A Qualitative Exploration of Parents' Perceptions of Risk within an Adventure Playground

by

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Abstract

Risk-aversion is prevalent in North America, and the literature (Brussoni et al., 2012) has suggested that Adventure Playgrounds may be an appropriate intervention to re-introduce risky play into children's lives. However, even within spaces that allow for more risk-taking during play, children's participation may be restricted due to parental concerns. The purpose of this study was to explore parents' perceptions of their children's risk-taking during play (risky play) in the context of an Adventure Playground, the Vivo Play Hub (VPH). Parents who had previously visited the VPH, were recruited online through community Facebook groups and asked to participate in semi-structured interviews with photo elicitation. The method of interpretive description guided the study and elements of narrative inquiry were engaged to present the findings. Three themes were created through analysis, 1) *consequences* explored the worries parents experienced about their parenting interventions, 2) *risky parenting* questioned what it meant for parents to support (or not support) risky play, 3) *simply play* brought attention to the complexities parents face related to play. Conclusions indicated that parents felt the VPH was a safe environment that allowed their children to have a quality play experience, however it also revealed the complexity of parenting in attempting to embrace risky play.

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Preface

This thesis is an original work by Anthony Bourque. No part of this thesis has been previously

published. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval

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Dedication

To everyone who has put a roof over my head, supported me when things were tough, and embraced my *playful* side.

Thank you to my friends, family, and my two lovely 'Hooligans'

"I don't want to go to school and learn solemn things."

- Peter Pan

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A final acknowledgement to Mary Ann Rintoul and Play Around the World (PAW) program. Without Mary Ann and PAW, the Adventure Playground at Vivo, my passion for play, and venture into graduate studies would not have happened.

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Prologue: Or "Why I think it's Important to Read and Write About Play Until Its Almost

Not Fun Anymore."

Adults most often describe play as a behaviour that is intrinsically motivated, freely

chosen, and personally directed (Hughes, 2012). While most scholars and practitioners agree

upon these three points, others may contend argue for additional descriptors. For example,

children often describe play as something that is "fun" (Glenn, Knight, Holt, & Spence, 2011).

Others contend that play is also culturally influenced. That is to say, that play is informed by

what makes up our culture, the physical, social, historical, and ideological influences (Kaliala,

2006; Roopnarine, Johnson, & Hooper, 1994). It is the cultural influence of play that led me to

where I am today.

I came to my undergraduate experience as a mature student (a designation for students

attending several years after secondary education), as I opted to obtain certification as an

electrician first. During my apprenticeship, I was fortunate to have been mentored by some

genuinely kind people. These individuals were often the ones who would come to work with a

smile on their faces and find ways to inject the workday with fun. This could be through telling

jokes, singing while they worked, or exploring creativity in their craftsmanship. These

experiences helped instill in me a philosophy that I strive to live by and impart in those I trained,

but it was an approach I could not quite put into words. Was it craftsmanship? Art? Or something

else? As I reflect now, it was play finding its way into my life.

When I officially became a post-secondary student, I was intrigued by a program called

Play Around the World (PAW). Through this program, students were trained in the principles of

Playwork, and then went abroad to work in underserved communities and provide play

programming. This experience had more of an impact on my life than I could have imagined.

Playwork evolved in the UK in the 1970s led by the play leaders of the 1960s, these were individuals who "supervised and organized" children's play spaces (Hughes, 2012, p. 4). Playwork, as described by Sturrock and Else (1998), is a profession that involves "work[ing] with children in the expansion of their potential to explore and experience through play" (p.2). In playwork, the focus is on the child, with efforts to simultaneously remove adult agendas from children's play spaces. At the same time, one of the guiding playwork principles acknowledges the reciprocal nature of play with adult playworkers. "Playworkers recognize their own impact on the play space and also the impact of children and young people's play on the playworker" (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005, p. 1). I did not understand this principle initially. However, through my own experiences, I now understand the reciprocal nature of play, which led me to my current studies.

Through PAW, I facilitated play provision in Cambodia for three months during the summer of 2014 and learned about disability, privilege, and culture through the lens of play. During this process, I witnessed games from my childhood played in another culture, which solidified in my mind, play's transcendence of geographic location. I also became attuned to differences in what was acceptable play across cultures. In North America, for example, rice may be used for sensory or musical play. However, rice is revered in Cambodia and would never be used for anything other than food. In Cambodia, while parents gathered for their social activities, children would often roam neighborhoods. I would see them at local parks using play equipment that would never pass North American safety standards, and yet, I cannot recall a single injury.

When I returned from my time abroad, I continued to volunteer with the PAW Program. In part, this was because of the important role it had played in my life, but also because I was unable to find other ways to use my new playwork skillset. Once home, I began to observe my

communities more carefully, and it was then that I realized play, as I understood it, had seemingly disappeared. One afternoon, I visited my childhood playground, expecting to see the same earthy wooden structure with slides, sand, tire swings, and climbing ropes. I could still recall the feeling of the knots in the wood as I climbed and the smell of the cool sand from when I dug in the sandpit. When I arrived, I found a new structure where the old one had been. It was shiny and metal, bent in unnatural ways, every surface slick and manicured, complete with black rubber surfacing to prevent injuries. I remembered this place full of children, and now it was barren. I began to consider possible explanations for the lack of children in the playground. Was it because new playground structures are built with the intention to limit or restrict certain play behaviours (Gill, 2018; Herrington & Nicholls, 2007), or was this space empty because parents simply were not letting their children out into their communities (Jenkins, 2006)? Perhaps there were new barriers (structural or policy) in place preventing children's unstructured play? Or, maybe this was all in my head. I felt nostalgic for my childhood.

It was not only my childhood playground that had changed. Many new playgrounds have been criticized for lacking in challenge and risk, two things children need (Herrington & Nicholls, 2007; Little, 2015). I continued to draw comparisons in my mind between the playground of my childhood, those in Cambodia, and the new playgrounds that seem to exist in a space devoid of children. I wanted something else, something different, something more adventurous.

I was first exposed to Adventure Playgrounds when I watched a clip from *The Land*, a documentary about an Adventure Playground in the UK. These were places where children were in control. Children were able to create, build, destroy, explore, and imagine using a broad range of common, yet unexpected play materials. The playground itself looked like a dystopian

scrapyard run by children, yet the video also revealed the ways in which the children cared for, loved, and respected the space.

Adventure Playgrounds, such as the one described above, have been primarily located in the UK and Europe since their inception in the postwar era and have been slowly spreading through North America (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012). However, Adventure Playgrounds remain few and far between, each seemingly a paradox in the risk-averse culture of North America (Brussoni et al., 2012). Brussoni and colleagues (2012) have suggested that Adventure Playgrounds may be the required intervention for the risk-averse and safety conscious culture of North America (Brussoni et al., 2012). Such an approach provides an opportunity to shift the paradigm of play in North America, one child-built fort at a time. That is not to say that change will be easy. From personal experience implementing more adventurous play interventions, most parents are excited at the potential opportunities, while some still struggle with releasing control over their own child's play.

There are many questions to be explored as there is very little literature on the applications of Adventure Playgrounds within North America. Through the proposed research, I hope to expand on the existing literature by asking the question: what are parents' perceptions of risk within the context of an Adventure Playground?

Chapter 1: Introduction

Children are drawn towards play activities wherein they experience thrill, exhilaration, and challenge (Tovey, 2010). These play activities, which may also allow "the child to encounter risky or even potentially life-threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear," have previously been classified as deep play (Hughes, 2002, p.2). Arguably, deep play and other forms of thrilling play were considered a normal part of childhood, however, thrill and challenge have been unwittingly stifled by cultural and structural risk-aversion (Gill, 2007; Herrington & Nicholls, 2007). Risk-aversion, among other factors, have contributed to the overall decline of play since the 1950s (Gill, 2007; Gray, 2011). A lack of access to unstructured play opportunities and the rise of play deprivation have led to many negative impacts on children and are well documented in the literature (Brown, 2014; Eager & Little, 2011; Gray, 2011). Identifying the need for play in the lives of children may be responsible for the contemporary resurgence of play for its instrumental value in the domains of education, health, and child development (Alexander, Frohlich, & Fusco, 2014; Brown, 2014; Brussoni et al., 2015; Eager & Little, 2011; Frost, 1998; Gray, 2011; Tremblay et al., 2015; Vanderloo, et al., 2013). This has fueled advocates to bring play into the limelight and to push society back from risk-aversion by reintroducing risky play.

Risk has always been a common occurrence in children's outdoor play, but it was not until 2007 that the term risky play was officially coined and defined (Voce, 2016). Sandseter and Kennair (2011) defined risky play as "thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury," that are adventurous, challenging, and primarily happen in the outdoors (p.258). Examples of risky play may include activities where children explore height, speed, with

dangerous tools, near dangerous elements, rough and tumble play, or the potential to disappear or get lost (Sandseter, 2007).

Risk-taking comes naturally to children and has been identified as part of their healthy development (Brussoni et al., 2015; Brussoni et al., 2012; Little & Wyver, 2010; Sandseter & Kennair, 2007). Unfortunately, supporting healthy risk-taking in play has been challenging within North America (Brussoni et al., 2015; Brussoni et al., 2012; Gill, 2007). The implementation of safety standards in public play spaces, risk-averse parenting norms, and fear of litigation experienced by children's care providers, create a scenario where few public spaces exist for children to engage in risky play (Gill, 2007; Herrington & Nicholls, 2007; Jenkins, 2006). Children experiencing risk-aversion as a consequence of over-protective parents, the built environment, or public policy are referred to as the "bubble-wrapped" generation as there is very little chance that they will be immediately harmed. "Bubble-wrapped children" as described by Malone (2007), applies to children whose parents prevent independent exploration and restrict autonomy while playing and in other areas of their life. This restricts important opportunities for children to develop psychologically, socially, culturally, and physically (Malone, 2007). The long-term implications of bubble-wrapping resonate through all types of unstructured play, including risky play. Eager and Little (2011) suggested that a lack of risky play is linked to specific consequences, with the culmination of these negative consequences being labelled "Risk Deficit Disorder" (RDD) (p.3). On an individual level, RDD is linked to an increase in obesity and declines in independence, learning, risk assessment, and mental health (Eager & Little, 2011). It has been suggested that continued lack of exposure to risk in play prevents children from confronting and mastering fears, which could lead to and be responsible for the societal increase in neuroticism and psychopathology in children (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011).

Advocates are attempting to reintroduce elements of risk into children's play (Pop-Up Adventure Play, 2018), but unfortunately, risk-averse attitudes still pervade North American and Western societies (Gill, 2007). The pathway to *better play* is blocked for many children by parents who act as gatekeepers over their children's outdoor play (Veitch, Bagley, Ball, & Salmon, 2005), thus perpetuating the bubble-wrapped generation. Though many parents acknowledge the need for children to play, risk-aversion has contributed to heightened safety concerns about the "stranger danger" phenomenon, traffic, bullying, and fear of injury (Gill, 2007). These concerns are inter-related to other ecological factors acting in the immediate physical environment, in the social environment, at the community level, as well as other influential levels that control policy both locally and nationally (Lee et al., 2015; Veitch et al., 2006).

This study adds to existing research of parental perceptions related to play and risk (Brussoni & Olsen, 2011; Lee et al., 2015; Little, 2015; McFarland & Laird, 2017; Neihues, et al., 2013; Valentine, 1997; Veitch et al., 2006; Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017), by examining parents perceptions of risk-taking and free play within the context of an Adventure Playground.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Play and Risk

Play can look and feel very different to each individual, which can make it difficult to describe what type of play an individual is experiencing (Hughes, 2013). Hughes' (2013) sixteen playtypes are commonly used to describe observable play behaviours, examples include: "creative play, where a child may be seen exploring materials and permutations of colours; imaginative play, where children manifest ideas that are connected with reality; and mastery play, where children can be seen interacting with the physical environment" (p. 98). Though Hughes (2013) breaks down the observable characteristics, all playtypes, when freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated, are under the umbrella term of unstructured play (Hughes, 2013; Tremblay et al., 2015)

Included within unstructured play is the opportunity for children to engage with risk; this is known as risky play. Risky play most often occurs outdoors, where children have the opportunity to explore the concepts and feelings of uncertainty, challenge, and fear (Sandseter, 2007). Other risky play behaviours children exhibit include exploration of their community, messy sensory experiences with natural materials, and challenging physical activities that test their limits (Clements, 2004; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). While these behaviours are typically observed when children play and may be attributed to a specific play type (e.g.,' creative, recapitulative, deep, mastery, etc.) they may also be re-categorized as risky play if there is a possibility of injury (Sandseter, 2007; Stephenson, 2003; Tremblay et al., 2015).

To say that a particular activity has the possibility to cause injury but is important for health could be considered paradoxical. This may be due to contemporary colloquial uses of the words "play" and "risk". Common descriptors of play are that it is pleasurable and positive

(Garvey, 1990), while the use of the word risk has moved from a, "neutral term denoting the probability of a given outcome, to being synonymous with 'danger' and implying a negative value judgement," (Brussoni et al., 2015, p. 6425). When risk is associated with play in the literature, its meaning is not associated with a negative value judgement or "bad risks" but instead with "good risks" that provide enough challenge to support healthy growth and development (Gill, 2018, p. 9).

Risky play is not a new type of play, but a different way of looking at a set of play behaviours (Brussoni & Olsen, 2011; Gray, 2011; Little, 2015; Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017). Many authors and institutions have adopted the definition that risky play is "thrilling and exciting play that can include the possibility of physical injury" (Brussoni et al., 2015; Tremblay et al., 2015; Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). Thrill and excitement are the intrinsic emotions that individuals may feel, however, children may also express this as feeling borderline "out of control" or "scary" while still attempting to "overcome fear" (Stephenson, 2003, p.36). Observations have found that most risky play, where children have the opportunity to explore these emotions, occurs outdoors in an environment where they are able to engage with physical challenge, adventurous activities, or to attempt something new (Sandseter & Kennair, 2011). Sandseter (2007) classified risky play into observable behaviours through interviews with children and staff at a Norwegian Preschool alongside naturalistic observations. From the data analysis, six categories of risky play were documented.

Play at great heights was found to be the most common form of risk-taking and was frequently observed as children climbing (Sandseter, 2007). "If there was anything around that could be climbed, the children would immediately begin climbing it, whether trees, playground climbers, big rocks, steep slopes, hillsides or other things" (Sandseter, 2007, p. 243). Although

climbing was the most frequent play behaviour, play at great heights also included jumping from height, balancing at height, and hanging or dangling at heights.

Sandseter (2007) observed elements of risk and excitement when children *played with high speed* which included activities such as riding a bike, sliding, or falling, all at high speed, while borderline feeling out of control, are all risky play. In addition, this play behaviour can include "running at high and uncontrolled speed – for example, down steep hills, or sliding down slides, hills, cliffs...[and] swinging on swings or zip-lines" (Sandseter, 2007, p.245). Children also manipulated their level of control and excitement by changing their body position (i.e., going headfirst down a slide) or by adding height component (i.e., jumping from the zip-line). When playing with speed, children tend to have lower levels of control over the activity as speed increases.

Play with dangerous tools was observed at the preschool, where children were allowed the use of whittling knives, saws for branches, as well as hammers and nails for construction (Sandseter, 2007). In some cases, children were allowed to use an axe under more strict and direct supervision. Unlike other types of risky play, this play with dangerous tools did not seem to be helped or hindered necessarily by supervision.

Play near dangerous elements, according to Sandseter (2007), does not restrict elements to earth, wind, water, and fire, but takes in other elements of the environment, such as cliffs, where a loss of control could lead to injury or death. Sandseter noted play "on top of rocks near deep water, near a burning fire pit, or close to ice lakes in the winter as other examples of play near dangerous elements" (p. 246).

Of the six risky playtypes described by Sandseter (2007), *rough-and-tumble play (RTP)* is arguably the most recognized. RTP includes behaviours such as "play fighting, fencing with sticks/branches, [and] play wrestling…" (Sandseter, 2007, p. 246-247). It is important to recognize that this behaviour occurs on the edge of pretend and real fighting, with there being real potential for injury should children be too enthusiastic or unable to recognize specific cues from their peers.

Play where the children can 'disappear' or get lost, takes on the form of exploring one's neighborhood or community on their own, which could lead to becoming lost (Sandseter, 2007). In the literature, this type of play has been linked to children's levels of independent mobility, which can have implications on levels of physical activity (Brussoni et al., 2015). It is important to note that this play behaviour primarily exists from the perspective of the child. Children may perceive they are on their own, even though they may under supervision (Sandseter, 2007).

