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An ethic of indulgence? Alcohol, Ultimate Frisbee and calculated hedonism

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Abstract

In this article, I use Featherstone's concept of calculated hedonism to analyse consumption of alcohol amongst Ultimate Frisbee players. Drawing on a multi-year ethnographic project, I examine Ultimate players' reasons for drinking and contextualize this drinking within Ultimate's broader lifestyle. This examination and contextualization contributes to a growing body of literature that goes beyond the dominant perspectives on sport-related drinking through its conceptualization of consumptive pleasures in the formation of player identity and relationships between players.

Keywords

alcohol, calculated hedonism, determined drunkenness, sport, Ultimate Frisbee

Introduction

Excessive alcohol consumption associated with sport has been largely constructed, within sports sociology, as producing problematic aspects of hegemonic masculinity, such as misogyny, hazing, homophobia and proving one's worth through drinking until the point of illness (Palmer, 2011, 2013b). At the same, Palmer argues, research on sport and alcohol has adopted a relatively narrow range of 'theoretical, conceptual and methodological terms' (2013b: 2). Subsequently, she cautions:

> As sociologists of sport, we are at risk of simply reproducing stereotypes and assumptions of sport-related drinking more common to popular accounts of sport and alcohol, rather than developing the critical, theoretically informed analyses of drinking in sport that should be our key point of difference. (Palmer, 2013b: 2)

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Palmer (2011) suggests that alternative theoretical perspectives, such as calculated hedonism, offer productive and underexplored opportunities for developing new perspectives on links between sport and alcohol.

In this article, then, I take up Palmers' (2011, 2013b) call for new theoretical perspectives, by deploying Featherstone's (2007) notion of calculated hedonism to consider alcohol consumption amongst committed Ultimate Frisbee (Ultimate) players within mixed gender settings. I contextualize this consumption within a range of social practices, and show how the concept of calculated hedonism can be used to theorize links between different elements of Ultimate's lifestyle.

Having demonstrated that calculated hedonism informs much of Ultimate's lifestyle, I argue this concept facilitates a contextualized understanding of heavy drinking in Ultimate, which, importantly, reveals significant contrasts, as well as some similarities with the social relations described by research on drinking in other sports (e.g., Muir and Seitz, 2004; Pringle and Hickey, 2010; Waitt and Warren, 2008). Thus, although heavy drinking might be well critiqued as unhealthy, it is also implicated in the production of alternative, and potentially less problematic, sporting subjectivities. Such an approach is not intended to ignore problematic aspects of alcohol in sport; rather, it is an attempt to add to current understandings through recognizing further complexities of the 'sport-alcohol nexus' (Palmer, 2011: 168).

Firstly, I introduce Featherstone's (2007) concept of calculated hedonism and review recent literature on alcohol use that frames heavy sessional drinking in relation to this concept (e.g., Brain, 2000; Hackley et al., 2012; Measham, 2004a; Measham and Brain, 2005; Szmigin et al., 2008). Secondly, I outline my research methods in the study from which I use research materials. I then discuss my research materials in relation to calculated hedonism. In my conclusion I consider the theoretical insights offered by calculated hedonism for examining sport-related drinking.

Calculated hedonism

The destabilization and fragmentation of identity within late modern societies has become a familiar theme (e.g., Bauman, 2007; Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). Within this context of destabilization, Turner (2008) and Featherstone (2007) argue, consumption has taken on an increasingly significant role in the construction of identities. Turner, for example, juxtaposes Weber's analysis of the ascetics of early capitalist production with a contemporary emphasis on capitalist consumption. Whereas much 20th century sociology assumed that the value and meanings associated with consumption of commodities was determined by the logic of capitalist production, it has become increasingly clear that consumption requires sociological analysis in its own right (Featherstone, 2007). Indeed, Featherstone points to 'the growing prominence of the *culture* of consumption' (2007: 13, emphasis in original) through which pleasure, desire, social identification and social distinction are pursued.

