

A Study of Play Across the Lifespan

by

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ABSTRACT:

I explored how play and playfulness changed across the lifespans of an international sample of adults aged 18 to 70. My research study was informed by phenomenological methodology and used interviews as a means of data collection. Participants were recruited from a number of platforms, including a university graduate faculty, a play-based listserv, a play conference, and an international discussion forum. Eighteen participants were recruited from Canada, the United States, Germany, and Argentina. Semi-structured interviews were held in person, over Skype, or were written and emailed to me. Data was concurrently collected and analyzed thematically. The main themes yielded were, ‘play as exploration’, ‘wellbeing’, ‘play as serious’, ‘it is not what you do, it is how you do it’, and ‘stigma’. In general, play behaviours refined as participants aged, and followed a pattern of beginning as predominantly physical play, focusing more on social play during adolescence, and then further honing into social and emotional play during adulthood. Adults recollected more instances of *playfulness* as they aged rather than play. Play was shown to promote and facilitate wellness holistically across the lifespan.

This research contributes to the foundation of play research by examining the transitions of child to adolescence, and adolescence to adulthood, as opposed to maintaining age-group silos. While the research question is unusually large for a thesis, it provides the seeds of hypotheses for future studies on play. Results from the data were mapped on to the Wheel of Wellness to show how play influences holistic wellbeing.

PREFACE

This thesis is an original work by Sarah Cosco. The research project received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “From Childhood Memories to Adulthood Activities: A Study of Play”, No. MS3_Pro00038579, May 25th, 2013.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Decreasing levels of free play have been observed and recorded across the lifespan from young children (Singer, Singer, D’Agnostino, & DeLong, 2009; Gleave, 2009; Gray, 2011a) to seniors (Aronson & Oman, 2004; McCarville & Smale, 1993). This reduction in play is alarming given that play provides a holistic range of health benefits across the lifespan as well as contributes to happiness and well-being (Gray, 2009). While a set definition of play does not exist, the literature agrees that play is voluntary, self-directed, intrinsically motivated, fun to engage in, and is a means to its own end, done for its own sake (Gray, 2009; Alexander, Frohlich, & Fusco, 2014; Berinstein, & Magalhaes, 2009; Goldmintz & Schaefer, 2007; Eberle, 2014). When play meets these criterion, it is often called free play, or unstructured free play. Structured play, by contrast, is used to describe play that is organized by adults, for example, sports leagues, or children's summer camp activities. Controversially, some argue that organized sport should not be considered true play, because it is not self-directed, but rather externally-directed (Kimiecik, 2016; Gray, 2009; Henricks, 2008; Perry & Branum, 2009). Play is a spontaneous event instead of a scheduled or planned activity (Alexander, et al., 2014; Berinstein, & Magalhaes, 2009; Gray, 2009; Goldmintz & Schaefer, 2007; Eberle, 2014). It is not bound by ‘free time’ (Shen, 2010, Shen, Chick, & Zinn, 2014): play is fluid and can occur in any context or environment as it is the manifestation of a mental state. The mental state, *playfulness*, is explored more thoroughly within the literature review (Chapter 2), along with a more thorough exploration of what play is and how it is defined. For the purposes of this thesis, references to ‘play’ include both structured and unstructured forms, whereas dialogue specific to a particular form of play will be labelled unstructured or structured play.

Unstructured, free play helps children develop a holistic range of motor (Graham & Burghardt, 2010; Mayfield, Chen, Harwood, Rennie & Tannock, 2009), social (Graham & Burghardt, 2010; Mayfield et al., 2009), emotional regulation (Gleave, 2009), and coping skills (Sutton-Smith, 2008; Fiorelli & Russ, 2012), as well as resiliency (Henricks, 2009), and increased physical fitness (Gleave & Cole-Hamilton, 2012; Mayfield et al., 2009). Free play also helps children understand who they are (Singer et al., 2009) and how they fit into larger communities and societies (Gleave, 2009; Gray, 2009; Henricks, 2009), as well as improve academic performance (Gleave & Cole-Hamilton, 2012; Sarama & Clements, 2009), build problem solving skills (Mayfield et al., 2009; Singer et al., 2009) and enhance creativity (Bergen,

2009; Laslocky & Winefield, 2011). During adulthood, play helps maintain physical fitness and increases quality of life (Lloyd & Auld, 2002; Magnuson & Barnett, 2013), provides sandbox environments to test ideas and beliefs (Goldmintz & Schaefer, 2007), maintains cognitive prowess (Power, 2011; Proyer, 2012; Goldmintz & Schaefer, 2007) and promotes social cohesion (Lloyd & Auld, 2002; Gray, 2009; Chick, Yarnal, & Purrington, 2012; Baxter, 1992).