Since Sandseter's 2007 publication, two additional risky play behaviours have been recently added: *vicarious risk* and *play with impact* (Kleppe, 2018). Kleppe's (2018) observations of 1- to 3-year-old children were made at three Norwegian early education enters. Analysis indicated that children of this age group participated in the two other risky playtypes. *Vicarious risk* occurs when children observe others taking risks and experience the same thrill and excitement as if they were actively participating, while *playing with impact* occurs when children use their bodies or equipment (such as bikes) to crash or bump into things.

There is extensive evidence indicating that children's play, including risky play, is fundamental to their development and health (Brussoni et al., 2015; Frost, 1998; Ginsburg, 2007; Hughes, 2013; Tremblay et al., 2015). Among other advocates, the Canadian Public Health Association (CPHA) has recently taken a stand for play and risk because of its potential to

impact physical, social, and mental health positively (Alexander et al., 2014; Tremblay et al., 2015; Ginsburg, 2007; Lester & Russel, 2008).

Sandseter and Kennair (2011) used an evolutionary standpoint to examine the potential benefits of risk-taking in children's play. Children who continuously engaged in risky play exposed themselves to specific stimuli, and as they gain mastery, they may choose to increase the intensity of the stimuli. For example, children may choose to climb only to the lowest limbs of a tree, but as they become more comfortable with climbing, they may choose to move up to the next branches, thus, increasing their fall height and the stimuli they experience from the excitement of climbing and the fear of falling. Sandseter and Kennair (2011) identified the similarities between mastery through risk-taking to cognitive behaviour therapy used for anxiety. They hypothesized that an effective treatment to childhood anxieties exists by using graded exposure to stimuli and focusing on mastery-oriented thoughts about anxiety-producing stimuli (p.274). This creates an environment where children learn how to engage in potentially dangerous activities (risky play) and they can balance being in a state of adaptive fear necessary to keep them safe, with positive emotions that stem from thrill and excitement. The authors indicated that continuous exposure to risky play that facilitates this balance may build resilience through an anti-phobic effect.

With discussion of fear, anxiety, and injury, one can understand why some individuals see risky play as negative, however, the risk in play is not about carelessly exposing children to hazards in an attempt to challenge them. For some individuals, risk and hazard may be one and the same but there is a clear difference between the two terms. That difference needs to be identified and understood to ensure that a standard of care is provided when engaging risky play.

Risk vs. Hazard

Through the literature on risk in play, there appears to be inconsistency when discussing the difference between risk and hazard. Sandseter (2007) suggested that "risky play includes exposure to hazards" (p. 238), while Tremblay and colleagues (2015) identified a hazard as "a source of harm that is not obvious to the child, such that the potential for injury is hidden" (p. 6478). "Hazard" appears in Hughes (2013) as a synonym for "danger," wherein the two terms take on the same meaning (p.207). For the purpose of this research, risk and hazard within the context of children's play will be defined in keeping with Brussoni et al. (2015):

> We use the word 'risk' in the context of risky play to denote a situation whereby a child can recognize and evaluate a challenge and decide on a course of action. This is in contrast to the common use of the word to describe hazards that children cannot assess for themselves and that have no clear benefit (p. 6425).

It is important to note that risky play is not intended to expose children to environments, activities, or materials carelessly that will incur serious injury, but to balance risk and safety in a way that strengthens children's ability to incorporate risk into their play and to assess risk properly (Hughes, 2013; Sandseter, 2007). The degree of risk and likelihood of injury can be objectively controlled, for example, a new climbable structure may be chosen because of a specific fall height, however, it ultimately comes down to the experience of the individual engaging in risk-taking. Risk is subjective (Little & Wyver, 2010); some children may feel climbing a step stool is risky, while others may only feel the thrill and excitement when they have climbed to the very top of a high tree. This indicates a dissonance that some parents may not necessarily be aware of, the subjectivity of risk differs among children, but also between parents and children.

Sandseter's (2007) work indicated a difference between child and parent perceptions of risk play behaviours and sources of risk. For example, children experienced fear and excitement when climbing a tree, while caregivers only experienced unease when children jumped down (Sandseter, 2007). There is a difference between adult and child perceptions of risk, but more specifically, what each consider appropriate risk-taking. This tension identifies a critical dialogue about the current state of play, risk, and parents.

Parents, Culture, and Risk

Lupton (2006), explored the "cultural/symbolic approach" of risk, where it is believed that "ideas about risks are part of shared cultural understandings and practices that are founded on social expectations and responsibilities" (p. 12-13). When this approach is applied to risky play, a specific narrative begins to take shape. Culturally we have become risk-averse (Gill, 2007); we see risk as a negative and seek to minimize those things that might harm us (Lupton, 2006). Parents, strive to do and allow what is best for their children, which includes healthy risk-taking during play (Brussoni et al., 2012), but they must also negotiate cultural norms of risk-aversion.

The intersection of risk-taking and parenting creates rich discourse where the two concepts are often at odds with one another. Parenting is complex, as guardians and caregivers navigate a world of expert opinions and information, specifically targeting parenting practices (Lupton, 2006; Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2020). Through this constant stream of information about children and their healthy development, these individuals strive to be "good parents" who are accepted within their own social circles (Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2020). The good parent norm parallels Lupton's (2006) theory that individuals strive to be "good citizens" by following the cultural norms of the community. It is through this cultural lens

that one can begin to understand the perceptions which adults, parents, and caregivers hold when exploring the concepts of risk and play.

Mixed Messages: Struggling to Understand the Importance of Risky Play

As ideas and concepts such as risk become more complex, expert opinion is often relied on in order to generate appropriate messaging for the public to understand the phenomena (Lupton, 2006). However, the nature of expert messaging is that it is subject to change as new information comes to light or for other experts to challenge specific ideas, thus, there may be contradicting messages that exist within the same culture (Lupton, 2006). For example, in 2015, ParticipACTION collaborated with other industry leaders to create a position statement regarding active outdoor play, which by their definition included risky play. Though many organizations embraced the new position statement, several others retracted support because of safety concerns (Tremblay et al., 2015). This division not only creates mixed messaging for the public but it may also be partly responsible for why some parents choose not to accept the importance of risky play. McFarland and Laird (2017) explored parent and early childhood educator (ECE) attitudes towards risky outdoor play and found that only 40% of parents and ECE's believed that outdoor risk-taking experiences were important for children. This may be due to parents not understanding the benefits that healthy risk-taking in play provides or valuing other activities over play for their perceived developmental benefits (Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017).

Structured, scheduled, adult-led activities such as organized sport or academics have replaced child-directed play (Hofferth, 2009; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001; Lee et al., 2015; Tremblay et al., 2015; Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017). Some authors have indicated that play has been on the decline (Gray, 2011), which in part has been confirmed by two longitudinal

studies analyzing changes in how American children spend their time. From 1981 – 2003, there

has been a decrease in unstructured play and discretionary time in favor of structured activities

and academics (Hofferth, 2009; Hofferth & Sandberg, 2001). Parents look to structured activities

to equip their children with valuable life skills while they perceive unstructured play to be less

valuable (Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017).

Some parents acknowledge the beneficial impact of unstructured play. In several studies,

parents have reflected on their own childhood play activities, such as riding bikes (play at speed),

exploring a forested area (disappearing/getting lost), or climbing trees (play at height) (Little,

2015; McFarland & Laird, 2017). Nevertheless, some still restrict their children's access to risky

play and struggle to allow their children to participate in the same activities from their own

childhood (Little, 2015). This suggests a type of cognitive dissonance that exists between

parents' practices and understanding. Parents have indicated that times have changed (Watchman

& Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017) and cite safety concerns regarding increased traffic, the stranger

danger phenomenon, and bullies/teenagers as the foundation for their risk-aversion (Brussoni &

Olsen, 2011; Gill, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Little, 2015; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997; Veitch et

al., 2006).

Concerns about the Community

Gill (2007) wrote about increased road traffic and societal reliance on the automobile for

transportation. Parents strive to provide the best opportunities for their children, as a result, their

children are often shuttled between multiple structured activities and have become known as the

backseat generation (Brussoni et al., 2012). Gill (2007) also suggested that many public play

spaces do not offer the same play quality that they once did, which forces parents to drive to

public spaces that meet their needs (Gill, 2007; Vietch et al., 2006). All of these factors

contribute to increased neighborhood traffic, which perpetuates the belief that local communities are both unsafe and lack quality play opportunities for children (Gill, 2007).

In a qualitative study by Jenkins (2006), an analysis showed many parents' concerns for their children's safety stem from the presence of strangers. Stranger danger, the fear of harm or abduction by an unknown person or group, is a common theme throughout literature addressing changes in children's play (Brussoni & Olsen, 2011; Gill, 2007; Jenkins, 2006; Little, 2015; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997; Veitch et al., 2006). Documented instances of the stranger danger phenomena are limited and statistically unlikely (Brussoni et al., 2012; Dalley & Ruscoe, 2003). However, the associated worries are ever-looming in popular culture as "the public believes the threat is dangerous and growing" (Gill, 2007, p. 49), despite evidence to the contrary (Dalley & Ruscoe, 2003). The improbability of abduction is not lost on parents, but they still cite it as a significant concern (Brussoni & Olsen, 2011; Little, 2015). The fear of strangers also applies to the community context. Parents have indicated they feel disconnected from their community and do not know their neighbors (Lee et al., 2015; Veitch et al., 2006). This creates the perception that more strangers surround families, which is then used to further justify restricting children's roaming ability (Veitch et al., 2006). This pattern reinforces a negative cycle that continues to disconnect neighbors and increase safety concerns (Lee et al., 2015). Some parents have indicated that some parks have become places where teenagers gather and participate in "undesirable behaviors such as bullying, swearing, drinking alcohol, and in some parks taking drugs" (Veitch et al., 2006, p.387). For these parents, there is a fear that their child will be bullied by the teenagers (Veitch et al., 2006) or if their child is left unsupervised and free to roam the neighborhood that they would begin to participate in these undesirable behaviors too (Valentine & McKendrick, 1997).

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Concerns About Parenting Practices

Parental safety concerns and the attributed anxieties contribute to over-protective behaviors (Brussoni and Olsen, 2011; Little, 2015; Tremblay et al., 2015). This has led to parents being labeled "helicopter parents," "snow plough parents," or "curling parents" (Gill, 2018, p. 9). Over-protective behaviors can manifest in different ways for parents. For some, it may be over-involvement in their child's activities or curtailing activities they believe to be too risky (Brussoni & Olsen, 2011). Gill (2007) suggested that if a child is injured, it signifies a failure on the part of those responsible for play provision. Although Gill (2007) was discussing injury as failure within the context of playgrounds, it could be argued that the idea also applies to parenting norms given the current climate of risk-aversion. Failure in any realm may impact not only the child but also the parents, thus leading to over-protection into their child's adolescence (Little, 2015).

There is evidence that the level of independence parents perceive in their children is associated with age and may be an important factor in parental over-protective behaviors (Lee et al., 2015; Veitch et al., 2006). In most cases, the level of independence parents perceive their children to have, which is positively correlated to their child's access to risky play, increases with age (Brussoni & Olsen, 2011; Veitch et al., 2006). This indicates parents' beliefs and actions may alter as their children get older. This point is contested within the literature. In a study looking at mothers' attitudes towards risk-taking in their children, one mother suggested that she would most likely be just as protective as her daughter aged (Little, 2015). LeMoyne and Buchanan (2011) also explored helicopter parenting experienced by millennials entering college, finding that some parents still attempted to hover over their children to remove the challenges they faced as young adults. This suggests that much depends on the parent and or context.

Brussoni and Olsen (2011), explored fathers' perspectives of over-protection, finding that many of the fathers believed the behavior was "subjective and contextual" (p. 241). Fathers believed their over-protective behaviors decreased as their child aged or if they parented more than one child. For some, gender played a contextual role in their parenting, "fathers with little or no experience in parenting boys and girls believed they would treat their sons and daughters differently, but those in these situations noted few differences that they attributed to the child's gender" (Brussoni & Olsen, 2011, p.241). Little (2015) explored mothers' beliefs of risk in children's outdoor play, finding that the child's age was one of the subjective determinants for allowing access to risky play, but did not acknowledge gender as a relevant factor. It is unclear if gender was not recognized as a factor by mothers, or if gender was not explored by the researcher.

A Possible Intervention to Increase Risky Play?

The literature shows active outdoor play and its risks are important for healthy development and that it is challenging for children to access risky play due to parental concerns (Brussoni et al., 2015; Brussoni et al., 2012). Several interventions have been proposed by scholars to reverse risk-aversion. Gill (2008) suggested a "space-oriented response," with the goal of creating more child-friendly communities through the creation of "welcoming, accessible parks, squares, and public spaces" (p. 139). Gill (2008) further contends this approach would support community activities that encourage children's independence, while promoting intergenerational socialization and play. Ultimately, this approach would introduce risk in a way that fosters resiliency while balancing safety and freedom. Gill's (2008) intervention could take shape in many ways. However, one possibility that has been suggested in the literature is Adventure Playgrounds (Brussoni et al., 2015).

Adventure Playgrounds

Adventure Playgrounds are places where children of all ages can develop their own ideas of play. Most young people, at one time or another, have a deep urge to experiment with earth, fire, water, and timber, to work with real tools without fear of undue criticism or censure. In these playgrounds, their love of freedom to take calculated risks is recognized and can be enjoyed under tolerant and sympathetic guidance (Hurtwood, 1968, p. 55).

Adventure Playgrounds are supported by a play leader, or playworker, who is there to help extend and support children in their play, while removing any hazards that create unnecessary danger (Hurtwood, 1968). Adventure Playgrounds are typically unique in their outward appearance as many were placed in locations that were not useable or visually unappealing (Brown, 2003). Once a site was determined, they were then co-created by children, playworkers, and community members (Brown, 2003). Brown (2003) described life on an Adventure Playground, it was about "making fires, dressing up, role play, rudimentary cooking (mainly soup and baked potatoes) and organizing impromptu social events, such as parades and carnivals. Large scale flour and water fights and bonfires were a regular feature" (p.116). Children were often found den building, getting messy in mud and dirt, or creating other apparatuses for swinging and climbing, while the playworkers supported play and inspected newly built equipment (Brown, 2003). As well as serving children, the Adventure Playground helps connect the community with a "variety of opportunities," such as potential space for a community garden, providing public gathering spaces for groups, or hosting special events (Hurtwood, 1968). Adventure Playgrounds have been proposed as a potential answer to the current play decline and risk-aversion western cultures now face (Brussoni et al., 2012), but little research has been done on Adventure Playgrounds within North America. Parent experiences

regarding safety and parenting norms, during their visit to the Adventure Playground, are critical

to explore, as they have been identified as the most salient factors allowing and preventing

access to outdoor play for children (Brussoni et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2015).

Study Purpose and Objectives

The literature shows that parents are the gatekeepers to their children's risky play (Veitch

et al., 2006). Adventure Playgrounds represent an opportunity for children to access more risky

play, however, little is known about how parents perceive risk in play and Adventure

Playgrounds specifically in the North-American context. The purpose of the present study was to

examine parents' perceptions of risk within the context of a Canadian Adventure Playground.

The objectives of this study included examining within the Adventure Playground: (a)

parents' perceptions of risk taking and play, (b) parents' roles in their children's play, and (c)

providing recommendations that may enhance play provision related to risky play and Adventure

Playgrounds.

Chapter 3: Method

Methodological Approach

Qualitative inquiry is understood as research that is naturalistic and interpretive (Markula & Silk, 2011; Mayan, 2009). Researchers who employ this type of inquiry use inductive practices to explore the "context, complexity, and 'confounding variables'" of a particular phenomenon (Mayan, 2009, p. 11). A qualitative approach and supporting methods were used to gain an in-depth understanding of parent perceptions of risk and safety in an Adventure Playground, specifically the Vivo Play Hub (VPH). Interpretive Description (ID) was the methodological approach for this study.

ID borrows research design "from the full universe of available design techniques as appropriate to the nature of the research question at hand," but allows for the elements to be epistemologically realigned so that they may strengthen the overall quality of the research (Thorne, 2016, p.39). ID is informed by the empirical data, but adheres to its foundation in nursing practices, whereby it explores the relationship between objective and subjective information (Thorne, 2016). As such, this type of research is "conducted in a naturalistic context" and acknowledges "human commonalities as well as individual expressions of variance within a shared focus of interest" (Thorne, 2016, p. 82).

ID was ideal for this study because of its inductive approach to data analysis and its ability to provide practical application of the knowledge translated from the research (Thorne et al., 2004; Kiesel, 2017). ID combines the experiential knowledge of the participant and the real-world wisdom of experienced practitioners to develop a field further, while attempting to inform immediate change to applied practice through action (Kiesel, 2017). This approach has previously been applied within the context of children's recreation, sport, and leisure, that

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focused on parent and practitioner perspectives. For example, Neely and Holt (2014) used ID to

examine parents' perspectives on the benefits of children's organized sport. Watchman and

Spencer-Cavaliere (2017) examined parents' perspectives of children's sport and free play.