Importantly, consumer cultures exist where there is an oversupply of commodities that individuals are encouraged to indulgently consume. For Turner, this oversupply and indulgent consumption predicates 'a new life-style, embodied in the ethic of calculating hedonism' (2008: 90). Calculating hedonists, Featherstone argues, are those individuals

who 'make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into a lifestyle' (2007: 84). Calculated hedonism, then, refers to the active construction of identity through pleasurable consumption.

Through various forms of consumption, calculated hedonists deliberately seek out intense emotional and aesthetic experiences. Yet, Featherstone qualifies, such explorations, are carefully prescribed. Further, such explorations, 'do not amount to a rejection of controls, but a more carefully circumscribed and interpersonally responsible "controlled decontrol" of the emotions which necessarily involves some calculation and mutually expected respect for other persons' (2007: 58). Calculated hedonism, then, disrupts binary understandings of rationality and emotions, suggesting instead that rationality and emotions work in combination.

The concept of calculated hedonism has been employed by a number of scholars to reconceptualize drinking patterns within the contemporary political, historical and economic moment (e.g., Brain, 2000; Griffin et al., 2009; Measham, 2004a, 2004b; Szmigin et al., 2008). As Brain observes, in this post-industrial, postmodern consumerist era individuals are expected to pursue pleasure and gratification through direct consumption. Through the 1990s, the alcohol industry actively marketed new products, with a wider range of flavours and increasing levels of alcohol, for their psychoactive properties (Brain, 2000; Measham and Brain, 2005). The development and marketing of these new products, along with liberalization of drinking laws in many Western countries, suggest that hedonistic indulgence in alcohol is acceptable, and, from a government perspective, of economic value (Measham and Brain, 2005).

Yet, at the same time neoliberal discourses, which prioritize management of the self and locate responsibility for problems, such as alcohol abuse, with individuals rather than society, have simultaneously become dominant (Griffin et al., 2009; Measham and Brain, 2005). Subsequently, Brain argues, 'there is an evident tension' (2000: 12) insofar as discourses of consumerism encourage pursuit of pleasure, while discourses of self-management emphasize moderation and restraint. Nonetheless, heavy sessional drinkers, and young drinkers in particular, are critiqued by media, health authorities and governments for their immoderate consumption without recognition of these tensions between discourses of consumerism and of moderation (Szmigin et al., 2008).

Further, these critiques have often been made without considering the specific practices of those classified as binge drinkers, not to mention the range of definitions of the term 'binge drinking'. Numerous studies (e.g., Brain, 2000; Measham and Brain, 2005; Szmigin et al., 2008) have found heavy sessional drinkers to engage in a range of practices of self-management with regards to their drinking. Brain, for example, discovered his research participants organized their drinking around other commitments, such as school, work and family. In this way, Brain suggested his participants were 'calculating hedonists' (2000: 8) insofar as they sought 'sensuous indulgence of consuming but always in planned, carefully controlled ways' (2000: 9). Similarly, Measham found young drinkers planned and controlled their consumption 'within the boundaries of time (the weekend), space (club, bar, private party), company (supportive friends) and intensity' (2004a: 319). Szmigin et al. argue that the drinkers in their study 'are choosing when, where and who to drink with and even when they can drink to excess implying that

they are equally choosing when not to do so' (2008: 362). Measham summarizes this process as an act of seeking 'a controlled loss of control' (2002: 349). Such nuanced approaches to theorizing drinking, Palmer suggests, are particularly relevant to sport: 'sport is peppered with examples of this determined drunkenness where the explicit intention is to get rapidly and heavily intoxicated' (2011: 175). Subsequently, calculated hedonism offers a way of conceptualizing heavy drinking within sport without repeating hysterical media narratives of the fecklessness of heavy drinkers.

