members of households, work places, college communities, and friend groups. Liminality has social, economic, and physiological dimensions for professional Ultimate Frisbee players. Their social lives and daily schedules revolve around Ultimate. They cannot support themselves financially with their sport so they need another source of income, but it must be compatible with Ultimate. Their diets and grocery shopping choices are also influenced by Ultimate Frisbee, which adds a physiological dimension to their liminality. In addition to being multi-faceted, the liminal phase for professional Ultimate Frisbee players is indefinite. Players must choose between remaining liminal until Ultimate Frisbee becomes a "legitimate" sport or reverting back to amateur athleticism. In the meantime, they engage in *communitas* with each other, bonding over their shared experience in the liminal space. Specifically, professional Ultimate Frisbee players form *communitas* by incorporating "The Spirit of the Game" from amateur Ultimate into their professional Ultimate experience.

Professional Ultimate Frisbee players are not the only type of liminal athletes. Wherever we see athletes competing at the highest level of their sport, who cannot earn a living from their sport, we see liminal athletes. In this paper, I use a flexible anthropological model of liminality. This model includes analyses of different dimensions of liminality and conditions of the liminal state, such as *communitas* (Turner 1969), and accounts for different types of liminality across indeterminate periods of time (Thomassen 2014). Future studies on liminal populations may find utility in the broader anthropological model of liminality presented in this paper. Future research on this topic could expand on the physiological dimensions of liminality by examining liminal athletes' nutrition, stress, and daily activity.

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Appendix A: Tables

Table 1: Thomassen (2016) Types of Liminal Experiences: Temporal Dimensions

Model 1 Types of Liminal Experiences: Temporal Dimensions

Time	Subject		
	Individual	**Group**	**Society**
Moment	Sudden event affecting one's life (death, divorce, illness) or individualized ritual passage (baptism, ritual passage to womanhood, as for example among the Ndembu)	Ritual passage to manhood (almost always in cohorts); graduation ceremonies, etc. Ritualized passage within a cosmological event-calendar, such as New Year, Harvest, Solstice.	A whole society facing a sudden event (sudden invasion, natural disaster, a plague) where social distinctions and normal hierarchy disappear Carnivals Revolutionary moments
Period	Critical life-stages Puberty or teenage	Ritual passage to manhood, which may extend into weeks or months in some societies Group travels	Wars Revolutionary periods
Epoch (or life-span duration)	Individuals standing outside society, by choice or designated Monkhood. In some tribal societies, individuals remain 'dangerous' because of a failed ritual passage Twins are permanently liminal in some societies	Religious Fraternities, Ethnic minorities, Social minorities, Transgender Immigrant groups betwixt and between old and new culture Groups that live at the edge of 'normal structures', often perceived as both dangerous and 'holy'	Prolonged wars, enduring political instability, prolonged intellectual confusion (example: the Thirty Years' War) Incorporation and reproduction of liminality into social and political structures Modernity as 'permanent liminality'?

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Table 2: Active AUDL Teams

Team	City/Area	Founded	First Season
DC Breeze	Washington, DC	2013	2013
Montreal Royal	Montreal, QC	2013	2014
New York Empire	New York City, NY	2013	2013
Ottawa Outlaws	Ottawa, ON	2014	2015
Philadelphia Phoenix	Philadelphia, PA	2013	2013
Toronto Rush	Toronto, ON	2013	2013
Chicago Wildfire	Chicago, IL	2013 (as Windy City Wildfire)	2013
Detroit Mechanix	Madison Heights, MI	2010	2012
Indianapolis AlleyCats	Indianapolis, IN	2012	2012
Madison Radicals	Madison, WI	2013	2013
Minnesota Wind Chill	St. Paul, MN	2013	2013
Pittsburgh Thunderbirds	Pittsburgh, PA	2014	2015

Continued

Table 2 Continued

Team	City/Area	Founded	First Season
Los Angeles Aviators	Los Angeles, CA	2014	2015
San Diego Growlers	San Diego, CA	2014	2015
San Francisco FlameThrowers	Oakland, CA	2013	2014
San Jose Spiders	Los Altos Hills, CA	2013	2014
Seattle Cascades	Seattle, WA	2014 (as Seattle Raptors)	2015
Vancouver Riptide	Vancouver, BC	2013	2014
Atlanta Hustle	Atlanta, GA	2015	2015
Jacksonville Cannons	Jacksonville, FL	2014	2015
Nashville NightWatch	Nashville, TN	2014	2015
Raleigh Flyers	Raleigh, NC	2014	2015
Austin Sol	Austin, TX	2015	2016
Dallas Roughnecks	Dallas, TX	2015	2016