Lastly, Tink and colleagues (2018) applied the ID framework to examine how practitioners

conceptualized and operationalized nature play within a Canadian context. These examples

highlighted the ways in which ID values both disciplinary and experiential knowledge, drawing

on individual perspectives to further inform practice. Furthermore, Kiesel (2017) explained that

ID is used to catalyze change and support practitioners. In keeping with this, one of the primary

aims of this study was to generate data with participants with the potential to inform the literature

but most critically so that it could be practically used by play advocates and facilitators.

Philosophical Assumptions and Researcher Role

The paradigmatic positioning of researchers reflects their beliefs with regard to "inquiry

aim, nature of knowledge, the way knowledge is accumulated, goodness (rigor and validity) or

quality criteria, values, ethics, voice, training…, accommodation, and hegemony" (Lincoln,

Lynham, & Guba, 2011, p.98). A paradigm creates the foundation for how knowledge is created

and understood but also influences the scaffolding that supports the methodological design and

decisions that are made (Thorne, 2016). Thus, my own beliefs and philosophical underpinnings

as an interpretivist should be acknowledged. A research paradigm is a set of beliefs and

convictions that form our worldview of "what we can know about our world (ontology) and how

we can know it (epistemology)" (Mayan, 2009, p.24). As an interpretivist, I adhere to the

ontological belief that there are multiple realities, but every individual has their own reality,

meaning that truth is subjectively experienced by the individual (Lincoln et al., 2011). The

epistemological belief of an interpretivist, in essence, how we make meaning, is through co-

creation and collaboration, discussing the subjective meaning of individuals' experiences

(Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Because of this, "reality can never be objectively known, and for

some, it is further influenced by social constructs and political forces" (Peers, 2018, p. 4-5). The

data obtained through this qualitative inquiry was co-constructed, it is perceived by the

participant but interpreted by the researcher (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

Though play may be understood through multiple worldviews, it lends itself well to

research within the interpretivist paradigm. Take, for example, how someone may play with a

cardboard box (few items afford more opportunity and fun). Though it is just a box, for some it

may be a rocket ship, a fort, or a race car. It allows for imagination, and provides individuals

with the inspiration to have their own unique experience. Two children could build

simultaneously with the same box but have different experiences because of size, ability, agency,

or adult influence. Furthermore, the type of play that evolves with the box may be influenced by

what is available in the immediate environment or the overarching cultural norms that dictate

what is considered appropriate play.

I undertook this study, as a graduate student, however, the opportunity to access the

specific research context came through my role as Play Team Lead at Vivo for Healthier

Generations (described below). I am passionate about play provision and intend to inform

practice. Interpretivism attracts inquirers who may be passionate about the subject and driven by

the "call to action" by those who feel that knowledge may hold the potential to drive social

change (Lincoln et al., 2011). It could be argued, from a positivist standpoint, that my passion for

the subject and attempt to inform change adulterates the data, yet the notion of "bracket[ing] out"

my own beliefs and values so to approach the research tabula rasa, does not align with the

epistemological and ontological underpinnings of the interpretivist paradigm (Thorne, 2016).

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Within the realm of qualitative inquiry, the researcher's background and experiences influence and shape both the research process and results (Markula & Silk, 2011). Because of this positioning, existing theoretical and experiential knowledge, particularly my own experiential knowledge as a practitioner and researcher, were blended in such a way that it was supplementary to the subject data, adding depth and trustworthiness (Thorne, 2016) to the study (see section on Quality Indicators for more details). Furthermore, awareness of my dual roles as an employee at Vivo and researcher, I engaged in various reflexive processes to add to the quality of the study (also described in Quality Indicators).

Context

This study was approved by the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, under the project name "A Qualitative Exploration of Parent Perceptions of Risk within an Adventure Playground" (see Appendix A for ethics approval). The context, which frames this study, was the Adventure Playground known as the VPH.

Imagine for a moment, you have arrived at a recreation center with your family (or perhaps you are caring for a little one in your life and are out for some fun). You step out of your car after parking near the massive building. As you walk towards the entrance, you hear something flapping in the light breeze and look over to see a bright teal flag with the words "Play Hub." You are intrigued and think to yourself, "Well, we are here to play, we should check it out." Your little one smiles and takes the lead heading towards the flag. You approach the far side of the building that you've never really noticed before because it's partially obscured by the large building. As you come around the corner, it looks like…a junk yard? It's full of weird things you would never associate with play. There is a big pile of dirt that looks to be packed down from use, but also growing with shrubs, tall grass, and wildflowers. Poking out behind the

mud pit are several shipping containers, all of them have been graffitied from top to bottom causing you to hesitate. "What have I walked into?" you think to yourself as you get closer. There is junk everywhere. Ropes are strung out between shipping containers and attached to awkward wooden L-structures that are a bit too high and wide to easily sit on. Buckets, pool noodles, and cardboard are scattered around. To your right, there is a mountain of milk crates held together with bungie cords and duct tape next to a wall of tires speckled with paint that is 20 feet long and 2 to 3 feet high. There is a fire pit. "Wait, A FIRE PIT?! There is fire in a place for children?" As you regain your bearings, you begin to see and hear the space, it is coming to life. Children are running around teaching one another how to climb the shipping containers that are foreign to them. Parents are laughing and chatting around the fire pit as they stay warm and keep an eye on their children. From the mud pit you hear the sounds of digging and the quiet chatter of children negotiating the size of the hole where they plan to put an actual kitchen sink. Other children are building some sort of cart on wheels that is barely holding together. As you get closer to the graffiti that caused you to hesitate just moments before, you see teenagers taking pictures and dancing. You now realize the graffiti is a mural created by the children and youth who claim ownership over the Hub. You hear them refer to the space as "The Crates," in hushed voices, as it is a name for them not for adults. That is when you realize your little one has wandered off and begun exploring the wall of tires and milk crates with another group of children. The other parents don't seem to be concerned about sticking too close to the play. You think to yourself, "that's new, parents not following their children." You turn around and are approached by someone calling themselves a Play Ambassador. They begin to tell you about what you have wandered into. You settle in and are comforted by the smells of campfire and the

shouts of pure delight bursting from the children who are fully immersed in play. The Play

Ambassador finishes up their preamble and says, "Welcome to the Vivo Play Hub."

The VPH is one part of a larger social research and innovation (R&I) project, the Vivo

Play Project (VPP), being undertaken by the R&I lab at Vivo for Healthier Generations, a

recreation center in Calgary, Alberta. "The VPP is a four-year initiative that aims to increase

knowledge, understanding, value, and participation in outdoor, unstructured play" (VPP, 2020).

It aims to create 10% shifts in physical activity, intergenerational socialization, sedentary

behaviour, and outdoor play (VPP, 2020). To achieve these goals, the VPP is co-creating

multiple intervention strategies with the community. One of these strategies is the development

of Play Hubs. Over the duration of the four-year initiative, the VPP is tasked with establishing 6-

8 play sites across North-Central Calgary. The first site established in 2018 was the VPH.

When beginning to plan the various play sites, it was quickly realized by the VPP design

team that a space would be needed to bring outdoor, unstructured play to life. The VPH was

established as a place where the design team could test out new ideas for play, introduce new

loose parts, and support the development of their staff, who are known as Play Ambassadors. It

also served a secondary function as a space to co-create and iterate with the communities to

establish what their ideal Play Hubs could be.

The VPH began with a blue 40-foot shipping container placed on the South-West corner

of Vivo property. The South-West corner was bordered by the West Vivo parking lot (northern

boarder), a neighbouring school (southern boarder), and a busy secondary road (western

boarder). To the east extends the space where children would typically play before turning into a

large descending slope. The space for children to play was a flat stretch of grass, with two rows

of small trees and a few nearby landscaping rocks. However, soon after the launch, it was

obvious that this was a poor location for children's play. Most telling was that children and their

loose parts began migrating further east and eventually down the previously mentioned slope.

The South-East corner featured varied terrain (hills, slopes, concrete, grass, etc.) and more

abundant natural elements (trees, rocks, shrubs, rabbits, etc.). This led to the VPH making the

short move to its current location, where it is nestled comfortably in at the bottom of a steep

slope between a large patch of evergreen trees and the Vivo building. Since the move of the blue

shipping container to the South-East corner, several additions have been made to the VPH

including, a red 20-foot shipping container, two white 7-foot cube shipping containers, four

pieces of outdoor functional art called Furbaniture (these are wooden L-shaped structures that are

approximately 28 inches high and wide, and 7-feet long on each side), and a 300 square foot mud

pit. Within the various shipping containers there are over 300 discrete kinds of items and loose

parts for children to play with. Some highlights include, "1500 milk crates, four telephones, eight

rolls of AstroTurf, six gas masks, one video camera, over 2500 feet of rope, two shopping carts,

one plunger, two turkey basters, one military grade ammunitions box (empty), one retro cash

register, six fire pits, and 52 pool noodles" (VPP, 2020). Upon re-opening in the "new" location,

teenagers from the neighbouring high-school and youth from the local Youth Leadership Club

(YLC), were invited for a special event where they were provided with spray paint and allowed

to use the shipping containers as a canvass (see Appendix B for a sample of VPH images).

Typically, guests are greeted upon arrival by a Play Ambassador, where they are told

about the VPP and the VPH. Play Ambassadors are trained in and follow the professional

practice of Playwork. Their aim is to provide a child-centered environment where children are in

control of their play experiences while encouraging parents to step back. However, Playwork is

not recognized as a profession in North America, unlike in the United Kingdom. As such, the

formal education, training, and on-going regulation are widely unavailable for North Americans

wishing to become Playworkers. The training the VPH Play Ambassadors receive has been

developed internally at Vivo in consultation with UK Playworkers but is still under development.

Within the VPH there are very few explicit rules. Children are typically told three rules,

try to have fun, try not to hurt yourself or anyone else, and try to have fun (for extra fun and

emphasis). Parents are asked to take a step back and let their children explore if they are

comfortable, however, they are also told they are welcome to play with (or without) their

children, but must stay on Vivo property. The setup of the VPH always varies. This is in part due

to the iterative nature of the VPP, but also due to the fact that the VPH is not fenced in, requiring

all loose parts to be secured before and after hours. This is a limitation of the space, as children

are not able to build off of previous visits, however, it also affords the exploration of new loose

parts, while still allowing children access to items they have previously played with. The days

the hours of the VPH may vary depending on the season. It is predictably open on Sundays from

1:00 – 4:00 pm (weather permitting).

Participants

I recruited participants through purposeful sampling as information-rich cases allowing

for in-depth exploration and understanding of the research question (Mayan, 2009; Thorne,

2016). I chose parents to take part in the study on the basis that they could offer unique, and

valuable insights into a particular experience, specifically in connection with VPH (Patton,

2015). Recruitment occurred via posting information in targeted social media groups,

specifically focusing on community groups in communities surrounding the VPH. The inclusion

criteria in order to be eligible to participate in the study was comprised of parents who: 1. had

children who played at VPH and 2. had themselves visited the VPH with their children on a

minimum of two play visits. Upon expressing interest in becoming a participant, parents were provided an information letter and were required to complete an informed consent waiver via email (see Appendix C).

Six parents consented to participate in this study, five mothers, all of whom identified as women and one father, who identified as a man, between the ages of 31 - 43 years with a mean age of 38 years. "Interpretive description can be conducted on samples of almost any size" and though these samples trend towards smaller sizes, from five participants upward, the number of participants is variable (Thorne, 2016, p.103). What is essential is that the collected data represents the experiences of the participants and the rationale for the size is consistent with the research question (Thorne, 2016).

The parents had varied educational backgrounds, and all had completed post-secondary education in non-play related fields (i.e., architecture, geophysical technology, pharmacy, computer sciences, business administration and geography). Parents disclosed their ethnicity, wherein the majority of the participants identified as Caucasian alongside one participant who identified as Hispanic. As part of the inclusion criteria each participant was a parent of a child who had attended the Vivo Play Hub at least two times. These parents had between 1 – 3 children, ranging from 1 – 16 years old with a mean age of 6 years old. The Vivo Play Hub is primarily targeted at children ages 6 – 12 years old, however, the Hub is open to children of all ages as healthy risk taking can begin in children as young as 1 year old (Kleppe, Melhuish, & Sandseter, 2017; Sandseter, 2007). Additional information about participants was collected using a demographics information form (see Appendix D).

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Data Collection

Data collection involved the use of two primary data sources, semi-structured interviews supported by photo-elicitation, and reflective notes.

Semi-Structured Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide was created in order to probe parents about their perceptions of risk and safety at the VPH. Mayan (2009) suggested that semi-structured interviews are best used when the researcher understands the phenomenon but would still be unable to predict the answers of the respondents. I constructed a semi-structured interview guide composed of open ended questions, based on existing literature, field experience, and collaboration between myself and my supervisor (Markula & Silk, 2011). Interviews occurred over a two-month period, beginning with a pilot interview in June 2020. Patton (2014) suggested interview guides for semi-structured interviews should be used to provide topics for the interviewer to explore, where questions may be spontaneous and conversational but still focused on a particular subject. I conducted the pilot interview with a parent who met the study inclusion criteria. Insight from the pilot interview and discussions with my supervisor led to the final iteration of the interview guide.

I organized questions into six topical clusters. These consisted of:

1.building rapport and setting the stage

2. first experiences in the VPH environment

3. play behaviours and risky play

4. risk and safety

5. parent opinions

6. conversation wrap-up

Examples of questions included: "Tell me about your first visit to the VPH," "What would you say is the difference between the VPH and a traditional playground?," "Was there an incident during your visit to the VPH that made you feel uncomfortable?," and "What do you consider to be the biggest issue parents face when attending a space like the VPH?" (see Appendix E for the complete interview guide). As the interviewer, I adopted the role of active participant allowing for deeper probing into of issues that arose during the interview (Markula & Silk, 2011). A total of six interviews took place, including the pilot interview using ZOOM. Although initially intended to only serve the purpose of piloting the interview guide, the pilot interview offered interesting insights and depth into the research question and was included in the total number of interviews used for analysis. Interviews were recorded and downloaded to a secured local hard drive. Interviews lasted between 51 and 62 minutes with an average of 56 minutes and I transcribed them verbatim.

Photo-Elicitation. Photo-elicitation, a technique originally situated in anthropology and also used in sociological studies, at its most basic, is "the simple idea of inserting a photograph into a research interview" (Harper, 2002, p.13). Researchers using this type of photo elicitation have noted the technique can help to "sharpen the informants' memory and reduce areas of misunderstanding" (Harper, 2002, p. 14). Given the semi-structured interviews for this study were to take place over Zoom and would require parents to think back to their experiences at the VPH, photo elicitation was used as a tool to refresh parent's memories and to stimulate conversation. As the researcher and interviewer, I curated a collection of anonymized photographs drawing on the literature to ensure the representation of different play types and risk (Hughes, 2013; Sandseter, 2007), as well as my own experience as Play Team Lead at the VPH. The photographs, which were all specific to the VPH, captured such things as risky play, play

with loose parts, and the VPH environment (see Appendix B for a sample of the images). The

addition of photo-elicitation to traditional semi-structured interviews can add rigour to the

research design (Harper, 2002). In preparation for the interview, I sent parents the VPH imagery

in advance and asked to view the photographs to support their general recall of experiences at the

VPH. The imagery was also referred to specifically during the third cluster of interview

questions.

Reflective Notes

Thorne (2016) discussed the need for additional reflection using field notes to enhance

research quality. Reflection should occur at different times and at different levels of immersion

with the data to enhance reflective quality (Thorne, 2016). I took reflective notes immediately

after each interview to capture insights and emotions that may not have been transparent in the

transcripts, as well as to document some of my initial impressions. I then transferred these to

individual notes which were placed alongside the interviews to look for similarities,

inconsistencies, and interconnections as well as to provide additional context during data

analysis.

Data Analysis

In addition to taking reflective notes, transcription also served as an early form of

analysis allowing me to revisit the data post interviews. Data collection and analysis occurred

concurrently using constant comparative analysis to identify emerging themes and patterns

across the participants, which also informed subsequent interviews (Thorne, 2016). Following

Thorne (2016), analysis involved "confirm[ing], test[ing], explor[ing] and expand[ing] on

concepts…[that] emerge in the field" so that the phenomena may be studied thoroughly (p.109).