Methods

This article draws on findings from a multi-year ethnographic investigation of ethical subjectivities amongst Ultimate players (Crocket, 2012). Operating as a bricoleur (Kincheloe et al., 2011), I employed a range of fieldwork methods, seeking 'a deepened and thoroughly partial understanding of [my] topic' (Richardson and St. Pierre, 2005: 963). Over the course of three years, I undertook multi-sited participant observation as a player–researcher at a range of competitive and social tournaments within New Zealand, Australia and Europe and, for 12 months, I trained and played on an elite men's team. I conducted 14 interviews, which included 10 New Zealanders, two British players and two from the United States of America. I also conducted textual analysis drawing on as many publicly available texts on Ultimate as I could find.

Throughout my fieldwork, I sought to record research materials as thoroughly as possible and to identify inconsistencies and anomalies as well as patterns. Nevertheless, I do not 'claim exclusive privilege in the representation of "ethnographic truth"' (Angrosino, 2005: 731). Instead, I acknowledge challenges such as the fatigue associated with attending tournament parties after participating in a full day's play and my reliance on notes scrawled late at night after leaving such parties. Subsequently, rather than aiming to offer an unquestionable account of calculated hedonism in Ultimate I offer here a sense of 'situatedness, which posits a particular perspective' (Chung, 2009: 62).

I conducted data analysis throughout my project (Ezzy, 2002), primarily through conducting 'analysis through theoretical reading' (Kvale, 2007: 117). Following St. Pierre (2011), I undertook extensive theoretical readings, which, in combination with re-reading my field notes, transcripts and texts and the process of writing, was significant in the development of my findings. In the course of this process, I came to share Palmer's (2011) dissatisfaction with the narrow focus of much sport sociology literature on alcohol consumption. Subsequently, I sought to redevelop my work by putting my Foucauldian approach into conversation with in recent studies of drug and alcohol, which draw on calculated hedonism as an organizing concept.

Ultimate Frisbee and calculated hedonism

Ultimate Frisbee is an invasion-style team sport played with a flying disc (Crocket, 2013; Griggs, 2011; Thornton, 2004). Key factors that distinguish Ultimate as a lifestyle sport include its origin within the counterculture movement of the 1960s, its code of fair play—Spirit of the Game—being explicitly written into the rules of the game, and, relatedly, players officiating their own games. Although a number of scholars (e.g.,

Crocket, in press-b; Griggs, 2011; Robbins, 2004; Thornton, 2004) have examined these factors, little consideration has been paid to the broader, distinctive lifestyle associated with the sport.

Like many other lifestyle sports (cf., Wheaton, 2004), Ultimate Frisbee is a subculture that values high levels of commitment. A significant marker of commitment amongst Ultimate players is regular attendance at social and competitive weekend-long tournaments. Tournaments vary between mixed (co-ed) and gender-segregated formats. However, because men's and women's divisions are typically run simultaneously at the same venue, almost every tournament includes both men and women as active participants. Subsequently, even when playing in gender-segregated teams, male and female Ultimate players spend significant amounts of time socializing with each other over the course of a weekend. Attending tournaments involves playing multiple games (often seven games per weekend) and a range of associated activities, such as watching other teams play, sharing travel, accommodation and food, and partying. Collectively, I suggest, these activities fully immerse participants in an indulgent, hedonistic lifestyle. Ultimate players' sense of belonging to a distinctive community based on this lifestyle is reinforced by its relative unintelligibility to non-players (Crocket, in press-a, see also Bara, 2012).

Tournament parties were a central feature of every tournament I conducted fieldwork at and were usually well attended. Most parties, which would usually offer subsidized drinks, were held on the Saturday night of a tournament weekend. For many—but certainly not all—players, tournament parties were an occasion to engage in heavy sessional drinking. Moreover, at social tournaments, drinking was relatively common in many off-field activities, and amongst a smaller group of players, it was occasionally an on-field activity.

Like Thorpe's (2012) analysis of après snow culture and Donnelly's (2013) analysis of roller derby participants, my analysis suggested that tournament parties, and their associated drinking, form an important part of what it means to be an Ultimate player. Gerald, for example, recalled his first tournament in this way:

> Afterwards we went to the student bar and met all the other teams and socialized and I hadn't really done that with other sports…. With Ultimate, you've circled up, you've all talked about how the game went and now we're going to go to the bar and chat, and get to know each other a bit more. I really like that side. We had lost all our games but we did quite well on the drinking side afterwards with the other teams. So, we were quite proud of that at least.