Table 3: Former AUDL Teams

Team	City/Area	Season(s)	Status
Buffalo Hunters	Orchard Park, NY	2012	Rebranded as Rochester Dragons
Rochester Dragons	Rochester, NY	2013—2015	Contracted
Columbus Cranes	Westerville, Ohio	2012	Folded
Connecticut Constitution	New Britain, CT	2012	Folded
New Jersey Hammerheads	West Windsor Township, NJ	2013	Folded
Philadelphia Spinners	Philadelphia, PA	2012	Left to join MLU
Rhode Island Rampage	East Providence, RI	2012	Folded
Bluegrass Revolution	Lexington, KY	2012	Rebranded as Cincinnati Revolution
Cincinnati Revolution	Cincinnati, OH	2013-2016	Folded
Salt Lake Lions	Salt Lake City, UT	2014	Dissolved
Charlotte Express	Charlotte, NC	2015-2016	Contracted

Table 4: Comparison of Professional Ultimate Frisbee Players' Definitions of "Professional Athlete"

Definition	Character Oriented or Payment Oriented	Do you consider yourself a professional athlete?	Explanation
So I would say someone that works hard at what they do. A professional athlete to me is someone that cares about the game that they play. So they're not just playing because they're good at it but playing because they like to play. And a professional athlete is someone who always strives to get better. Just because you're professional and play at the highest level doesn't mean you can't get better. So people that actively try to get better, that's a characteristic of a professional athlete. I would say you have to be competitive, you have to wanna win, you have to want to succeed. Not necessarily win, you can't win every game, you can't win every tournament or anything, but at least wanting to be successful when it comes to your team or getting better yourself, whatever your goals are that you set for the season, if you're actively working to achieve those goals, I would say that's a characteristic as well.	Character Oriented	Yes	I mean everyone has their own different ideas of what's a professional athlete and what the characteristics are but I take steps to actively get better as a player and I try to play with a high level of sportsmanship, I try to implement spirit of the game always when I'm playing, and I work hard to be a good teammate, not only just a good player. So I think I would consider myself a professional athlete based on those things.
Someone who gets a small amount, or any amount, of income from playing professional sports in front of spectators	Payment Oriented	Yes	In the smallest margin of the sense, yes.
I would say a professional athlete is probably someone who is able to love whatever lifestyle they'd like without a job- just being paid by whatever their athletic pursuit of choice is	Payment Oriented	No	I wouldn't consider myself a professional athlete, no. Probably a semi-professional athlete in that it complements my lifestyle and requires not a full life dedication but a large chunk of life dedication outside of work.
A professional athlete to me is somebody that other people look up to. Whether or not they hold the title of being on that team or getting paid a lot of money, that they're generally a role model for somebody else. And I think that's what inspired me most about this team is its ability to um, become role models for other people in the community.	Character Oriented	Yes	I do. And I try to be one, not just when I play, but in teaching other people about the sport and teaching younger people about the sport, but also people that see the sport as something that isn't legitimate. Um, so my professionalism comes in trying to help them understand the reality of what I do.

Continued

Table 4 Continued

I'd say, it's someone that gets paid to play a sport.	Payment Oriented	Yes	
Anyone who plays a sport and gets paid to do it.	Payment Oriented	No	I'm not sure where the line between professional and semi-professional is because I think that there's probably a difference between what I make in a season and what a, other profession athlete makes.
I would say, anyone paid to do it is professional. And it's not like the top tier of people paid to do a sport, which some people would say, I think. I would say that it's just being paid to do that sport.	Payment Oriented	Yes	
Outside the straightforward definition of someone who is paid to compete - someone who focuses on fine tuning their athletic ability at the highest level of competition. Someone who spends their time doing that and focusing on improving their skills in order to compete at the highest level of play. Whereas amateurs, in my mind, are playing more pleasure. That I see as the main difference between amateur and professional levels	Character Oriented	Yes	I may not be a professional athlete in terms of what people think of when they think of professional athlete. But when I am here, I am focused on improving my skills in order to compete at the highest level.

Appendix B: Notes

1 Arnold van Gennep's original publication, *Les Rites de Passage*, was published in 1909. In this paper, I cite the 1960 translation *The Rites of Passage*. Wherever the original book is referenced, I cite both dates.

2 After obtaining IRB approval from The Ohio State University in May 2016, recruitment emails were sent to each team and both teams' managers and players agreed to participate in the proposed research.

3 I developed a comprehensive open coding scheme from the data (LeCompte and Schensul 2010; Ryan and Bernard 2003; DeCuir-Gunby et al 2011). Memos were also included in the coding process to make clarifications or justifications for codes or note the relationship between two or more codes.