Informed by ID, analysis involved open coding, axial coding, and categorization using the

process of selective coding (Markula & Silk, 2011; Thorne, 2016). The open coding process involved deeply analyzing the raw data and examining basic concepts for similarities (Markula & Silk, 2011; Thorne, 2016). Open coding was first conducted by reading and rereading the transcripts, writing notes, memos, and codes in margins and in a journal. A second round of open coding was conducted using Atlas.ti software, where afterwards, the results of the open coding attempts were cross checked and used to begin the axial coding process. Axial coding relates concepts to one another, taking the conceptual data from open coding to create the mechanism and conditions through which the interactions among them can be worked out (Thorne, 2016). Axial coding was conducted through an inductive process, looking for the conditions that gave rise to specific open codes and testing them between data sets to create specific concepts. Once these concepts were determined, they were further refined through the process of selective coding (Thorne, 2016) into categories that became fully developed with "clear properties and dimensions" (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 99). Note taking occurred throughout analysis in the form of analytic notes, so to make connections in the data (Mayan, 2009).

At the end of this process, I shared a preliminary draft of the research findings with my supervisor, who served in the role of a critical friend (Smith & McGannon, 2018). My supervisor and I reviewed two of the six transcripts independently and discussed our impressions over a 60-minute online meeting. This allowed for discussion and debate over possible thematic categories within the draft data, as while ensuring the quality criteria of interpretive authority (Thorne, 2016). Another online meeting then took place over approximately 90 minutes to discuss these categories of relevance which included: parent concerns, risky play, free play, parenting behaviours, responsibility, ability, playful environments, injury, and safety. From this discussion, we co-constructed two themes around the concepts of 'consequences' and '(re)learning,' while a

third theme was still being formed. To expand the analytic process, I then engaged aspects of

narrative research in order to "create order, [and] construct texts in [the] particular context[s]" of

the VPH drawing on the parent interviews (Huberman & Miles, 2002, p.218). Essentially this

meant creating three parent profiles to support both analysis and the telling of the findings.

According to Miles and Huberman, "narrative methods can be combined with other forms of

qualitative analysis" (p.263) with consideration to ensuring coherence with the interpretivist

perspective. Given this research was paradigmatically founded within an interpretivist lens, the

use of specific narrative methods aligned well.

 Narrative research is the study of experience as a narrative construction, to explore fully

"the living and telling of stories, into stories as lived and told" (Clandinin et al., 2016, p.16).

Narrative research is itself a rich method of qualitative research in which there "are many

different ways that narrative researchers go about constructing narratives from field texts"

(Butler-Kisber, 2019, p.16). Narrative research, specifically narrative inquiry, has been used to

explore phenomena and the stories of those who experience them (Clandinin et al, 2016). For

example, Svendby (2015) retold the lived experiences in the narrative forms of ethnographic

fiction and poetic transcription as a way of exploring inclusive practice in physical education

lessons. Additionally, Fitzpatrick (2012) explored the use of poetry as a narrative method to

represent research data from a critical ethnographic study with marginalized youth. As well,

Rubuliak and Spencer (2021), explored the perspectives of children experiencing disability and

their experiences of inclusion during recess, wherein they used a qualitative case study method,

which was also informed by narrative inquiry.

 I drew upon the use of "creative nonfiction" narrative to present my findings, which

allowed the characters, or profiles, "to share views, emotions, and reflections about their

experiences using expressive, contextualized, and vernacular language" (Kim, 2016, p. 19). I reviewed transcript data and synthesized to construct three distinct parent profiles drawing on the data from across the six interviews, as well as my experience as a practitioner and knowledge of the literature. The creative nonfiction approach aligned with the narrative presentation, as I grounded the narrative understandings of experience while maintaining congruence with narrative ontological underpinnings (Clandinin et al., 2016). The experiences discussed in each of the parent profiles are grounded and aligned with those of the parent participants in keeping with narrative research and the constructivist paradigm.

The parent profiles helped to set the stage for sharing the findings. The profiles were discussed during the next online meeting, as well as an in-depth review and comparison of all six transcripts, moving back and forth between the raw data and proposed themes. In the following meeting, lasting approximately 60 minutes, we co-constructed a final theme, 'simply play,' and renamed the '(re)-learning' theme, 'risky parenting.' I then moved forward with the process of embedding the three themes of: consequences, risky parenting, and simply play, using parent quotes within the relevant profiles to share the findings.

Quality Indicators

Various different approaches to demonstrating the trustworthiness of qualitative research have emerged over time and it has become a contentious issue among some scholars who debate the development of quality criteria to be used as "unvarying standards" (Tracy, 2010, p. 838). Tracy (2010), posited that "guidelines [e.g., quality criteria] provide a path to expertise" (p. 838) and that there should be some form of quality criteria not only for the research produced, but to help the researcher further develop their skills. Quality criteria were strengthened formally in this study through an audit trail with reflexive journaling and critical friendship.

Audit Trail and Reflexive Journaling. Zitomer and Goodwin (2014) described an "audit trail" as a means of enhancing credibility. An audit trail is the collection of "memos, logs, field notes, computer files, and other relevant information" so that the decisions made by the researcher can be critically critiqued (p.201). An audit trail with reflexive journaling was used to track and make explicit the decisions made regarding the research process (Mayan, 2009; Thorne, 2016). This practice exists in the form of a notebook that I maintained throughout the research project.

Reflexivity is "the process of being highly attentive to how and why you make decisions and interpretations along the research way, critically examining your personal-researcher role and how this interfaces with all- even the most minute- aspects of the research" (Mayan, 2009, p.137). The audit trail along with reflexive journaling, was created to bring attention to the *why* behind the participant responses, while I simultaneously challenged the inherent axiological assumptions behind my interpretation of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Peers, 2018). This process helped to ensure epistemological integrity and analytic logic (Thorne, 2016).

Having explored the positionalities of who has contributed to the play literature, many like myself, come from a predominantly Eurocentric population with a homogenous stance that play is inherently positive. However, to be reflexive is to step back and challenge the axiological foundations of knowledges generated and taken as universal (Peers, 2018). Do I inherently value a specific version or type of play? Do I subconsciously perpetuate my values or those of others, that do not align with the values of the participants? To be aware of these concerns is to be aware of what we choose to observe, what we see in these observations, and how we interpret these observations (Thorne, 2016). Through reflexive practice, which included keeping a journal as well as ongoing conversations and debriefing with my supervisor, I attempted to acknowledge

my own beliefs, while not imposing them. I took the reality and experience of the participant seriously; so long as it is recognized as authentic by one individual, it is legitimate (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011).

Critical Friendship. Critical friendship is the process of "critical dialogue between people," where the researcher gives voice to their interpretations of the data to key individuals who can provide "critical feedback" (Smith & McGannon, 2018, p.113). Smith and McGannon (2018) stated that "the goal is not to agree or achieve consensus but rather to encourage reflexivity by challenging each others' construction of knowledge" (p.113).

In establishing critical friendship, bi-weekly and at times weekly, online meetings were held with my supervisor starting in December 2020 through to February 2021. During this time, my supervisor and I reviewed all 6 transcripts, then met to discuss the identified categories, which led to the creation of key themes. Refinement of the themes continued during the meetings, further engaging in the process of critical friendship. On three occasions in January, I met with the innovation designers from Vivo for Healthier Generations responsible for the VPH, to discuss and debate ideas further. We discussed the themes from the perspective of practitioners, adding to the academic lens provided by my supervisor.

Enhancing Quality Criteria

Critical friendship and creating an audit trail strengthened the quality criteria of epistemological integrity, representative credibility, interpretive authority, analytic logic, moral defensibility, and disciplinary relevance, as discussed by Thorne (2016).

Thorne (2016) discussed the quality criteria that are typically applied to studies using ID. "Epistemological integrity" is the paradigmatic alignment of the research process, starting with the research question by ensuring it "is consistent with the stated epistemological standpoint" (p.

233). Epistemological integrity was monitored through reflexive practice and in discussions with critical friends, it continued through the interpretation data and construction of the findings. "Representative credibility," ensures that the claims of the study are "consistent with the manner in which the phenomena was sampled" (p.234). Reminiscent of qualitative and quantitative quality criteria, transferability and generalizability, representative credibility ensures that the knowledge produced from the study is situated within applicable contexts and populations. The reach of the VPH is limited as it is a pilot project with a small geographic footprint. The findings of this study only pertain to the experiences of those parents attending the VPH, although the learnings may be further reaching. "Analytic logic," is the explicit path of decisions made by the researcher from the initial design of the research project through to the final conclusions and knowledge claims. Analytic logic is explicit so the reader may judge the credibility of the knowledge created. Analytic logic is primarily upheld by "interpretive authority," and is the "assurance that the researcher's interpretations are trustworthy" (p. 235). Analytic logic and interpretive authority were maintained through critical friendship discussions between me and my supervisor, as we shared interpretations of the data and collaborated on the construction of themes. This helped to reveal inherent bias I may have had and ensure that a view "external to the researcher was revealed" (p.235). In addition to these four main credibility indicators addressed by Thorne (2016), several others were considered in this study. "Moral defensibility" acknowledges the need to "influence and inform practice," (p. 236) while at the same time maintaining that research should not be done just for the sake of doing research. The researcher must convince the reader they were justified in conducting the study, that there is a purpose in seeking knowledge from participants. Collectively, the literature review, proposed research question, and findings of this study highlight the role of parents and play in child development,

adding moral defensibility for the exploration of this discourse. Moral defensibility, is closely

linked to another criteria, the need for "disciplinary relevance." Thorne (2016) maintained that

knowledge attained through the use of ID, must be relevant to the discipline in which it is

intended to be applied. In addition to my own ongoing experience as a play practitioner, by

involving practitioners from Vivo for Healthier Generations in the process of critical friendship,

disciplinary relevance was further strengthened.

Ethics

Dignity and respect are at the heart of research ethics (Markula & Silk, 2011), and it is

through the exploration and consideration of morality and ethics that we may strive to act

without causing harm (Goodwin & Rossow-Kimball, 2012). According to Markula and Silk

(2011), for research to be ethically conducted, adherence should be given to five tenets: "respect

for dignity, free and informed consent, vulnerable persons, privacy and confidentiality, and

justice and inclusiveness" (p. 14).

Respect for dignity was upheld throughout the research process as the right to autonomy.

Individuals were informed of their right to withdraw their participation and their contributions up

to two weeks after the review of transcripts, and throughout the research process, they were

informed that they may choose not to answer questions during interviews. Free and informed

consent ensured that potential participants were not coerced and had the autonomy to choose if

they wished to join in the study. An information sheet was made available to all participants that

clearly outlined the purpose of the study, requirements, ethical guidelines, and contact

information for other inquiries. Alongside the information sheet, an informed consent waiver was

signed by all participants "to demonstrate they have knowingly, voluntarily, and freely decided

to participate in the research study" (Markula & Silk, 2011, p.17). Within these documents, I outlined that consent was on-going.

Privacy and confidentiality were outlined in the information sheet and were upheld throughout the research process. All efforts were made to ensure privacy through anonymity: a pseudonym was assigned to individuals, all transcripts were reviewed to ensure anonymity was not compromised, and all other identifiable data (e.g., identifiable locations, organizations, identifiable characteristics) were replaced other than the naming of the VPH and project from which it developed. All data collected throughout the research project were stored electronically on an encrypted device in a locked filing cabinet. Raw data were only seen by the researcher, research assistants, and supervisors.

As interviews were no longer conducted in person but through a Zoom Room, additional privacy and security measures were taken. Zoom Rooms were a recommended digital meeting platform for the University of Alberta as they are established using 256-bit TLS encryption and all shared content is encrypted using AES-256 encryption. In addition, Zoom Rooms were individually created with unique rooms and passcodes. To ensure all digital privacy measures were met, all security updates were fully installed, meetings were non-recurring, and recordings were not hosted on cloud servers.

Vulnerable persons are considered "children, the disabled, the elderly, the poor, or other individuals who do not have the means, education, or ability to fully comprehend the research purpose" (Markula & Silk, 2011, p. 18). Within the context of this research project, participants of all demographics, including those defined as vulnerable populations, were eligible to be included in the study. The information sheet and informed consent were written in an accessible way, and additional communication strategies were not required.

The risks and benefits associated with involvement in the study were outlined in the information letter, and any benefits were indirect. For parents, it provided an opportunity to share their experiences, perceptions, and ideas regarding an alternative play environment that may have implications for future play provision. This study may have involved emotional risks during the interviews as parents reflected on their experiences. There were no questions that I or my supervisor deemed sensitive in nature, and no parents appeared to have adverse reactions to any of the questions. The risks of participating were similar to those that one may experience in day-to-day life, and I was prepared with additional resources (e.g., counseling services, Alberta Health Link) if there was a need.

Chapter 4: Findings

Using elements of narrative research, the findings were presented through the development of personas along with key themes. Drawing on the experiences and quotes from study participants, I created three parent personas that captured a number of parenting styles present within the data and focused on participants' understandings of play, perspectives on risk-taking, and level of intervention in their children's play experiences. The three parent personas were the "Free Range Parent," "Tight Rope Parent," and the "Helicopter Parent." I then used these personas as backdrops to present, contextualize, and explore the three key themes: 1) consequences, 2) risky parenting, and 3) simply play, developed through the data analysis. All three themes are present within each persona differently, yet at the same time, overlap, and are therefore not mutually exclusive. Collectively, the theme of *consequences* explores the worries parents experienced about their parenting interventions. The theme of *risky parenting* questioned what it meant for parents to support (or not support) risky play. Finally, the theme of *simply play* brought attention to the complexities parents faced related to unstructured play.

The Free Range Parent

Francis, whose name means freedom or adventure (Redmond, 2019), is a Free Range Parent (FRP) who believes play and independence are important for their child's development. They support unstructured play by its commonly understood definition among playworkers, that it is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated. As such, they support their child to engage in free play by supervising, but not directly intervening unless there is a high chance of serious injury, which is typically associated with risk-taking. For Francis, this means balancing safety and freedom, which can sometimes be a challenge. Francis has already "bought into" risky play because the underlying philosophy of "as safe as necessary, not as safe as

possible" (Brussoni et al., 2012) embraced at the VPH aligns with their parenting style. They are happy to stand back at the VPH and let their child fully embrace a child-centered environment where they can do whatever they want.

Consequences

As an FRP, Francis experienced a constant tension when deciding how involved to be in their child's play activities. Francis talked about their thoughts when navigating how to best support their child at the VPH when other parents are watching and they find themselves concerned about the consequences associated with being judged. They shared,

> If you don't know [the other parents] and they're watching you, there's a little bit of pressure to like, am I a good parent? Am I being a terrible parent for not helping? My child's being mean to their kid, and I don't know them, like when there's other parents there it does definitely change my behaviour a little bit.

For Francis, the pressure associated with being a FRP, in an environment where other parents might judge their behaviour, was troubling. Their desire to permit and encourage physical and/or emotional risk-taking during their child's play put them at odds with other parents, who were more likely, in keeping with social norms, to intervene and manage these risks. When coming to an environment like the VPH, where children are empowered to assess risk for themselves, Francis still experienced worry over the consequences of being seen as a "terrible parent" in trying to balance doing what they believe is right with the social pressures of keeping children free from harm. In these moments, Francis talked about slowing down and reflecting on their decisions before intervening with their child,

I've just kind of explained the logic to myself in my head, and I go through the process of, talk myself off the edge kind of thing, realize like it's not a big deal, I'm making a big deal in my head.

Francis's quote reflects their ability to pause and assess their child's activities, rather than immediately giving into their risk-anxiety. In this instance, however, Francis used this logic to manage social consequences associated with being viewed as a bad parent. In addition to being concerned about what other parents might think of their parenting style, Francis also shared an experience of when their mom joined them at the playground, demonstrating their ability to manage potentially feeling judged for their risky play decisions.

I was at a playground and my youngest climbed to the top of a very tall slide and I was with my mom and she was like, 'Is she going to be ok?!' she got up there so she's fine and I just carried on chatting with my sister-in-law and my brother and, just like that she made it to the bottom of the slide, and she was perfectly happy.

Risky Parenting

Watching risky play was not an anxiety inducing experience for Francis. "I'm fairly comfortable with physical risk because I've seen it happen with [my daughter] over and over again, that she usually knows how far she can go," they shared. Francis spent time playing and working through risks with their children, which helped Francis to recognize their children's abilities and decided it was about trust:

It comes down to us as adults trusting them. Trusting them to know how far and how high they can go…It's trusting children that they know what they need and when they need it and how high and how far they can go.

For Francis, trust was pivotal when it comes to risk-taking because risk permeates every part of life. "Risk is inherent in every activity that we do. Every piece of life has risk in it." At the same time Francis acknowledged, the benefits of risk-taking are not equally recognized by all individuals:

> [There] are risk-takers, and they push the limits, and we really value that in people and in organizations, we value that. But then when we talk about taking risks with children [or] we don't value those types of physical risks.