Moreover, Gerald explicitly contrasted the convivial sociality of Ultimate parties with the abuse he had been subjected to when he joined a new rugby club (Crocket, 2014). Regina described her first playing experience as 'a big party tournament which was basically three days of partying with a bit of Ultimate. It was a good introduction [to Ultimate], I think'. Much like the roller derby participants Donnelly (2013) studied, many teams aim to 'win the party', by being the last team remaining on the dance floor, while tournaments often offer prizes to the players with the best costume at the party. The recognition of the importance of the party, of drinking and socializing with other players, points towards Ultimate's lifestyle being one of calculated, hedonistic indulgence.

Although there is certainly some degree of pressure on partygoers to drink heavily, I found coercive peer pressure to drink to be relatively rare. A significant minority of players either do not drink at all or do not drink heavily and are by no means social outcasts for making these decisions. Regina, for example, suggested that as a new player, the combination of playing and drinking opportunities was, 'good because you can choose how much you want of either'.

Relatedly, I am not, by Ultimate standards at least, a heavy drinker and, in my 10-year playing career, have never felt pressured by other players to drink more than I wish. Even after this time, however, I am still somewhat surprised at the number of players who pursue 'determined drunkenness' (Measham, 2004b: 344) in full knowledge they will have a hangover for their Sunday games. Despite this being quite different to my preferred approach to drinking, I point out that players who drink heavily at tournament parties have chosen a specific time, location and social group to drink with as Brain (2000), Measham (2004a) and Szmigin et al. (2008) had identified as significant. I explore each of these aspects—time, location, group—to consider the appropriateness of calculated hedonism as an organizing concept for Ultimate-related drinking.

Levels of consumption at tournament parties varied significantly, depending on the kind of tournament; thus, drinking was timed to the particular event. Parties held during competitive tournaments tended to involve far less determined drunkenness than parties at social tournaments. Typically, heavy drinking at parties revolved around games, such as boat races, three-pint challenges (the amount of beer an upside down Frisbee can hold), and forfeit-based games. Because social tournaments place less emphasis on achieving peak performance, hung over players are not seen as letting their teams down. Instead, I suggest they are seen as having exercised a pleasure-maximizing strategy.

Similarly, many players play both competitive and social tournaments and moderate their drinking according to the context. Gerald, for example, contrasted his behaviour at two consecutive tournaments, the first of which was a social tournament:

> I turned up to that already intoxicated at 2 in the afternoon, already drunk, and I was throwing ridiculous discs and enjoying myself. And, last weekend we had tour [a competitive UK based tournament series], and it meant you know, early nights, waking up early, stretching off properly, you know, being as ready for that tournament as I could be.

Importantly, Gerald picks and chooses the tournaments at which he indulges in heavy drinking.

Moreover, although some tournaments are clearly delineated as competitive or social tournaments, teams and players often participate in the tournament—and the party—on their own terms. Some teams and players regard the party as essential regardless of how competitive the tournament is, while others might limit their partying even at social tournaments in order to focus more on playing. Subsequently, I found a mix of strategies towards drinking at every tournament, with some degree of heavy drinking ever-present.

In terms of location, although tournament parties are often held in public bars in the presence of other patrons; players primarily interact with other players and, in doing so, have chosen a specific social group to drink with. Parties provide opportunities to

socialize with teammates and players from other teams, to catch up with old friends and, importantly, to make new friends. Reflecting on his participation in a World Club Championships tournament, Phillip suggested at such tournaments, parties took on extra importance, because: 'the party and the trading night [where players trade their playing shirts] were really the only opportunity to mingle with people from other countries that have exactly the same passion as you do. I think they're a definitely a critical part of the sport'. Phillip's account illustrates how, 'drinking serves simultaneously to construct both a sense of communal identity for those drinking together or sharing tastes and a sense of difference and boundaries from others' (Dietler, 2006: 236).