Play is a pathway to releasing human potential in that it is creative in nature and the joy felt while engaging in play becomes self-motivating (Twietmeyer, 2007). Play allows us to consider the possibilities, the ‘what ifs’ of life, and pursue them with our imagination in a sandbox-like play frame, allowing us to test our ideas and push our boundaries (Kohn, 2011). Seniors’ health could particularly benefit from play activities. As we age, health issues such as onset of chronic disease, loneliness, mental illnesses, specifically depression, and decreased senses and range of joint mobility all become concerns (Day, 2008). Play can help strengthen social bonds and decrease depression, and provide pleasurable opportunities for physical activity and involvement in the community. In order to encourage and maintain play – and its associated holistic health benefits – across the lifespan, it is then, therefore, necessary to better understand play across all age groups, not just during childhood.

There are currently two contemporary issues of concern in the realm of free play: free play is disappearing from the lives of children and adults, and research on play is still heavily weighted to exploring childhood, leaving the rest of the aging spectrum relatively unexamined. As free play has decreased in society, increases in mental illness (Gray, 2009) and sedentary lifestyles (Vitale, 2011) have been observed. The social and problem solving skills of children, as well as their creative capacities, have also seen decreases as opportunities to play have steadily diminished (Gleave, 2009). Sedentary lifestyles, increased stress levels, and social fragmentation are contemporary health issues that plague adults too overburdened to overcome them (Alexander, 2008; Magnuson & Barnett, 2013). Researchers across a range of fields including psychology (Brown & Vaughan, 2010; Gray 2009), education (Mayfield & Chen, 2009), health (McKenzie, Crespo, Baquero, & Elder, 2010; Vitale, 2011), and early childhood development (Frost, 1997; Frost, Brown, Sutterby, & Thornton, 2004) have collectively argued that diminishing free play has contributed to this range of health and social issues. While this body of research has identified the importance and usefulness of free play to holistic health and well-being, an in-depth exploration of play across the lifespan is still lacking. The oversight of

adult play, in particular, is a curious thing. We know that diminished play in seniors affects their ability to function and be independent, to maintain their social bonds and cognitive capacities (Gray, 2009; Yarnal & Qian, 2011; McCarville & Smale, 1993; Aune, & Wong, 2012; Magnusen & Barnett, 2013; Proyer, 2012). Young and middle-aged adults have these same problems, and play is just as important for them as it is for children and seniors (Gray, 2009; Goldmintz & Schaefer, 2007). There is also an interesting and significant knowledge gap in regards to adolescent play. Studies on adolescent play are few and far between (Staempfli, 2007; Caldwell & Witt, 2014; Pellegrini, 1994), however, limited research has shown that playful adolescents are more psychologically and physically healthy, with higher levels of self-confidence than their non-playful peers (Staempfli, 2007; Caldwell & Witt, 2014; Hess & Bundy, 2003), and that adolescents explore their social standing and hierarchies with their peers through play (Pellegrini, 1994).

The current research explores adult's retrospective and current perceptions of play from their childhood to adulthood, beginning with adult recollections of childhood play and moving through time to note how play changes as they aged. Particular attention will be given to the value of play, and what lessons of life and cherished moments adults take away from their play experiences, as well as how adults perceive their current engagement in play. The ultimate goal of the research is to present a story of play (in the context of holistic health and wellbeing across the lifespan), its essence, what it looks like, where it occurs, what we get from play and how play colours our lives from childhood to elder hood. Given that extant research has shown a multitude of ways play facilitates health, knowing how play changes as we age may highlight opportunities to increase and encourage play across the lifespan. Across the lifespan there may be periods in the aging process where play is vulnerable. Knowing where those faltering moments are will provide direction to key target areas to continue engaging in maintain play from childhood to elderhood.