When society did not recognize risk-taking is necessary for children's healthy development, Francis found it necessary to take on the responsibility of introducing risk themselves. Francis recalled a time at the VPH where they were trying to do just that, but found themselves restricted from allowing their child to experience what appeared to Francis be a minor risk.

> I'm really open to like being barefoot, and all that, and my daughter loves to take off her shoes and in the mud she wanted to take her shoes off and then for safety reasons she was told to put her shoes back on again. So, we were told to freely play any way [and] anyhow we wanted but give[n] the 'put your shoes back on,' and I understand because there's lots of stuff around, and you don't really know from a safety perspective, so it actually felt, I felt a little stifled in my daughter's play because it changed her play a little bit, it changed what she was doing when she was told…

Francis recognized there may still be safety precautions that need to be followed, but they were under the impression that "anything goes" at the VPH. When told something to the contrary, Francis expressed, "it took me a while to get over it." Parent expectations of permissible risk-taking and what the VPH provided does not always align. Francis believed that

having a parent present at the Play Hub should allow for certain privileges. "I think there's a difference when the parent is there, there's the thing[s] that should be allowed if the parent is there supervising verses sort of, you're dropping your kid off and leaving." Francis continued to expand on the differences between their expectations and those accompanying other play spaces like school playgrounds. They shared,

> I do find the school rules a little too strict for the way that I let my kids explore and play… I work at the school, and I'm always out at recess supervising the kids, so there's a lot of things I have to tell the kids at recess that they're not allowed to do because the school rules. Whereas if that was me with my kids on my own, I would just let them do it.

Though traditional playgrounds in the community offered less risk and challenge, they were also not supervised, which may have allowed for Francis to break certain rules with which they disagreed. However, the VPH, while providing more risk, was closely monitored to prevent rules from being broken. Francis pointed out that when expectations are unclear and parents are uncertain about the unwritten rules, it can be problematic. Francis would have kept their child's shoes on if they had known, but to be told they could do as they pleased and then be told otherwise, "it made me feel slightly less welcome and slightly less sort of responsible for my child, you know?"

Simply Play

When it comes to play, Francis would like for their child to be self-sufficient. "I'm already bought into what's supposed to happen there [the VPH]," explained Francis, "so I purposely was trying to stand back more." Francis recognized the VPH as a place for children to take control and for adults to take a step back. However, in some cases, when attempting to respond to a child's needs, Play Ambassadors overstepped and significantly impacted the child's

play in a way that Francis understood, but which countered their beliefs. Francis remembered a

particular time at the VPH:

> The loudest person was the Play Ambassador, the person that was like fully in there was
>
> the Play Ambassador. I just think that's like, who's project is this? It was definitely not
>
> the children's project, cause one thing, there was another point where…one of the staff
>
> had a [moving dolly] and was pulling the kids around on it… they were doing a type of
>
> play that, and going at a speed that the children couldn't do themselves, so they couldn't
>
> replicate that type of play, so now they were dependent on this Play Ambassador if they
>
> wanted to go that fast. So, it was kind of taking away a little bit of their initiative of play.
>
> Francis expected that in an Adventure Playground, that is supposed to be child-centered,

children would not have their play adulterated, particularly by a staff member who knew the

tenets of playwork. When the Play Ambassador took control of the activity, it also took away

from the experience that Francis' wanted for their children and they worried that it may set a

precedent for other adults to intervene in their children's play. They remembered a situation

involving a slip n' slide at the VPH where children were so caught up in the excitement of the

activity that they were unaware of adults getting in the way. "…adults [were] going down [the

slip and slide]. Sliding into kids because the kids [went down] first…it was one of the [Play

Ambassadors] actually." Increased adult intervention can potentially create dangerous situations,

so for Francis, adults were a concern. Any type of adult involvement that begins to take control

from the children, at the VPH, was counter to Francis' beliefs associated with being an FRP.

The Tight-Rope Parent

Dare, whose name means "challenge to take a risk" (Moss Gathering LLC, 2021), is a

Tight-Rope Parent (TRP). Dare is uncertain about how to support their children when playing

without controlling the activity (compared to an FRP), but they look back on their own play

experiences as a child with fondness and wish the same for their children. Dare struggles with

how to integrate the free play experiences of their past into their own children's lives given the

hyper safe society that exists today. While they may see various forms of play (e.g., free, risky)

as beneficial, they also feel pressured to ensure their children are provided an array of structured

activities that reflect cultural norms and investment in children's development. As a result, play

may be sidelined. When they find themselves in situations where they must choose between

safety and risk, they are likely to default to what most other parents are doing. Dare may become

more safety-conscious or more accepting of risk-taking depending on the environment, its

prevailing (sub)culture, or pressure from other parents.

Consequences

Dare shared many of the same concerns about making the 'right' decisions for their child,

as Francis. However, Dare felt the need to balance playful risk-taking against the schedule they

had planned for the day:

> Sometimes the anxiety…is actually less about them getting hurt and more about all the
>
> other things that are going on. Like the fear that, oh if your kid gets hurt, then that means
>
> that they're going to want to go home, then if you go home, then you don't have the
>
> snack, and you've gotten into the car, and like all these other things are actually what's at
>
> risk, it's not actually your kid.

Dare made decisions about restricting their daughters' participation based on the potential

for schedule disruption and the day being ruined should an injury occur during risky play. They

explained,

It's like the easiest go-to excuse for stopping a behaviour that you are now actually

uncomfortable with for new reasons. Like I said, you've got a complicated day planned,

you're stressed out by work, something in your family is tricky, and you're just like, you

use the excuse of physical risk to say, 'be careful,' 'stop doing that,' 'don't do this,' and

you never actually get down to like, oh the reason I don't want to do this is because I

don't want to go home and make a new plan.

At the same time, when weighing the risks of injury, Dare recognized that in telling their

daughters to stop engaging in risky play, they "might wreck everybody's fun." Dare recalled a

time when they visited the VPH with a friend and their family. The family friend was opposed to

letting their children get messy because of all of the other things that it would trigger:

I had a friend meet me [at VPH]; she came with her three children. She was yelling at

them to stay out of the mud. Because it's gross and disgusting and dirty, and they were

going to ruin their clothes and how are they going to get into their car.

In the same way Dare had previously used safety to lessen the likelihood of schedule

disruption, they realized it wasn't so much about the mess itself, but the impact on their friend's

plans for the day that led to the negative reaction. "I feel like her biggest issue is just like having

to clean things off." This experience also provided a moment of insight for Dare about their own

parenting practice:

I can still remember the pair of shorts I was wearing when we went, and I saw how much

mud was there, and I remember thinking to myself, 'I can wash these.' And like that was

a new, that was like a mark for me that I'm trying to remember as a parent, like

remember those moments where you decide I can wash everything… and just how much

nicer the afternoon was when I stopped and let go of worrying about time and worrying

about what we did and just chilled out.

Although Dare continued to be concerned about the potential consequences of their

daughters' risk-taking and possibly "ruining the day," they began thinking about their own

parenting practices. Dare was able to step out of the "anxiety" and "let go of worry" that

stemmed from potential consequences. In doing so, it allowed them to see the positive

possibilities associated with their time at the VPH with their daughters.

Risky Parenting

"Prior to attending [VPH] stuff, I would try to get involved a lot more. Now, if I see them

involved in something, I will just let them do their thing instead of adulterate their play,"

explained Dare as they reflected on their time in the VPH and how their perspective on play and

risk had evolved. Dare recognized that adulteration has become a norm in children's play:

I don't know where it came from, but everybody has this expectation that you need to be

in there involved in everything. And if you aren't watching them like a hawk and doing

everything, then you aren't caring kinda thing.

Dare wanted their daughters to play without being watched "like a hawk" but also had

concerns about their daughters' ability to manage risks on their own, uncertain of their

capabilities. Dare was also uncertain how to decided what is appropriate risk-taking and what is

not, "I don't think I have a logic to it whatsoever." This led Dare to look for alternative means of

assessing readiness for risky play. For example, they revealed that they "still have a hard time

with the concept of kids with tools," but when asked how they would know when their children

were ready for using a real hammer, they correlated the strength and control required for a

hammer with lifting a milk jug.

One thing I always tell them is too heavy is the milk jug they want to carry into the

house. When I trust them with carrying the milk jug then I trust them with a heavy

hammer…I think it's because of the weight, it's something heavy that you need to have a

little bit more strength to control properly.

Even when they thought one of their daughters was ready to try something new, Dare still

felt anxious, "seeing her do something for the first time usually makes me uneasy…but after she

does something for the first time, I realize she's a capable human being." What helped Dare be

at ease when their daughters tried something new at the VPH, was the Play Ambassador. Dare

recalled when a Play Ambassador gave them the permission to stand back from their child and

how that felt: "having the Play Ambassador say that to me made me feel like, 'okay, what I want

to do is okay because somebody said it's okay,' so for me it was wonderful." Having had the

Play Ambassador encourage Dare to step back helped to establish new norms about risk, safety,

and supervision that Dare was ready to embrace. Permission to let go and take that step back,

helped with "fighting the helicopter in my head versus what is actually going on." The VPH

supported Dare to do just that when one of her daughters wanted to climb one of the shipping

containers.

I still have reservations because she needed a hand to get up there but learning the rule

that if the kid can get up there on their own, they're allowed to be up there … that kinda

clicked to me because before I was like, 'I'm never letting my kids up there,' but you

know if they can climb up there then they likely can get down as well so not a big deal.

After seeing their daughter as capable of successfully managing risks, Dare believed it

helped to quiet the desire to hover and intervene and helped change how they support their child.

Dare shared that, "I try to cheer her on and let her know…encouraging her and being close by in

case she does need assistance if she falls down or anything." This perspective shift further

reinforced Dare's confidence in their child's abilities, "I remember thinking, 'I didn't know she

could do that.' I've been acting like she can't, what would change if I acted differently."

Although they were not willing to step back to the same degree as a Francis when it came to their

child's engagement in risky play, Dare reflected on their own fears and demonstrated an

openness to change. Dare remembered a powerful moment when they let their youngest daughter

climb on something that she normally wasn't allowed, before jumping off to be caught be a

nearby adult. Some parents might have reflected on their concern in that moment, but Dare

remembered the pure delight as they recalled her daughter had, "the biggest smile on her face" as

she launched herself, joyfully yelling, "FLY!" Dare laughed saying, "I think she wants to fly."

Simply Play

Adventure Playgrounds like the VPH can be challenging for both parents and children

but for different reasons. Dare remembered their first time at the VPH:

> My first impression was, 'what is all this junk?' and I think I said that to my oldest. I was
>
> like, 'I don't know what [I] brought you to, but this is weird honey, there's a lot of weird
>
> junk here, but we're here, so we are staying.' And we ended up staying to the very end
>
> because my kids loved the junk so much, and we had so much fun. That's when I realized
>
> junk is fun.

Dare realized when it came to the items children wanted to play with, adult ideas of what

made for good play might be too narrow. Inspired by their "junk is fun" experience at VPH, Dare

continued to observe their daughters' play at home. "I bought them a slide and a few outdoor

toys, and their preference is buckets and dirt and water." These realizations changed Dare's

understanding of an item's play value, which also helped them understand why their children

were not always keen on visiting traditional community playgrounds compared to the VPH. Dare

elaborated,

> We have a playground behind our house, and it's always the same thing unless there is
>
> somebody else with them, there is no interest with playing with it. But I've always found
>
> at [VPH] there's something new to look at or tinker with.

> Dare also saw another side of their daughters' when they played with the "junk" at the

VPH. "[They are] actually a little more creative with their play than I thought they would be.

They don't always need me to tell them what to play with." The experiences at the VPH with

other parents also led to some nostalgic reflections of their own childhood. Dare explained, "I

think one thing I notice people saying is how nice it is to kind of get back to simpler things, and

how open-ended things are…I've said to my [partner] we should get a big pile of dirt in our back

yard, that's all we need. You don't need all these fancy things to play with."

The Helicopter Parent

Toan, whose name means "safe" or "secure" (Moss Gathering LLC, 2021), is a helicopter

parent (HCP). HCPs have become a norm in society but also have a stigma attached to their

parenting style. Toan wants their sons to play but does not trust them to play alone without

supervision and adult direction. Having control over their sons' play, allows Toan to prevent

them from doing things they feel are inappropriate (e.g., breaking the rules, misusing things).

While Toan lets their children participate in some risk-taking, in most cases, Toan is the one who

sets the limits for risks rather than the children. The acceptable limits of risk are lower for HCPs

than FRPs and TPPs. Toan frequently steps in and directly supervises their children. While

seeing the value of play, Toan consistently prioritizes safety even in situations many would

consider low risk.

Consequences

Toan had similar worries as both Francis and Dare when it came to the consequences of letting their children engage in risky play but is on high alert particularly when either son engaged in risky play with others:

> If my kid gets hurt, I'll go get him a Band-Aid, and he'll probably be fine, right? But when your kid hurts somebody else, it's more pressure. I guess you don't want them to do that.

While Toan had concerns about their sons hurting themselves, the issue of accidentally hurting another child and how that child's parents may react significantly influenced their parenting. Toan elaborated, "I understand accidents happen, but you don't know how other people will react. By other people, I should say, other parents." Toan was worried about a negative interaction where they might be judged and labelled a bad parent by others. "Sometimes like other parents will judge you if your kids are being too rough…you know?" The Play Ambassadors appeared to have a key role in managing this concern. Toan recalled a time when one of their sons was physical in their play, so they prepared to intervene. Before Toan could step in, the Play Ambassadors intervened with the parents.

> I think it was [Play Ambassador #1 and Play Ambassador #2], were like, 'it's fine don't worry if it gets bad like we'll interfere.' And it kinda made [me and another parent] feel comfortable to let the kids play instead of having to kind of worry about their every little move.

Toan relied on the Play Ambassadors to manage challenging interactions that occurred when at the VPH.

Risky Parenting

Dare, Francis, and Toan, agreed that the VPH was safe place for their children to play.

For Toan, this was due to knowledge that the Play Ambassadors would be nearby and that,

although parents were asked to stand back, they could still step in if they feel the need. As an

HCP, Toan's threshold for when to step in was lower than that of other parents:

> For the most part, I'm fine with [risk-taking]. In those things that are more risky, I would
>
> want to be more involved and not just supervising but be right there with my kid. So, if
>
> he's roasting a marshmallow, I don't just put the marshmallow on the stick and say ok,
>
> have fun go to the fire. I'll be there, crouched down next to him. You can hold the stick,
>
> but I'll be there next to him.

Toan still wanted to play an active role in assessing risk while at the VPH, "I'm going to

let him play with things, but I assess where the bad could come in." Concerns with risky play can

cause internal conflict if parent safety expectations do not match those of the VPH. "When I see

signals that don't match my expectations of duty of care," shared Toan, "it makes me not trust all

the other invisible stuff." This lack of trust in the "invisible stuff" had the potential to increase

the level of Toan's intervention in their children's play or result in all-out restrictions on certain

play behaviours. In activities that bordered on Toan's limits, they often stepped in verbally:

> I normally remind them to be safe… I know we're supposed to sit back, but I'm normally
>
> like, 'be extra careful, you know you have a hammer in your hand, and that can hurt
>
> somebody,' or, you know I'm reminding them of the risks, but I'm ok with them taking
>
> them.

When deciding to intervene, it was not always about safety for Toan. Toan believed that

because rules tend to change depending on the environment (e.g., playgrounds, VPH, school,

home, etc.) that their sons will not know what is appropriate. Toan believed stricter rules should

be applied at the VPH so that children do not get into trouble.

> [Play Ambassadors are] ok with [the kids] using like you know the tubes or whatever and
>
> hitting each other[s] with them. And I have a hard time with that because I work so hard.
>
> I'm telling them not to do that because if they did that at school or at a playground with
>
> their friends like they get in trouble at school for that, right?

Because Toan did not trust in their children's ability to navigate the rules in different

environments, they were more restrictive in what they allowed in public and in private.

> My kids probably do it [playing swords] at home a lot, but I'm always like no, we don't
>
> do that because you're trying to teach them that for school… It's just so hard to like,
>
> teach your kids that it's ok to hit each other with this now, but don't hit each other with
>
> that and don't use your fists and don't use it, you know what I mean, it's very confusing.

Simply Play

Toan's expectations around supervision and facilitation of their children's activities

required a high degree of engagement on their part. Toan recalled some tough days: "I find it

really exhausting as a parent on those days when what I'm actually looking for is support, and

it's just like, ok, you've got to figure out how to play." Toan felt the need to be present,

supervise, and to provide their sons with play activities, all of which could be daunting.

> We always do the same things. I'm not super creative coming up with all these fun things
>
> to do. We kind of stick to the same stuff, so to have somebody else's ideas, it gives them
>
> different things to try.