To further contextualize the group, it is necessary to consider the contribution of broader, carnivalesque (cf., Hackley et al., 2012) aesthetics of tournament parties in the production of both social identification and social difference. An important aspect of social identification as an Ultimate player is dressing in theme for a party. Anna explained that themed costume parties create an atmosphere 'for having fun with one another and where people are all about poking fun at themselves'. As an example, one party I attended had a 'Rubik's cube' theme. Partygoers arrived with each piece of clothing matching a different colour from a Rubik's cube. The challenge was to swap clothing with other players until all one's clothes were of one colour. Initially, many players were racing to be the first person to 'solve' the Rubik's cube. Yet as the party progressed even people who had 'solved' their Rubik's cube continued to trade clothing in a bid to look even more ridiculous, or to help other people 'solve' their own Rubik's cube. These behaviours suggest a playful exploration of emotional and aesthetic experiences, a feature central to calculated hedonism (Featherstone, 2007). In the light of this attention to time, location and group, determined drunkenness was only one of numerous acts of calculated hedonism that Ultimate players indulged in at tournament parties, acts that collectively forged a sense of connection with other players.

This same example of the Rubik's cube party, however, also shows the creation of social difference. The party took place in a public bar. Part way through the night members of a men's rugby team entered the bar. After standing at the bar ordering drinks and reacting to our costumes by pointing and laughing, they proceeded to the dance floor. Dominating most Ultimate players for size, the rugby players quietly pushed many of us—male and female—and a number of other male patrons out of the way, establishing their own space on the dance floor. This low-level aggression was subtle enough to avoid the interest of the bar's security staff and continued through the night. As well, the rugby players approached a number of women who were not in costume, initiating dances that were often overtly sexualized. In a similar manner to Curry's wrestlers, these rugby players appeared to be focused on, 'drinking [and] picking up women' (2000: 168). As far as I could observe, the Ultimate partygoers did their best to continue drinking, dancing and trading clothes while ignoring the rugby players.

The Ultimate players' responses came at the fields on Sunday, when the behaviour of the rugby players became an item of parody as many Ultimate players, who mimicked the rugby players' highly sexualized attempts at dancing with women, and their willingness to use their bodies to move others out of their way on the dance floor. The delayed parody of the rugby players' behaviour might be understood as (re)producing what Dietler describes as 'differences in expected bodily comportment during and after

drinking' (2006: 236). The message conveyed through the parody was of the inappropriateness of aggressive or hyper-sexualized behaviour within Ultimate.[1]

It is not my intention, however, to suggest that drunken antics in Ultimate do not also have negative consequences. As examples, a teammate of mine had to pull out of a tournament after cutting her foot on broken glass while drinking. Occasionally players drink so much they might spend the night sleeping in the toilet block at a hostel, or in the doorway to their hostel room. While some players who over-indulge to this extent express regret at their hangover the next day, such incidents are often interpreted as comical and players rarely seem to moderate their drinking at future tournaments. Relatedly, Gerald told me, 'I'll always have a good story about Steven [pseudonym], like defecating in the bath, or Steven drinking all this champagne'. Gerald's fond recollection of Steven's subversively profane behaviour appears to ignore the negative consequences of Steven's actions and, in particular, that those not involved in such antics often carry the burden of cleaning up after others' drunken escapades.

More broadly, although Ultimate parties involved heavy sessional drinking, I did not observe the levels of hazing, aggression, violence, homophobia and misogyny associated with drinking cultures in many other sports (e.g., Curry, 2000; Fields et al., 2007; Kirby and Wintrup, 2002; Muir and Seitz, 2004; Pringle and Hickey, 2010; Thorpe, 2010; Waitt and Warren, 2008). During my fieldwork, I did not personally encounter, nor hear stories of, physical or verbal violence towards others, or aggressive destruction of property, such as deliberately smashing glasses or jugs, at Ultimate parties. While I do not claim that such things have never occurred at Ultimate parties, my research indicates that such events are rare.