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION AND GOALS:

Play is often studied within isolated age groups (e.g., early childhood, young adults), with children's play given the bulk of attention (Magnuson & Barnett, 2013; Alexander, Frohlich, & Fusco, 2012). Childhood, adolescence, and adulthood do not have firm boundaries, where one falls asleep a child and wakes up the next morning an adolescent. Aging is a process, and people

mature at different paces (Woolfolk, Winne, Perry, & Shapka, 2008). Given that aging is not a series of silos, this research arose from wondering how play transitions through these life stages, in particular the grey areas of between childhood and adolescence, and adolescence and adulthood.

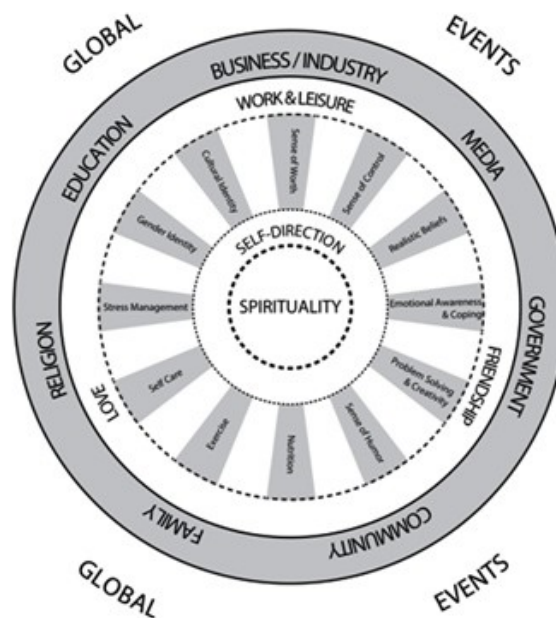
Beyond the basic descriptions of what play involves across the lifespan, this research questions the experience of play, what it feels like, what motivates it or hinders it, why we think we play, and whether or not this experience undergoes its own series of transitions as we age. In studying play across the lifespan, this research will begin to explore gaps left in current play research regarding the lived experience of adult play, and transitions between age groups. In sum, this research aims to explore the recollected experience of playing across the lifespan, constructed from memories of childhood and adolescence and reflections on adulthood, and examines these experiences within the context of holistic health and wellbeing. Thus, the specific research questions asked in this study are:

- How do adults recollect their play histories across different points in their lives?
- What do adults perceive to be the benefits of playing?
- How do experiences of play facilitate holistic health and wellbeing across the lifespan?
- Are there vulnerable points in play transitions across the lifespan?

2.0 BACKGROUND

This chapter begins by explaining some of the foundational concepts and models used to frame the study. Definitions of key concepts and a review of the literature will be presented.

Public health is defined as the deliberately structured measures taken to sustain and facilitate the health of populations via prevention (and intervention) of disease, promotion of health, and provision of conditions through which people can attain and maintain optimal health (World Health Organization [WHO], 1998). The World Health Organization's definition of health is widely accepted and used by public health globally and is constructed as "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (WHO, 1998, p. 1). The concept of wellbeing is subjective, but Witmer, Sweeney, and Myers' (1996) holistic model, the Wheel of Wellness encompasses theory and literature from a range of disciplines to create a wellness wheel focused on three life tasks (*work, love, and friendship*), two foundational tasks (*spirit and self-direction*), and 12 sub-tasks of self-direction (refer to the 'spokes' of the wheel depicted in Figure 1, and written below).



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Figure 1: The Wheel of Wellness. Reprinted from "The Factor Structure of Wellness: Reexamining Theoretical and Empirical Models Underlying the Wellness Evaluation of Lifestyle (WEL) and the Five-Factor Wel", (2004) by J.E. Myers, R.M. Luecht, and T.J. Sweeney.