Given the self-imposed expectations for supporting their child's play, Toan appreciated

the play value another person could add. Toan described the importance of having another

person for their children play with: "the best thing I find about [VPH] is that there is always somebody else there. My kids get along really well, but they're always together and even having one other child with them changes the dynamic." When other children are not present at the VPH, the Play Ambassadors supported parents by stepping in, this helped relieve the pressure Toan felt when confronted with planning play activities for their boys. Referring to an experience with a particular Play Ambassador, Toan shared,

> He was like playing with kids. He was like sliding them on a parachute; they had the best time. He was really, he interacts with the kids, and he did it really, really, well. They were very interested after that.

The Play Ambassadors had an important and positive impact on Toan's experiences at VPH, allowing them to step back from their children's play. At the same time, however, this did not appear to have led to a change in Toan's understanding of play as something to be directed by children. Toan said they "still feel[s] like they need some sort of guidance." Play, for Toan, is just not simple.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The findings of this study highlighted key issues that parents experienced at an Adventure Playground. These issues were illustrated through three themes:

1. consequences identified the worry parents expressed at being judged and labelled a bad parent by their peers.

2. risky parenting captured the subjective nature of risk as it pertained to parenting practices.

3. simply play examined the complexity that surrounds play and the impact on families.

Collectively, I explored these themes through three parent profiles, the free-range parent (FRP), the tight-rope parent (TRP), and the helicopter parent (HCP). The FRP was positioned as believing that "children can and should function independently (i.e., limited parental supervision) as they age and develop" (Davis & Cashdan, 2020, p.59). The HCP was a colloquial representation of the over-protective parent and is represented in the literature as *that parent* who limits their children's "independence and voluntary physical risk-taking opportunities" (Brussoni & Olsen, 2011, p.237). A third profile was created and termed the TRP and was described as having elements of both the FRP and HCP. For example, the TRP may exhibit over-protective behaviours and simultaneously value free play and independence. The TRP could be interpreted as a combination of elements tied to both the FRP and HCP, while not fully conforming to either.

The discussion delves into these findings and engages with key aspects of the themes in order to explore, challenge, and add to the existing literature. The following questions served as a guide to the discussion: What does it mean to be a good parent in a risk-averse society? What is the role of parents in children's risk-taking? How did letting kids play become so complicated

for parents? The discussion concludes with practical recommendations for play providers and the limitations of the study.

What Does it Mean to be a "Good Parent" in a Risk-averse Society?

The theme of consequences identified in the findings captured the worries parents had around how others would judge their parenting. The concerns identified were about making the right decisions for their child, ruining scheduled activities, and accidentally hurting another child. These worries stemmed from different experiences, which were traced back to the root concern of being perceived as a good parent. The exact definition of good parenting is still ambiguous and undefined (Hoghughi & Speight, 1998). However, Shaw (2010) has suggested good parents are responsible for their child's healthy growth and development and life success, which can be interpreted within specific child-rearing discourses.

Anyone directly or indirectly involved in child-rearing (e.g., parents, caregivers, educators, etc.) wants to be perceived as doing their best as they contribute to the upbringing of the children in their life (Ashdown & Faherty, 2020). However, Ashdown and Faherty (2020) suggested that how "an acceptably good parent" has been defined is limited and grounded in white, middle-class America (p.2). Thus, the current understanding of the good parent has failed to include the diverse views of good parenting from other cultures. Shaw (2010) contended that the contemporary good parent accepts the many responsibilities "for not only the growth and development of their children but also their overall success in life" (p.6). Perceptions of the good parent have been explored in several discourses that are linked to child development, such as academic performance (Thomas et al., 2015), sport and recreation (Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017; Watchman & Spencer, 2020), and injury prevention (Dao & McMullin, 2019).

Thomas and colleagues (2015) explored the good parent as a construct of teachers and parents. They found that policy changes placed pressure on parents, shifting educational responsibility from institutions onto parents, positioning them as responsible for their children's academic success. For parents, the assumption of responsibility added pressure as teachers questioned their parenting behaviours at home. Good parents exhibited over-involvement tendencies, including monitoring their children's leisure and screen time, favouring academic pursuits, managing homework, and on-going participation in school activities. Those parents who were unaware of their children's academic behaviours or did not prioritize their children's educational pursuits were questioned by teachers (Thomas et al., 2015). According to Watchman and Spencer-Cavaliere (2017) parents of children who participated in sport viewed it as a privileged opportunity to develop many skills important to future success. To achieve the good parent standard, parents were pressured into additional sport and social commitments, while being told their children needed to participate in additional training or practice. Those parents who failed to keep up with these standards risked becoming ostracized by other parents (Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017). Finally, Dao and McMullin (2019) approached what it means to be a good parent from a supervisory and injury prevent lens, as they explored childproofing in households. Two key elements discussed were supervision and physical controls for children's safety. However, parental understanding of how to properly supervise was mixed and undefined. Good parents, according to Dao and McMullin (2019), were those who introduced safety measures that eliminated all risk, provided consistent supervision, and were knowledgeable about "positive physical and learning environments" (p. 17). Should any injury occur, the responsible individual would be considered a bad parent (Dao & McMullin, 2019).

In the current study, elements of each of the discussed good parent constructs described above were apparent in parents at the VPH. For example, one parent expressed concerns that their children might accidently break the rules at school because of behaviours learned at the VPH or at home, which may lead to issues between them and the school administration. Though participants did not discuss the pressures of extra-curricular commitments due to organized sports, several parents indicated they felt the need to provide a variety of activities for their children, which, similar to Watchman and Spencer-Cavaliere (2017), led to parents feeling the need to take on extra commitments in support of their children. All parents indicated that some form of safety precaution or supervision was required for their children. Parents were concerned that if their child became injured or accidently injured another child, that they would be considered a bad parent. This supports Dao and McMillan's (2019) assertion that safety and injury prevention are key for good parents in the home, but extends these ideas to public play spaces.

The literature addressing free play and parenting recommendations is somewhat sparse. Given contemporary understandings of free play what constitutes a good parent or good parenting is most closely aligned with the FRP. FRPs believe in reducing parental supervision to promote children's independent development (Davis & Cashdan, 2020), a belief that closely aligns with Playwork. Hughes (2012) indicated that playworkers believe children need time, freedom, control, and independence, to explore and play. Free play, which supports independence and risk, is shown in the literature as fundamental to the overall development of children, including their physical health, social skills, academic success, and ability to assess and manage risks that may lead to injury (Alexander et al., 2014; Milteer et al., 2012; Tremblay et al., 2015). In the current study, parents who aligned with free-range ideals, valued the

independence they were able to foster in their children while at the VPH. However, if free play is so beneficial for children, why is it not prioritized alongside other developmental activities?

As identified by Dao and McMullin (2019), good parents are those who keep their children safe and free from injury. This belief is at odds with those of parents who ascribe to the tenets of Playwork and believe that play, and the built environment in which play happens, should include healthy risk-taking elements (Hughes, 2012). Both of these perspectives were present in parents at the VPH. FRPs believe it is their responsibility to encourage independence by giving their child the agency to assess risk on their own. The goal is not to let their child become injured, but an acceptance that injury is a part of childhood (Hughes, 2012). Over-protective parents are less likely to embrace risk-taking as willingly and are more likely to align with the risk-averse beliefs explored by Dao and McMullin (2019). Free-range parenting has gained negative attention in the media in recent years, with these parents portrayed as neglectful for allowing their children to walk independently around the neighbourhood and other nearby locations (Cornwall, 2021). Parents more likely to see the value in risky play at the VPH, attempted to balance the perceptions of good parenting and their beliefs in free-range parenting. Determining what constitutes being a good parent in the context of risk, safety, and play is complicated and highly dependent on personal beliefs. As well, concerns about safety and risk-taking in children's play are temporal and changing. In years past, children were given more time, space, and independence which suggests that contemporary dynamics of parenting are susceptible to cultural and sub-cultural shifts (Gray, 2011), making good parenting a moving target.

Lupton (2006) summarized "cultural/symbolic" theories of risk, suggesting that our ideas of risk are "part of shared cultural understandings and practices that are founded on social

expectations and responsibilities" (p.12). Additionally, Lupton stated "pre-established cultural

beliefs help people make sense of risk, and notions of risk are therefore not individualistic but

shared within a community" (p.13). The current social expectations of parents are to ensure risk

avoidance and enhance safety, which usually involves the restriction of independence through

supervision (Dao & McMullin, 2019). While free play supports children's independence in their

play and mobility around their local neighbourhood, parents feel this exposes their children to

the dangers of strangers, bullies, traffic, and drugs (Brussoni et al., 2012; Brussoni et al., 2015;

Valentine & McKendrick, 1997; Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017). In response, parents

then prioritize the safety approach identified by Dao and McMullin (2019) which aligns closely

with the cultural values of risk aversion, rather than the FRPs values. In the current study, several

of the parents who closely aligned with HCP beliefs outlined in the findings, aligned with the

safety approach. FRPs, some of which were interviewed in this study, risk their good parent

status among their peers (Lupton, 2006). Parents feel pressured into adopting intensive parenting

behaviours, claiming responsibility for many aspects of their children's lives (e.g., school,

leisure, and play) (Shaw, 2010). Thus, in a space where there may be parents with conflicting

parenting behaviours, like those visiting the VPH, there may be a need to set parenting

expectations by establishing a subculture facilitated by experts (Lupton, 2006).

In Lupton's (2006) discussion of risk as it pertained to Ulrich Beck's *Risk Society:*

Towards a New Modernity (1992), they discussed the role of experts in understanding risk.

Lupton (2006) suggested that due to the evolving and omnipresent nature of risk, the mere act of

engaging in risk-taking, regardless of the outcome, could be seen as counter to existing norms.

However, expert voices may help individuals navigate the changing landscape of risk-taking and

risk-aversion (Lupton, 2006), which may help parents who are yet undecided about their stance

on risky play. Participants in this research looked to the Play Ambassadors as expert voices when they attended the VPH. At the same time, if facilitation, intervention, or safety expectations of the participants were not met, parents were more likely to try to control aspects of their children's activities. This could be due to lack of knowledge parents had of unstructured play and questioning the Play Ambassador's expertise. In free play, expert voices are limited in North America, as Playwork is an unaccredited and relatively unknown profession compared to other disciplines (e.g., sport, coaching, health and safety, education). The findings indicate the need for more awareness of the Play Ambassador role for parents and accredited training for staff to facilitate the acceptance of Play Ambassadors as experts in free play.

Parenting is complex and evolving, just as there is a spectrum of parenting approaches, there is a spectrum of good parenting ideals across and within discourses (Ashdown & Faherty, 2020; Shaw, 2010). While uncomfortable with the idea of being labelled a bad parent for letting their children engage in risk-taking, FRPs may (or may not) be willing to risk such a label because they believe in the instrumental value of play. Parents who prioritize risk-averse norms, supporting safety and injury prevention, may lower their threshold for risk to the point where every activity is perceived as a threat. However, as Lupton (2006) pointed out, expert voices, no matter how few, can help make sense of risk-taking complexities as they pertain to good parenting.

What is the Role of Parents' in Children's Risk-taking?

Dao and McMullin (2019) suggested that for parents of young children to be seen as a "good parent," they need to create environments free from risk to "help children explore and survive in the world" (p.25). However, playwork discourse has suggested that risk is essential to children's health and development (Brussoni et al., 2015; Hughes, 2012; Tremblay et al., 2015).

It could be argued that both perspectives have merit, but at different points in time during

childhood. What is unclear in the literature, and perhaps to parents, is how to determine when it

is appropriate to shift from a risk-averse mindset to embracing healthy risk-taking.

The process of assessing and engaging with risk is subjective, grounded in one's

perception and experiences (Jenkins, 2006; Little, 2015; Little & Wyver, 2010). The subjectivity

of risk may be additionally compounded by the differences in perceptions between children and

adults (Sandseter, 2007). Parents who engage in over-protective behaviours may have a different

experience with their children's risk-taking that is grounded in their own perspective rather than

in that of the child. In the current study, parents often identified that risk was subjective. For

example, in the findings when Toan discussed "not trusting all of the other invisible stuff," it

suggests a discrepancy in perception between parents and Play Ambassadors when it comes to

perceiving risk and safety. However, managing risk subjectivity as a parent, particularly when

the parent is the one who is uncomfortable, can be challenging. There is limited literature that

discusses practical strategies for parents to support their children in risk-taking. Parents, in this

study, who observed and supported risky behaviours for the first time, found it anxiety-inducing,

which led some to intervene. Generally, parents at the VPH with lower risk thresholds tended to

manage physical risks for their children. Morrongiello et al. (2011), developed a tool to measure

"underlying attributes that give rise to supervision practices" (p.190), and through it they found

that when supervising, parents exerted psychological control of their children through the use of

verbal prompts and warnings, essentially directing their children's actions during situations

where their children had not asked for help. Similar to Morrongiello et al. (2011), in this study,

more risk averse parents used verbal prompts (i.e., "be careful," "watch what you are doing,"

"that's dangerous") when they were anxious about the activities their children were taking part

in. Rather than directing behaviour, parents felt they were just reminding their children to be

mindful of what they were doing. At the same time, this did affect how children played, so in

essence, parents were controlling, even if not doing so in a way they recognized. Hughes (2012)

suggested this type of adult intervention could prove detrimental to children as it adulterates the

play, meaning it brings it under the control of the adult rather than the child's control and may

stop children from playing. Essentially, parents who were uncomfortable with risk-taking used

verbal cues to further exert control over their children as a means of annihilating behaviours.

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, parents uncomfortable with risk-taking in this study

who invoked verbal cuing did impact their children's play. In line with injury prevention norms,

these parents prioritized their own comfort levels, adulterating the play of their child, which is

counter to playwork discourse.

Niehues et al. (2013) identified decision-making strategies that might help parents when

in risky situations they find uncomfortable. Niehues et al. (2013) discussed fast-thinking

decisions that "rely on heuristics and lead to protective responses" (p.225). At the same time,

slow thinking is a process that involves weighing possible outcomes and considering the benefits

and risks involved. Niehues et al. (2013) suggested that slow thinking protocols are effective for

parents wanting to support risky play, which was also evidenced in this study. The findings

indicated that parents with beliefs that more closely aligned with playwork and slow thinking

were more likely to allow their children to engage in risk-taking behaviours and less likely to

step in when feeling uncomfortable.

In contrast, parents who were more likely to ascribe to fast-thinking protocols were less

likely to let their children take risks. Neihues et al. (2013) posited that through slow thinking,

parents were able to explore new information through discussion with people they trust,

expanding their knowledge and perceptions of risk and their children. Though Neihues et al.

(2013) did not directly address trust as a component for supporting risk-taking in play, trust was

identified in the findings of this study and appeared to play a critical role for parents who

actively supported risky play. Fast-thinking protocols do not allow time to develop trust and

explore discomfort, leading parents to decision making that may counter free play.

Parents who were more likely to allow for risk-taking at the VPH pointed out that trust

was essential in their decision-making process. Kerr et al. (1999) explored how trust was

established in the parent-child relationship, suggesting that knowledge of a persons' behaviour

over time and in specific situations, allows an individual to predict future actions. It is in the

understanding of how an individual will act or behave that we can begin to predict their

response. Gaining this knowledge is not a passive experience, it involves active engagement,

observation, and communication between parent and child (Kerr et al., 1999). This may help

clarify questions raised about the nature of supervision and how it should be conducted. Dao and

McMullin (2019) suggested that the "ambiguity of how to supervise children combined with the

uncertainty of injury" highlights the importance of understanding supervision (p.20). Perhaps

supervision, rather than being used as a means of injury prevention, should be used as a tool for

building trust between parent and child through shared knowledge and experience. In responding

to risk-taking, "people bring their individual perceptions and temperaments" (Niehues et al.,

2013, p.225), but if those are communicated between parent and child to create a shared

understanding, the process may help close the gap in risk subjectivity.

Unfortunately, not all parents and children are able to create a shared understanding of

risk (Niehues, 2013). However, the parents in this study who indicated they tried to create a

shared understanding by observing and listening to their child, also indicated they trusted their

children and saw them as capable human beings. This perspective challenges contemporary

understandings of childhood. Children are often positioned as "innocent, incompetent, and

vulnerably dependent" (Valentine, 2004, p.66), which reflects current injury prevention

discourses and suggests a foundation for over-protective parents' beliefs. If children are

vulnerable and incompetent, as Valentine (2004) indicated, why should over-protective parents

allow them to engage in risky play? It becomes a reinforcing feedback loop of risk-aversion.

Parents do not see their children as capable, so they never allow their children to grow and

develop through risk-taking. Parents then are never allowed to see their child as competent,

which reinforces contemporary understandings of childhood. This resonated in particular for

parents in this study who had more HCP tendencies.

The impacts of societal risk aversion can be seen in the built environments of children.