I suggest that a number of contextual factors may explain the rarity of these events. Firstly, the presence of both men and women as active participants is, in my view, a crucial factor. I found that even those players who focused on playing gender-segregated Ultimate tended to have a social circle including both male and female Ultimate players. In contrast, many of the problems examined within the sport–alcohol nexus are associated with sporting fratriachies, that is, young males drinking with their own male team, club or friends as their prime social group (e.g., Curry, 2000; Muir and Seitz, 2004; Pringle and Hickey, 2010; Thorpe, 2010; Waitt and Warren, 2008). If we consider gender to be performed relationally, then the relative absence of fratriachies is particularly significant.

Relatedly, as I (Crocket, 2013) have argued previously, male Ultimate players perform multiple masculinities on and off the field: problematic hypermasculine behaviours do occur, yet so do more moderated masculinities, which emphasize respect for others and avoidance of abusive behaviour. As an example, when John and I discussed sexual objectification of women, he told me 'it's not a case of like, holding back to behave in front of your wife, it is a case of you just don't do that'. Given that much research on sport, alcohol and masculinities has emphasized the role of hegemonic and hypermasculine behaviours (Palmer, 2011, 2013a, 2013b), the presence of multiple masculinities amongst male Ultimate players is an important explanatory factor.

An aspect of Ultimate that has received less scholarly attention is the (re)production of femininities. This topic deserves greater analysis in its own right. Due to much of my ethnography being located with an elite men's team, I am wary of taking an authoritative

stance. Subsequently, I offer only brief, tentative suggestions. Firstly, many of the women I interviewed preferred playing women's Ultimate to mixed, as they got to take on a greater range of on-field roles. Similarly, recent articles in niche Ultimate media (e.g., Baecher, 2014) have expounded the value of women's Ultimate and argued against comparisons between men's and women's Ultimate. In this regard, women's Ultimate might have similarities to the distinctive 'woman onlyness' of roller derby (cf., Donnelly, 2013). However, of particular relevance for Ultimate-related drinking, is that both my interviewees and women within niche Ultimate media expressed a clear preference for socializing with men and women: while the on-field preference may be for women-only Ultimate, they enjoyed off-field camaraderie between both men and women Ultimate players. A significant part of this camaraderie, I suggest, is a perception that Ultimate players can trust each other. Anna, for example, explained, 'I have never felt threatened or made unsafe by other Frisbee players at a party'. In contrast, she observed, 'I have had my ass kicked so many times on other nights out'.

In light of this analysis, Palmer's suggestion of 'hegemonic drinking' (2013b: 5) practices, in which gender is not the prime axis of analysis, is relevant as the performances I have examined were shared by both men and women. Indeed, for Ultimate insiders, someone being an Ultimate player is their most important feature. In this regard, Alize 'Bob' Clough explained, 'most tournaments… have a party that allows you to meet hundreds of amazing people. And that's really the culture of Ultimate and the lifestyle' (cited in Caner, 2012). This is not to argue that gender is unproblematic within Ultimate (see Crocket, 2013; Pringle and Crocket, 2013; Thornton, 2004), but rather that, at Ultimate parties, dressing in costume, pursuing determined drunkenness, playing drinking games, dancing, telling stories and reliving tournament highlights are activities that both men and women perform. Anna claimed, 'I don't think male and female players party differently', pointing out instead the variety between mixed gender groups of players who might 'go all out', or be 'more toned down'. Within Ultimate's subculture, then, pursuing determined drunkenness does not lead to women being judged as 'drinking like a guy' (cf., Palmer, 2013a), nor does dancing or costume wearing lead to men being judged as effeminate.