The life tasks outlined by Witmer et al., (1996), can be successfully met and maintained by the sub-tasks of *self-direction* that interact with one another and with life forces (for example *global events, government, education, or media*) to determine the wellness of an individual (Witmer et al., 1996; Myers, Luecht, & Sweeney, 2004). The model shows that the life tasks are met with personal resources of *cultural identity, stress management, sense of worth, sense of control, problem solving, creativity, emotional awareness and coping*, as well as *physical fitness*, and *nutrition*. The centre of the model contains *spirituality*, which encompasses a sense of oneness, positive affect, purpose, and values (Witmer, & Sweeney, 1992). The Wheel of Wellness's attention to the faceted dimensions of health and wellbeing make it a model of holistic health, aligning it to WHO's definition of health. The sub-tasks of the wheel are important because they provide the domains that can be matched to play behaviours, illustrating linkages between play and health. An example of such a link would be the sub-task of *problem solving and creativity*. This sub-task facilitates holistic wellness, and divergent thinking, which is essential to problem solving, and is nurtured through play. These linkages can also be used as justification for why organized bodies seeking to optimize wellness should likewise be interested in optimizing free play.

This section will: highlight research that illustrates how play contributes to the life tasks of wellbeing across the lifespan; describe theories used to explain the role of play; and provide a review of interdisciplinary literature focused on play. Prior to reviewing the literature, it is first important to distinguish between leisure, recreation, and play: three different concepts that are often mistakenly used interchangeably (Caldwell & Witt, 2011).

2.1 GROUNDING DEFINITIONS

Leisure can be defined as a form of time (free time) or type of activity, and is typically oriented around characterizing adult time and/or behaviour. Leisure activities are characterized as engaged in for relaxation, competition, or personal growth (Hurd, Anderson, Beggs & Garrahy, 2011; Dupuis & Smale, 2000; Watkins & Bond, 2007). Engaging in leisure activities involves a sense of freedom (as in personal autonomy and lack of barriers to participation), intrinsic motivation, positive affect, and perceived competence (Hurd et al., 2011). Dimensions of leisure as experienced and lived include passing time, exercising choice, lack of feeling evaluated, and achieving fulfillment (Watkins & Bond, 2007; Shaw, 1985). These experienced

moments of leisure tend to be phrased as reactions to situations, for example, a stressful day at work, or resisting obligations by making decisions on how to spend one's time, and thus taking control over one's life (Watkins & Bond, 2007). Interestingly, while definitions of leisure often tout its active engagement, lived experiences in research dating back to the 1950s have depicted passive leisure pursuits (Watkins & Bond, 2007; Shaw, 1985; Freysinger, 1995; Dupuis & Smale, 2000). Conceptualizations of leisure from phenomenological and phenomenographical studies included passive pursuits and were described as 'doing nothing', 'take[ing] it easy', or 'being lazy', often in response to the perception of having spare time (Watkins & Bond, 2007; Dupuis & Smale, 2000). This is a marked difference from play, which is always actively engaged (Gray, 2009; Bergen, 2009; Henricks, 2008) – either physically, emotionally, or intellectually.

The primary difference between leisure and play from Hurd et al.'s definition is that leisure is concerned with a particular outcome (relaxation, growth, etc.) whereas play is a means to its own end. Importantly, leisure is often conceptualized as bound by time, i.e., leisure time, which is seen as separate from work-time (Tribe, 2015). Play, by contrast, can occur in any context regardless of environment, and can layer over other activities, including work (Shen, 2010; Shen, et al., 2014). Some play scholars have concluded that leisure is neither a sufficient nor necessary component of play, given the fluidity of play across boundaries and environments linked to work, free time, and non-work responsibilities (Shen, 2010, Shen, et al., 2014). Playfulness has also been found to have little to no correlation with what activities are pursued during leisure (Barnett, 2011). Barnett developed an instrument to measure playfulness in young adults, based on 15 descriptors of a playful person that were consolidated and validated in a previous study (Barnett, 2007; Barnett, 2011). In a follow up study, Barnett (2011) used both the instrument and a single self-reported indicator to measure the playfulness of a sample of young adults (Barnett, 2011). Barnett then took the mean of the participants and divided them into playful and non-playful groups, excluding participants who scored within 10% of the mean. Both non-playful and playful individuals were found to report the same level of interest in participating in activities such as sports, health and fitness, fine and performing arts and both outdoor and indoor activities (Barnett, 2011). What this finding demonstrates is that merely observing someone engaged in any particular activity will not indicate whether that person is playful.