The introduction of playground safety standards has extremely limited their functionality and

play value, as nearly all elements of risk and challenge have been stripped from them in an

attempt to protect children from harm and officials from legal recourse (Gill, 2007; Herrington

and Nicholls, 2007). For parents, this means children may be less interested and willing to spend

time in the playgrounds supposedly designed for them, which potentially limits parents'

opportunities to build trust with their child. The VPH allowed parents to participate in risky play

with their children while visiting, which several of the parents identified as valuable for building

trust. Unfortunately, this type of intergenerational play is not standard practice across all

Adventure Playgrounds.

Adventure Playgrounds typically abide by playwork practices founded on the playwork

principles. The principles state that "for playworkers, the play process takes precedence, and

playworkers act as advocates for play when engaging with adult led agendas" further, "the role

of the playworker is to support children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play" (Playwork Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005, p. 1). In support of these two principles, a standard practice at Adventure Playgrounds is to restrict adult entry and to allow only children; this rule is in place to protect play from adult-agendas (Kleinman, 2021). To prevent play adulteration, a space may be provided for parents to watch their children from afar or in some cases parents' views may be blocked with a physical barrier like a fence. Given what has been discussed about the value of parent engagement in children's risk-taking to build trust, which may ultimately help provide greater access to free play, the notion of separating parent and child becomes problematic. These two philosophies, of trust building and unstructured play, are complicated when paired together, and pose a unique challenge to practitioners and advocates. Is it better to have a space where children and parents can play together, building trust, but where, at the same time, there is a higher chance of parent adulteration? Or is it better to have a space where children and parents are separated, where children are in full control over their play and able to develop independently, yet miss the opportunity to build trust with their parents? By allowing parents at the VPH to attend and participate with their children, it may, in the long term, lead to more freedom and play for the child who was able to build trust with their parent. However, in the short term, the parent may adulterate the play and control their child's activities. Both have the potential for positive and negative outcomes and require further exploration.

How did Letting Kids Play Become so Complicated for Parents?

Childhood has changed. Gray (2011) indicated that since about 1955, adults have been exerting more control over children's discretionary time. Discretionary time can be understood as time dedicated to recreation and leisure activities, including dance, music lessons, outdoor

activities, screen time, play, and other passive forms of leisure (Hofferth, 2009; Hofferth &

Sandberg, 2001). If parents have infiltrated more areas of their children's lives, as indicated by

Gray (2011), then not only has childhood changed, but so too has the nature of parenthood.

Parents have adapted and continue to do so in response to changes in the current social milieu in

many areas of childhood and parenthood, including play. The findings of this study contribute

knowledge with regard to parents' current understandings of play and their changing and often

complicated role in their children's play activities.

Sutton-Smith's (1997) book, *The Ambiguity of Play,* explored the various ways play has

been understood within specific disciplinary fields and proposed seven distinct play discourses

they called rhetorics. The rhetoric of *play as progress*, is arguably the most prominent discourse

used to show the utility of play. Sutton-Smith suggested that in this discourse, play is understood

and valued for its role in human development, yet it "serves adults rather than children" (p.42).

Accordingly, play's primary function is then to prepare children for adulthood as they gain the

skills needed for living (Sutton-Smith, 1997). If the dominant discourses suggest that the purpose

of play is to prepare children for adulthood (Sutton-Smith, 1997), that children are viewed as

vulnerable, incapable, and dependent (Valentine, 1997), and parents are responsible for their

children's success as adults (Shaw, 2010), an explanation for over-involved parenting begins to

form. In the current study, all of the parents demonstrated alignment with one or more of these

viewpoints, even the FRP utilized play as a means of fostering independence and risk

management, both of which are seen as important developmental outcomes (Eager & Little,

2011; Tremblay et al., 2015). Play then becomes a tool that parents are able to use in specific

ways to prepare their children for adult life. An example is the developmental discourse of play

as a means for learning (Elkind, 2007; Weisberg et al., 2015), that essentially utilizes play as a mode of delivering a specific outcome.

Play has been appropriated as a vehicle for education and in order to accomplish desired educational outcomes, play necessarily needed to change (Weisberg et al., 2015). Thus, guided play, a blended approach that uses adult initiation and child direction, has been suggested as a tool for educators (Weisberg, 2015). Guided play is described as structured by adults while children "control what to do next and how to respond" (Weisberg et al., 2015, p.9). In this way, educators control the setup and then let the play flourish within the limitations they set in the built environment (Weisberg et al., 2015). Participants in this research study, who aligned with this progress rhetoric, looked favorably on play that was guided by the Play Ambassadors, suggesting they valued the role of play as a means of learning. This is similar to the guided play approach discussed by Weisberg (2015), where adults nudge the children along, providing scaffolding as they develop, a process described as a balance of "freedom and structure" (p.10). Critically, however, this balance is controlled by the adults, not the children. Hughes (2012) warned of increased dependence on adults, (playworkers specifically) during play; "if the playworker does the thinking, then the children do not have to. As a consequence, the playworker may start to feel needed or valued, and so a cycle of dependency starts to evolve between playworker and children" (p. 217-218). This may shed light on the internal struggle of FRPs at the hub who were uncertain if they were providing too much or too little support for their children. Participants in this study witnessed moments when other parents and Play Ambassadors overstepped and adulterated the play, however, they also saw moments when play was unadulterated, fully controlled by the children, and fully supported by adults. In those moments, where the children were in control, parents saw just how impactful and *simple* play

could be without any agenda attached to it. Simultaneously, the safety discourse also remained

ever present in the minds of parents, further complicating children's access to free play.

Parents at the VPH felt they must manage safety concerns over local traffic and strangers,

which has complicated children's access to free play even further (Brussoni et al., 2015; Brussoni

et al., 2012; Gill, 2018; Gill, 2007). In his book, *No Fear: Growing up in a Risk Averse Society*,

author Tim Gill highlighted the fears parents have for their children's safety in their

neighbourhood. The *stranger danger* phenomenon is consistently present in the literature (Gill,

2018; Gill, 2007). It is a colloquial term used to refer to the abduction of children and includes

any other abuse, victimization, and harassment by strangers (Gill, 2007). Though child

abductions are extremely rare, they remain prevalent in the public consciousness due to the

strong emotional connection the idea evokes (Gill, 2007). Only one participant in this study

raised concerns over strangers in their neighbourhood, no participants indicated they were

concerned about strangers while attending the VPH. Among participants in the current study, all

felt supervision for their children was necessary, however only one parent, who aligned with the

HCP approach, expressed concerns about strangers. This may indicate that parents are becoming

less concerned of strangers in general, or that they feel they do not be concerned about strangers

because they are providing supervision. In addition to the stranger danger phenomenon,

increased local traffic is another primary concern for parents. Contributing to this issue, Gill

(2007) suggested parents live a car-dependent lifestyle due to longer working hours, the increase

of additional leisure activities that require transportation to and from facilities, and a decrease in

the quality of local play provision that forces parents to drive to other locations where their

children can play. In support of Gill (2007), parents at the VPH who felt their local play spaces

were inadequate for their children, indicated they would travel on bike or in a vehicle to a better

play space, further contributing to increased local traffic. There appears to be a growing appetite among parents and children for better local play spaces, and while parents may have different views on the purpose of play, all of the participants in this research viewed the VPH as a quality play environment.

What resounded with all parents at the VPH, was the value of having a flexible environment, where children could modify and change the setting, which was very different than many local playgrounds that are often designed for toddlers (Veitch et al., 2006). Parents who were familiar with the loose parts approach in free play knew to expect this at the VPH. Other parents, for whom this was new, came to appreciate it, often remarking at just how "creative" or "imaginative" their children were when reflecting how the play environment could both stimulate and support their children's creative abilities. Brown (2003) discussed how loose parts play contributes to an environment that promotes the concept of compound flexibility:

> The ideal developmental cycle for a human being (especially a child) involves the gradual growth of an interaction between a flexible environment and an increasingly flexible human being. In other words, given ideal conditions, the growing child makes use of whatever flexibility there is in the environment, and so becomes more flexible, and able to make even better use of elements in the environment- and so on. (p.53)

Playgrounds and toys are not typically designed with this type of malleability and creative potential. Currently, playgrounds are designed to comply with safety standards instead of play quality standards, limiting their flexibility (Gill, 2018; Gill, 2007). Elkind (2007) suggested children's toys have also become just as limited, noting the decreased variability design features (e.g., toys are fully plastic rather than made of assorted materials), increased automation, and increased integration with technology, which all contribute to toys placing limitations on

children's imagination. Brown's (2003) compound flexibility adds support to criticisms surrounding the limitations of many playgrounds and toys, while simultaneously highlighting something incredibly simple, "the growing child makes use of whatever flexibility there is in the environment" (p. 53).

Parents are faced with a staggering number of responsibilities regarding their children's health and success, and the additional responsibility of managing their children's play may be both daunting and stressful. Several parents in this study indicated they found it challenging to manage their children's playing consistently and stated they felt they were not "creative enough" to come up with play ideas. Parents also indicated there were times when they only wanted support in the form of supervision or care of their child. For these parents, the VPH and the Play Ambassadors provided creative ideas and child supervision, which allowed parents to stand back. In these instances, the value of attending the VPH came when the Play Ambassadors took a more direct role in play facilitation. For other parents, the value of the VPH was that their children could take the lead in their own play, which in turn allowed them to also step out of the play. For all parents, the moments when they were able to remove themselves and give up control over their children's activities, created space to step away from the complexity that free play has become, to realize its simplicity. Play does not require the new, expensive, and fancy toys, it does not need adults stepping in to manage children's activities, and it does not need to be curtailed to meet specific outcomes. When play is freely chosen by the child, conducted in the way the child finds enjoyable, and is done just for its enjoyment, play is at its most authentic and simplest form, which many would argue is where the magic really happens (Brown, 2003; Hughes, 2012).

Implications for Practitioners at the VPH

This study identified several issues facing parents who attended an Adventure Playground, including good parent norms, supporting risky play, and the value of free play. Adventure Playgrounds, Playwork, and unstructured play, while having been around for decades, are still new to many parents. This assumption forms the basis for the suggestions that follow. Additionally, I have relied more heavily on my own role as Play Team Lead at the VPH to expand how the findings might directly inform practice there.

The importance of frontline staff at Adventure Playgrounds cannot be overstated. At the VPH, these staff are called Play Ambassadors (PA), and they can play a key role in the experience of anyone who attends. Since Adventure Playgrounds are relatively novel in North-America, initial touchpoints with parents upon arrival are critical to ensure rules are followed, children can play freely, and parents feel comfortable standing back. When parents, in this study, discussed their uncomfortable moments, a number of them involved Play Ambassador oversights. For example, several parents pointed to visits where they were not greeted, given necessary information, or not told specific rules. Another parent described a situation where they felt the Play Ambassador was infringing on the children's free play. These types of situations may in part be attributed to inexperienced staff who were new to their role, but were critical in how parents perceived the VPH and the degree to which they felt welcome. The question then arises as to how the initial interaction with parents should happen and what the role of the Play Ambassador is and should be. Some parents simply want to sign a form and be left alone, while other parents want to know exact details about every risk in the environment, which places the onus on the Play Ambassador to communicate well. Part of this communication is a proper educational foundation about free play in order to introduce and discuss the cultural norms and

expectations of an Adventure Playground with any parent, no matter their level of knowledge or understanding. With unstructured play gaining momentum, several post-secondary institutions have course offerings for the professional practice of Playwork, yet training and education in this area is limited. Bloomburg University, as an example in the United States, offers a Playworker certificate, and the University of Alberta in Canada provides the Play Around the World program. Additional online courses from organizations based out of the United Kingdom are also available, such as the Playworker Development Course offered by Pop-Up Adventure Play.

Another issue in Adventure Playgrounds is the nature of play that occurs between parent and child, which in the current context has many parents significantly involved in their child's play. Given today's risk-averse climate and the unfamiliarity most parents are likely to have with Adventure Playgrounds, how is it possible to and does it even make sense to try and remove parents from these child-centred spaces? (Veitch et al., 2006). Before beginning this study, had I been asked if parents should be allowed in Adventure Playgrounds, my answer would have been no. However, after speaking to parents, the positive impact of playing with their children at the VPH was evident. How can we expect parents to see the value of play if they can't see it unfold and see the benefits to their children? While encouraged to step back and allow their child to direct their own play, whether through observation or engagement, parents learned a lot about play and their child's play through being present at the VPH. There is a tension around the presence of parents at Adventure Playgrounds and it is a difficult balance to achieve, as well as an area of need in future research.

Regardless of how parents are included or excluded in Adventure Playgrounds, establishing specific parenting norms is critical. The findings indicated a range of parenting behaviours, from free-range to helicopter. Setting expectations for parent conduct can help to

maintain the behaviours needed to establish a subculture that encourages risk taking, thereby

disrupting the safety discourse. Creating an appropriate risk-accepting subculture requires some

type of intervention with parents. In this study, parents felt more comfortable having the Play

Ambassadors set and enforce expectations. It also helped to ease some of their concerns about

being judged if they let their children take risks. In addition to using Play Ambassadors to help

inform parents about Adventure Playgrounds and risk, other educational resources, for example

parent education nights at the VPH, may be an effective way to further promote children free

play and risk taking.

In the end, Adventure Playgrounds are for playing, and part of play is about having fun

(Hughes, 2012). It is essential to meet folks where they are at with regard to their comfort levels,

address their specific needs, and treat them as individuals rather than taking a one-size-fits-all

approach. Creating a community of getting to know families who attend the VPH can lead to an

individualized approach to supporting positive and repeated visits.

Limitations

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted this study in significant ways, and due to local health

restrictions, several changes were made to the research method (See Appendix F for a summary

of COVID-19 impacts). A number of the study limitations occurred due to COVID-19 required

modifications. One study limitation was associated with the sampling of parents. Because I

wanted parents to have a range of experiences to speak about, an inclusion criterion was that

parents had visited the VPH multiple times. However, this also made it more likely that parents

who returned were also the ones more likely to have had positive VPH experiences and that they

may already value unstructured free play. It would be interesting to interview parents who did

not return to the VPH, after a first visit, to explore their experiences.

I conducted interviews retrospectively, with some parents having not attended the VPH in several months and recalling specific details was challenging for some parents. No observations took place of study participants at the VPH which could have further informed the interview questions and subsequent parent recall. However, photo-elicitation did appear to help refresh some parent's memories. The VPH, at the time of the study, was in its infancy and relatively unknown in the community and this created a small pool of potential participants. While this study responded to Brussoni et al.,'s (2012) call to explore Adventure Playgrounds as a possible intervention for risky play, the VPH may have been at too early a stage to respond well to this call. Additional research conducted at an established Adventure Playground may provide other perspectives related to long term impacts. Lastly, the recruitment process was completed online in specific Facebook groups. An alternative recruitment approach and a larger sample size could have potentially led to an increased diversity of perspectives.

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Access to unstructured risky play has been controlled by parents, influenced by sociocultural beliefs, and restricted by the built environment (Brussoni et al., 2015; Brussoni et al., 2012). In limiting access to risky play behaviours, there is a growing concern that children are missing crucial opportunities for healthy development, which may have severe long-term consequences (Brussoni et al., 2012; Eager & Little, 2011, Sandseter & Kennair, 2011).

Parents in this study indicated they had concerns related to the outcomes of their actions and those of their children when it came to play. These concerns further reinforced heightened societal norms of safety and risk-aversion, even in spaces like the VPH, where these notions are challenged. However, at the VPH, several parents in this study also experienced the benefits of risky play, which empowered them to support their children in risk-taking and hopefully advocate for it in the future. Unfortunately, not all parents subscribe to risky play or even unstructured play, instead prioritizing adult-led activities (Watchman & Spencer-Cavaliere, 2017). While it is not clear if Adventure Playgrounds are an adequate intervention for all parents, this study demonstrated that it did support those parents who practiced free-range parenting and those who were yet undetermined if risky play was appropriate for their children.

Attending the VPH did appear to help in other capacities, notably, in building trust between parent and child. Trust was an important factor in determining parents' level of comfortability with risk-taking in this study. Though it was at times overridden by other factors such as perceived awareness, ability, and age, parents who stated they trusted their children also indicated they gave them a higher degree of freedom and control over their play experiences. Ultimately, trust was developed in the moments where parents and children connected. When parents observed their children, free from the additional complexities of parenthood and

childhood, they could see their child's abilities demonstrated through free play in their creativity, imagination, and courage. In these moments, the simplicity of unstructured play shone through. Parents saw that play value was not necessarily found in the big, shiny playground or the new, expensive toys, but instead, it was found in dirt, cardboard, and old tires. Kids' preferences may be misunderstood when it comes to play desires. Barnett (2013) explored children's perceptions of their play and found that paradoxically, children preferred to spend time playing outside and indoors on video games. While appearing counterintuitive, Barnett (2013) went on to explain that children want to engage in environments, like those in video games, where they have freedom and control over their own play and loose parts that are just as flexible and malleable. In essence, this builds on Brown's (2003) idea of compound flexibility. There are important benefits that emerge from keeping play simple. In recognizing this, hopefully we can begin to change our play culture and risk averse norms that have complicated play for those who need it most, children.