In addition to these considerations of gender, I suggest further contextualization of tournament parties within Ultimate's lifestyle is required to understand differences between Ultimate parties and dominant, problematic links between sport and alcohol. Ultimate parties generally took place mid-tournament; the people attending the party would be one's teammates and opponents the following day. This is important in two respects. Firstly, there can be immediate social repercussions for unacceptable behaviour at a party. As Anna suggested, 'it's such a small community that anyone who would be awful enough to act out would be instantly ostracised'. This is an important point, highlighting that calculated hedonism within Ultimate clearly involves a significant level of 'mutually expected respect for other persons' (Featherstone, 2007: 58). Secondly, there are notable aesthetic continuities between tournament parties and other aspects of tournaments, which, I argue, make calculated hedonism a useful concept for understanding the broader Ultimate lifestyle.

Many teams playing in social tournaments, for example, wear fancy dress costumes on the field. Competitive tournaments also display such aesthetics, albeit to a lesser

extent. As an example, Seattle Sockeye, an elite men's club, took fishing rods and nets to the USA Nationals in 2012 and could be seen celebrating points by catching the scorer in a net. Moreover, at all levels of play, players might strike up conversations with opposing players during breaks in play or while off the field, either catching up with friends or introducing themselves to new players.

An apposite example of aesthetic continuity between tournament parties and other aspects of Ultimate's lifestyle are combined team huddles. After each game of Ultimate, it is customary for both teams to share a huddle together and for each team's captain to give a brief speech.[2] Shared team huddles on Saturdays often included references to the upcoming party, while on Sundays stories about the party, drunken antics, whose costumes were best and which players had hangovers were all common.

Not only is calculated hedonism celebrated through storytelling; it was sometimes performed within shared team huddles. As an example, Phillip and I discussed the habits of one team during shared huddles:

> Hamish: Did you hear about this mixed team? The other team would all have to close their eyes, they'd put on lipstick and then kiss the player [from the other team] they thought should be most valuable player [laughs]?
>
> Phillip: Oh, that's genius [laughs], so they'd get covered in kisses.

This performance, which is a vivid example of calculating hedonists' openness to emotional and aesthetic exploration (Featherstone, 2007), might more readily be expected amongst intoxicated players at a tournament party. Subsequently, it blurs distinctions between tournament party behaviours and game-related behaviours. Phillip's immediate response to my account suggests a positive valuing of this practice and is indicative of the broader significance of calculated hedonism in the construction of Ultimate players' subjectivities. In this way, I argue not only does calculated hedonism work to conceptualize alcohol consumption at tournament parties, but it also helps conceptualize the aesthetics of Ultimate's lifestyle in a broader sense.

An ethic of indulgence

There are also links, I suggest, between Ultimate's lifestyle of calculated hedonism and how players relate to one another as opponents on the field. As noted above, Ultimate is a self-refereed sport. This means players are in a relatively unique position of negotiating their own and others' behaviour without recourse to an external official who can impose penalties on rule-breakers. As I have argued elsewhere (Crocket, in press-b), players actively manage their competitive on-field selves through practices of moderation, tolerance and honesty. Moreover, as Griggs (2011) suggests, self-refereeing requires a certain level of agreement about interpretation and application of rules.

Yet the existence of an agreement does not tell us *how* that agreement is reached or maintained. Lou Burruss, a retired elite player, coach and blogger, suggests this agreement is influenced by the time players spend together off-field. More specifically, he argues that players who break agreements about how to behave face off-field consequences:

> Until you've experienced the snub at the tournament party, the muttered disrespect from other players and the awkward silences of your friends and teammates you should be careful about saying that there is *no* penalty. In a community as small as Ultimate's, these off-field penalties are a powerful force and shouldn't be underestimated. (Burruss, 2011, emphasis in original)

Yet, such systems of informal socialization are far from perfect. As Shelley explained:

> I'm not trying to defend binge drinking, but [there are] players who go to nationals and they'll go to bed after dinner, they won't go to the party… and they'll not really pay much attention to the spirit score after the game.