Recreation as defined by Hurd et al. (2011; Tribe 2015) is an activity engaged in during free time that is enjoyable, morally acceptable to society as a whole, outcome-oriented, and meets societal needs. The differences between recreation and leisure include recreation being viewed as contributing to societal function, whereas leisure is typically aimed as contributing to individual function. While leisure pursuits may remain fairly stable, ‘acceptable’ recreational activities changes over time. This change is due to the evolving perception of what behaviours are considered ‘morally acceptable’, for example, dog fighting used to be a common recreational activity to engage in, now it is frowned upon and not seen as societally beneficial (Cross, 2008). The key differences between recreation and play are: that recreation is bound by time, in that it is only undertaken in free time (Tribe, 2015; Webster, n.d.; Hurd et al., 2011; Interprovincial Sport and Recreation Council [ISRC], 1987); that recreation is purposeful in nature; and that it is bound by societal-level rules of appropriate behaviour deemed beneficial to the public (ISRC, 1987). Other definitions of recreation are far narrower, describing recreation merely as activities engaged in during leisure, suggesting that recreation exists within the state of leisure time and nowhere else (Tribe, 2015). The following figure illustrates the areas of overlap between play, leisure and recreation:

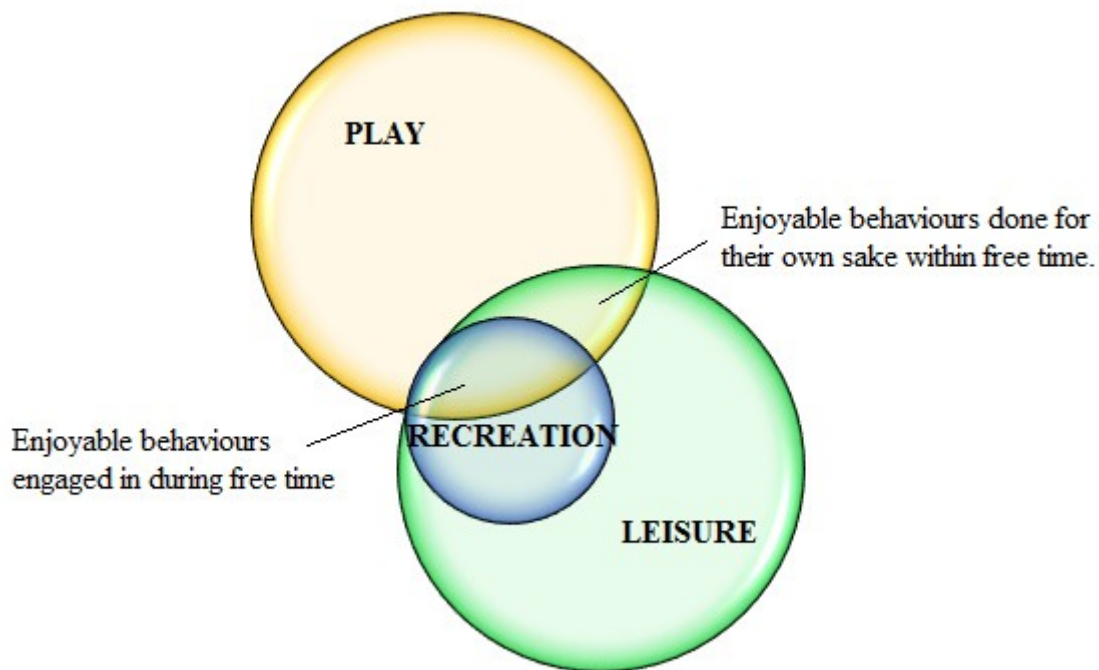


Figure 2: Overlapping criteria found in definitions of play, leisure and recreation.

Recreation for children is often labelled 'play' as a form of framing, designating specific play behaviours as socially-acceptable behaviours engaged in for societally-beneficial outcomes (Alexander et al., 2012; Frohlich, Alexander, & Fusco, 2013; Alexander et al., 2014), Canadian public health efforts use 'Active Play' as a brand name for physical activity efforts aimed at children, where they define active play as including a mandatory physically active component (specifically as providing greater energy expenditure than energy intake) for the purposes of weight reduction and maintenance of physical health (Alexander et al., 2014; Active Healthy Kids Canada [AHKC], 2012).