Future Research

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this research project's design was modified (See Appendix F for a summary of changes), impacting both the recruitment and observation of participants at the VPH. Future research should consider interviewing first-time participants after each visit paired with observations, which may shed light on a broader spectrum of parent experiences. Further, the inclusion of children's perceptions of play, safety, and risk-taking alongside those of their parents would add to the literature as there have been limited studies on children's perspectives and the perspectives of the whole family concerning risk and play (Backett-Milburn & Harden, 2004).

At the VPH, children from another research group assessing physical literacy within specific environments would often come to visit. From my own personal observations, as these children became more physically literate, they simultaneously became more confident and creative in their play. Given the current support for children to diversify their recreational activities rather than limit themselves to a single sport (Ennis, 2019), there is an exciting line of research to be explored to understand how unstructured play correlates with long-term athlete development and physical literacy.

In his 2009 book, *Play: How it Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*, Stewart Brown shared the story of retiring aerospace engineers and the challenges the engineering company faced in replacing those employees. Brown stated that due to poor play experiences growing up, the new hires could not think creatively like the previous engineers. Currently, great emphasis is placed on development in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) in education (Lathan, 2021). An interesting future research direction would involve conducting longitudinal studies with school-aged children where the relationship between opportunities to engage in unstructured play and creativity in STEM areas of study are explored.

Finally, while there is a multitude of research that indicates the positive benefits of engaging in unstructured risky play, measurable and quantifiable data remains elusive. Additional research to measure the benefits of unstructured risky play and the direct impact on children would be beneficial for researchers and advocates alike, given these types of outcomes are often prioritized by policy makers and stakeholders. Mixed method approaches to free play studies utilizing cohorts of families, focusing on quantitative and qualitative outcomes related to mental health, physical activity, and cognitive development, may help to further promote the

agenda of expanding opportunities for children to experience and benefit from engagement in

risky play.

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

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Appendix A

Notification of Approval

Date: February 5, 2020
Study ID: Pro00096568
Principal Investigator: <u>Anthony Bourque</u>
Study Supervisor: <u>William Strean</u>
Study Title: A Qualitative Exploration of Parent Perceptions of Risk within an
                                         Adventure Playground
Approval Expiry Date: February 4, 2021

Approved Consent Form:	Approval Date	Approved Document
	2/5/2020	<u>Information Letter and Implied Consent v3(A.Bourque).docx</u>

Thank you for submitting the above study to the Research Ethics Board 1. Your application has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee.

Any proposed changes to the study must be submitted to the REB for approval prior to implementation. A renewal report must be submitted next year prior to the expiry of this approval if your study still requires ethics approval. If you do not renew on or before the renewal expiry date, you will have to re-submit an ethics application.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to access the staff, students, facilities or resources of local institutions for the purposes of the research.

Sincerely,

Anne Malena, PhD
Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

Notification of Approval - Amendment

Date: May 29, 2020
Principal Investigator: <u>Anthony Bourque</u>
Study ID: Pro00096568

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

Study Title:	A Qualitative Exploration of Parent Perceptions of Risk within an Adventure Playground	
Supervisor:	William Strean	

	Approval Date	Approved Document
Approved Consent Form:	5/29/2020	Information Letter and Implied Consent v5 clean (A.Bourque).docx
	2/5/2020	Information Letter and Implied Consent v3(A.Bourque).docx
Approval Expiry Date:	Thursday, February 4, 2021	

Thank you for submitting an amendment request to the Research Ethics Board 1. This amendment has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee. The following has been approved: in-person activities to be replaced by online interviews; addition of revised consent form.

Approval by the Research Ethics Board does not encompass authorization to recruit and/or interact with human participants at this time. Researchers still require operational approval (e.g. AHS) and must meet the requirements imposed by the public health emergency (Alberta COVID page).

Sincerely,

Anne Walley
REB Specialist,
on behalf of Anne Malena, PhD.
Chair, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

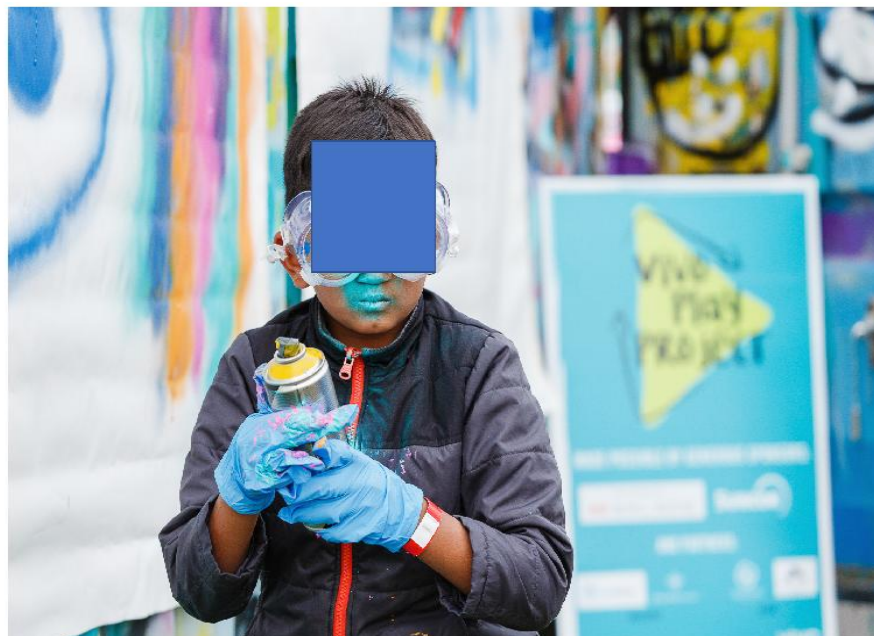PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND
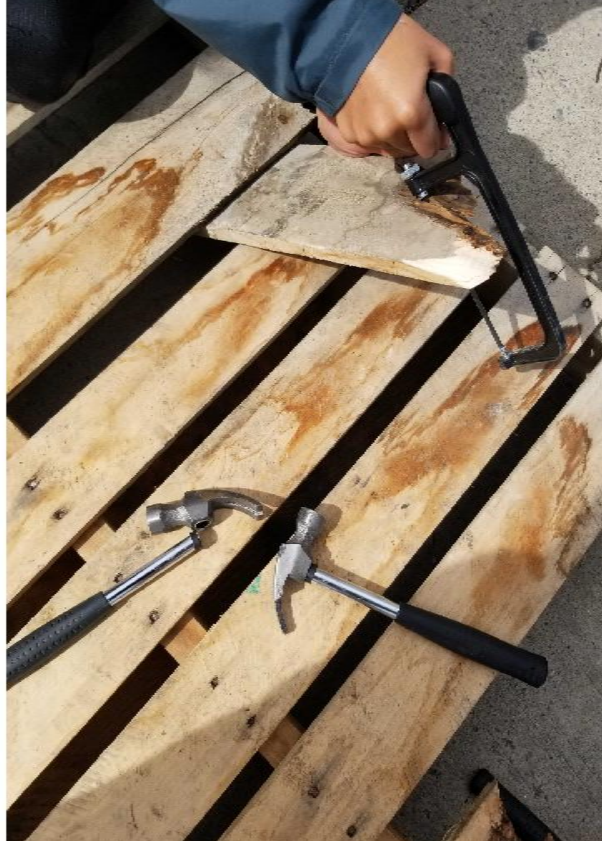
Appendix B

Vivo Play Hub Imagery

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

Appendix C

Participant Information Letter and Consent Form

<u>**Study Title:**</u>

A Qualitative Exploration of Parent Perceptions of Risk within an Adventure Playground

Research Investigator: **Anthony Bourque, MA Student**
3-149 Van Vliet Complex
Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
asbourqu@ualberta.ca
(780) 243-8432

Research Supervisor: **Dr. William Strean, Professor**
4-417 Van Vliet Complex
Faculty of Kinesiology, Sport, and Recreation
University of Alberta
Edmonton, AB
billy.strean@ualberta.ca
(780) 492-3890

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in this research study about parent perceptions of risk in an adventure playground. Your views and experiences are of great interest and we want to learn more about how parents understand risk, safety, and play at the Vivo Play Hub.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to explore parent perceptions of risk and safety regarding their children's play and the built environment that is an adventure playground. This study will be supporting the completion of a master's degree by Anthony Bourque (under the supervision of Dr. Billy Strean).

Should you agree to participate in this study, you will complete the following:

- A participant information form
- Have **previously** visited the Vivo Play Hub a minimum of two times
- Look at photos and/or short video(s) of the Vivo Play Hub
- A one-on-one interview lasting 60-90 minutes
- A **possible** follow-up interview lasting approximately 60 minutes
- Review of transcripts from your interview(s)
- Provide feedback on a summary of the combined research findings

Photos and/or videos of the Vivo Play Hub will be provided in advance of the interview for you to view. The interview questions will ask you to reflect upon you and your child(ren)s time at the Vivo Play Hub, and may refer to the photos and/or videos to provide additional context. Interview(s) will be booked at a mutually convenient time using either Zoom Room (free online) or via phone.

To protect participant privacy Zoom Rooms will be secured with a meeting ID and password unique to each participant. All Zoom Rooms and shared content within Zoom Rooms are automatically encrypted. Additional Zoom Room interviews will meet the guidelines of the Office of the Chief Information Security Officer (University of Alberta).

Each conversation will be recorded. We will type out the recordings. They will be returned to you for verification and chance to add additional information or elaborate on ideas. A summary of the final study findings will be provided to you for additional review. The total time commitment for this study is 2 – 3.5 hours (interviews 1 – 2.5 hours, review of transcripts and summary – 1 hour).

The researcher will be recording field notes following each interview to capture immediate reactions, descriptions, and possible follow up questions. These notes will support the researcher in returning to the interview setting throughout the analysis process, and supporting researcher reflexivity.

Benefits: The interview(s) will provide you with an opportunity to share your thoughts and views after spending time in the Vivo Play Hub, including risk, risky play, and safety. Your views will help to support education of future professionals, potentially influencing policy, and contributing ideas indirectly for future play provision. There may be no direct or immediate benefits for participants.

Risks: There are no physical risks to being involved in this study, however you may become tired due to the length of the talks and the topic. Though not intended, some topics and questions may lead to emotional stress. We will direct you to an appropriate community organization or counselling service if you would like to further discuss the topics raised. You can refuse to answer any question you are asked. If desired, you may ask to see the research questions in advance of the interview.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: You have the right to not be identified throughout the research process. All efforts will be made to maintain anonymity should you desire. You may choose a pseudonym. While reviewing the interview transcripts, you may request the removal of any information that you feel impacts your anonymity. All audio recordings, transcripts, coding sheets, and related documents will be stored electronically on an encrypted device. This device will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. Raw data will only be seen by the researcher and her supervisor. The research ethics committee always has the right to review study data if required.

We may present the research findings at a conference, and publish the study in a research journal. We will use direct quotations in the presentations and publications. We will take every step possible to protect your identity and privacy. No names or identifiers will appear in public or stored information. Five years following the end of the study, the information will be shredded and double deleted from the computer.

Voluntary Participation
Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to answer any question and may ask for the audio recorder to be turned off at any time. Even if you agree to be in the study, you may change your mind. Should you choose to participate or decline participation, you and your family will still be able to access the Vivo Play Hub now and in the future.

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

Freedom to Withdraw
You can withdraw at any time during data collection and up to one week following the summary of the study findings. There will be no penalty of any sort. If you withdraw prior to the one-week time limit, we will destroy all information provided. If you wish to withdraw, contact any member of the research team by telephone, email or in person.

If you have concerns about this study, you may contact the Research Ethics Office, at 492-2615. This office has no direct involvement with this project.

The plan for this study has been reviewed by a Research Ethics Board at the University of Alberta. If you have questions about your rights or how research should be conducted, you can call (780) 492-2615. This office is independent of the researchers.

Consent Statement
I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form. I will receive a copy of this consent form after I sign it.

_____   _____

Participant's Name (printed) and Signature   Date

_____   _____

Name (printed) and Signature of Person Obtaining Consent   Date

Appendix D

Participant Demographic Form

A Qualitative Exploration of Parent Perceptions of Risk within an Adventure Playground

Please take a moment to fill in the participant demographic form. All information collected will support the research outlined in the information letter and will only be seen by the researcher and his supervisor. If you are not comfortable answering any of the questions, leave them blank.

Participant Profile

Age: _____   **Ethnicity:** _____

Highest level of completed education: **Degree(s) awarded (major/specialty):**
☐Bachelors ☐ PhD
☐Masters   ☐High School   _____
☐Other

# of Children: _____   **Age of Children:** _____

Gender of Children: _____

Appendix E

Interview Schedule

A Qualitative Exploration of Parent Perceptions of Risk within an Adventure Playground

Research question: How do parents perceive risk and safety within the context of an adventure playground?

<u>**Cluster One -Rapport and setting the stage**</u>
1) **Tell me about your children's favorite way to play?**
   Probes: Where do they play? Is there supervision? How long do they play?

2) **What do you do while they play?**
   Probes: Why?

<u>**Cluster Two - Environment**</u>

3) **Tell me about your first visit to the Play Hub?**
   Probes: What were your impressions? How did it make you feel?
   Probes: Did this change in subsequent visits?

4) **What did <u>you</u> do while your child(ren) played at the Play Hub?**
   Probes: Why? Did you engage with anyone else?

5) **What would you say is the difference between the Play Hub and traditional playground?**
   Probes: Is there anything in the play hub environment or play hub materials that was concerning? *Was there any imagery that caused you concern?*

<u>**Cluster Three – Play Behaviours and Risky Play**</u>
6) **Was there an "incident" during your visit to the play hub that made you feel uncomfortable? Can you describe it?**
   Probes: Who was involved? What were they doing? Why do you think the situation occurred? What happened after the "incident"?

7) **Risky Play is defined as "*thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury, they are adventurous, challenging, and primarily happen in the outdoors,* how you would describe risky play or "risk-taking" in play?**

8) **The imagery I sent had images of children participating in "risky play," was there any imagery or things you saw in the play hub that you would qualify as risky?**

9) **Adventure playgrounds allow for children to use real tools like saws, engage with real elements like water and fire, and to climb things like shipping containers, did you see any of this happen during your time in the hub?**
Probes: *What happened? Do you feel like there was risk involved?*

10) **Adventure Playgrounds also allow for children to play with high speed, to be hidden from others, to wrestle or play fight. Did you see any play like this during your time in the hub?**
Probes: *What happened? Do you feel like there was risk involved?*

Cluster Four – Risk and Safety

11) **Do you feel like the Play Hub was safe or unsafe?**
Probes: How did the Play staff effect this?

12) **How was *safety* represented in the Play Hub?**
Probes: Can risk and safety both be present?

13) **In your opinion is there anything that you would deem "risky" in the play hub?**
Probes: Did you see any children playing with it? Why do you think they wanted to play with it?

14) **Does having Play staff present effect your visit to the Play Hub?**
Probes: What if they were not present? What if this was a child only space?

Cluster Five - Parenting

15) **Do you think parents should bring their kids to the Play Hub?**
Probes: Why?

16) **What do you consider to be the biggest issue parents face when attending a space like the Play Hub?**
Probes: Why?

17) **What would make an Adventure Playground like this more accessible for families?**
Probes: How would you go about doing this?

18) **Can you tell me if you had any "a-ha" moments or moments that made you realize something while you were in the Play Hub?**
Probes: How does this effect you? What about future decisions you will make?

Cluster Six– Wrap Up

19) **What kind of effect do you think exposure to this kind of play and environment will have on children?**
Probes: Is it important?

20) **What kind of effect do you think exposure to this kind of play and environment will have on parents?**
Probes: Is it important?

21) **Is there anything that I have not asked you about that you think is important to share?**

PARENT PERCEPTIONS OF AN ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

Appendix F

COVID-19 Study Design Changes

Section	Pre-COVID-19	During COVID-19
Recruitment	Of parents and children, In person at the VPH	Parents only, online via Facebook Community Groups
Data Collection	Observations will be conducted at the VPH of parents and their children	No observations
Data Collection	In-person, phone, or online	Online or phone interviews
Interview	Semi-structured	Semi-structured with photo elicitation
Interview	Based on observed experiences of parents and children at the VPH	Based on recalled experiences of parents at the VPH

Appendix F. Changes to the design of the study due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.