Here Shelley notes that the few players who opt out of Ultimate parties are also less interested in spirit scores, which are the fair play ratings that teams assign to each other after each game. While it is, of course, a simplification to equate determined drunkenness with fair play, Shelley's comment nevertheless points to a complex relationship between on-field and off-field performances in the creation of Ultimate athletic subjectivities.

Concluding thoughts

In this article I have focused on how heavy sessional drinking at tournament parties is performed as an indulgent aspect of an Ultimate lifestyle. I argue that calculated hedonism has strong heuristic value for analysing this style of drinking. In line with existing studies examining drinking as calculated hedonism (e.g., Brain, 2000; Measham and Brain, 2005; Szmigin et al., 2008), I found the timing, location and choice of social group to be carefully controlled factors for drinking at tournament parties. Calculated hedonism is particularly useful for considering alcohol consumption as involving 'a spectrum of possible positive and negative consequences for the user, for their associates and for wider society' (Measham, 2004a: 316).

In this regard, I recognize that drinking in Ultimate should not be considered removed from well-documented health problems associated with alcohol. Just as practices of self-management do not prevent disagreements and contention on the field of play (Crocket, in press-b), the calculated nature of drinking at Ultimate tournaments does not preclude negative consequences, such as vomiting, hangovers and alcohol-related injuries.

Nevertheless, drinking and its associated practices within Ultimate offer a significant contrast, for example, to the misogynistic abuse of women linked with drinking in men's rugby (e.g., Muir and Seitz, 2004; Pringle and Hickey, 2010), and the fratriachal performances of 'bros' within snowboarding (e.g., Thorpe, 2010). There are two key contextual explanations for these differences. Firstly, Ultimate parties feature both men and women as active participants. Indeed, while gender within Ultimate is constructed in problematic ways (Crocket, 2013; Thornton, 2004), tournament parties nevertheless involved 'practices and tropes which cut across gender' (Palmer, 2013b: 5).

Secondly, the aesthetics of calculated hedonism permeated much of Ultimate's lifestyle. As examples, costumes might be seen both on the dance floor and the playing field, while playful disruption of societal norms, such as the 'lipstick MVP' I described earlier, were positively valued by Ultimate players. This contributed to a sense of camaraderie

based on inclusion, trust and respect amongst players. These notions, I suggest, offer a close fit with Featherstone's conceptualization of calculated hedonism as based on an '*interpersonally responsible* "controlled decontrol" of the emotions' (Featherstone, 2007: 58, my emphasis).

Given the distinctiveness of the aesthetics of calculated hedonism within Ultimate, further studies might consider the postmodern ethical possibilities of such an existence. As Featherstone suggests:

> The aesthetic justification for life must be examined dispassionately, and if this is carried out it may show… the shift to aesthetic criteria and local knowledge may just as possibly lead to mutually expected self-restraint and respect for the other. (2007: 124)

As Duff (2004) argues, Foucault's ethics could be particularly salient here due to the explicit consideration of the ethics of pleasure.

Calculated hedonism offers valuable new theoretical insights to furthering sociological understandings of sport-related drinking. It locates drinking practices within contemporary consumer capitalism and is particularly useful in its conceptualization of consumptive pleasures in the formation of identity. Subsequently, calculated hedonism has much to offer the search for 'a more fully realised sociological understanding of sport-related drinking' (Palmer, 2013b: 13).

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Notes

1. I acknowledge that this reading is at best, partial. Through our esoteric costumes, the Ultimate partygoers were also acting in a somewhat exclusionary manner. It is not simply the case that innocent Ultimate players reacted to boorish rugby players' inappropriate actions by parodying their behaviour. We were also an exclusive group; not only did our costumes mark us as different, but as a group of more than 100 men and women, we were easily the largest group at the bar and were primarily interested in socializing within this group. Just as I interpreted the rugby players as being uncaring about other groups at the bar, we might also have been seen in this way by others. I suggest, then, that the situation is complex, particularly when social inclusion and exclusion is considered.
2. Shared team huddles are less common in North America, particularly at elite college level.

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