Stephen Sniderman believes that no game (and no "human system") has a set of rules that are unchangeable or that are understood the same way by all people. It is conventions, experience, and human nature that allow us to "play" together without anarchy, excluding machines and animals from our games.

Games have nested rulesets: explicit rules, the particular game's conventions, standards of "sportsmanship," broader social or political context. Each successive layer is harder to codify. Interpreting unwritten rules becomes a meta-game, with meta-rules, &c.-- escaping infinite regression requires imagination. We can use games' undefinability to understand all human rule-based systems.

Sniderman offers a new definition of "game" that emphasizes objectives in competition and, especially, rules. His examination of unwritten rules concludes that player experience and preference ultimately structure the game itself. As justification for playing, he presents games as a microcosm for any institution in reality, both equally unquantifiable.

Sniderman states that every game contains a set of rules, which the game is played by, which subsequently are governed by another set of meta-rules (including sportsmanship and language), and so on. Relating this ambiguous cycle to everyday life we can better understand the unpredictability and irregularities we come across.

No matter how meticulously detailed rules and meta-rules of a game are, there will always be cases where rules fail to describe procedure or conflict resolution. Imperfections are overcome when players suspend their knowledge of flaws and assume a set of unwritten rules which may vary from person to person.