Encouraging 'Active Play' is most often justified as a health initiative primarily aimed at preventing obesity, and to a lesser extent for child development (Anderson, Economos, & Must, 2008; Kimbro, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan, 2011; Hemming, 2007; Brockman, Jago, & Fox, 2010; Veitch, Salmon, & Ball, 2007). These health aims are public health goals (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005; Frohlich et al., 2013; Alexander et al., 2014), and as such, render activities promoting those goals to be purposeful activities. Further, Active Play initiatives are produced top-down, from institutions and adults down to children, and are not considered to be child-directed (Frohlich et al., 2013), which compromises Active Play's potential to actually *be* free play (Gray, 2009). This does not mean that Active Play initiatives cannot be enjoyable, indeed, recreation is considered to be a pleasant means of filling leisure time. It simply means that Active Play initiatives should not be generalized as play, which carries the assumption that they are a means to their own ends, voluntary, self-directed, and invoke a feeling of joy.

The conceptualization of play is much like a labyrinth viewed through a kaleidoscope. There is no single definition. Different disciplines depict play in various lights, influenced by the theories prominent in each field. Henricks (2008) quotes the oft-mentioned Huizinga, a famous classical scholar of play, and cautions disciplinary scholars to "celebrate the diversity" (p. 157) of play rather than try to narrow it and risk losing the holistic nature of what play is. Despite the vast array of definitions outlining play, there are moments of agreement and the beginnings of structured, descriptive criteria.

One of the difficulties in defining play is that "play proves often a subtle, elusive phenomenon that seems to appear without notice and then disappear just as quickly" (Henricks, 2008, p. 160). Indeed, we often recognize overt forms of play when we see them, however defining and classifying play is far more complex. This complexity is in part because "play's

distinguishing characteristics lie not in the overt form of the activity but in the motivation and mental attitude that the person brings to it” (Gray, 2009, p. 480). Without the ability to read minds, an individual could be playing without anyone around them even knowing. How then can play accurately be defined? One clue is already provided: by observing that mental attitudes and motivations are central to play, it has been established then that internal motivation is one characteristic that defines play (Bergen, 2009; Gray, 2009; Perry & Branum, 2009; Burghardt, 2010; Batt, 2010). Perhaps more obvious is a second characteristic, which is that play invokes joy or fun (Eberle, 2011; Bergen, 2009; Gray, 2009; Henricks, 2008; LaFreniere, 2011) and prompts positive attitudes in those who take part in it (Burghardt, 2010; Yarnal & Qian, 2011).

Continuing with the theme of play and the mind, play has been deemed an imaginative pursuit (Power, 2011; Batt, 2010; Nwokah & Graves, 2009) complete with mental rules that designate the parameters of the play experience - what is, what is not, and what is possible within this instance of play (Winther-Lindqvist, 2009; Perry & Branum, 2009; Eberle, 2011; Henricks, 2011). These rules lead to another characteristic—play as a phenomenon involving a shared understanding of a new reality constructed by the players (Bekoff & Pierce, 2008; Gray, 2009; Sarama & Clements, 2009; Eberle, 2011). The concept of a shared understanding revolves around the notion of play frames. When humans (and other mammals) play, they use special signals to create a contextual frame around their behaviours (Henricks, 2008; Bekoff & Pierce, 2009). All actions within this frame become play. The play frame, or play context, is maintained by repetition of play signals, such as bowing in dogs (Bekoff & Pierce, 2009), when children make statements such as, ‘This is pretend!’ (Nwokah & Graves, 2009), or the sly wink of a flirtatious adult; all of these actions serve to keep the shared play experience continuous. Put more poetically, “[t]o play is to create and then inhabit a distinctive world of one's own making” (Henricks, 2009, p. 159). The rules of these created worlds of play are crafted by the players and are fluid, changing with the changing of the play context (Winther-Lindqvist, 2009). The arbitrariness of rules is partly because of yet another defining characteristic: that play is equitable and fair (Bekoff & Pierce, 2009; Gray, 2009; Sutton-Smith, 2008). Rules are adapted to accommodate players of different skill ranges to better allow the full participation of all people involved (Perry & Branum, 2009; Bekoff & Pierce, 2009; Winther-Lindqvist, 2009). When in play, players are motivated to keep the moment of play going, and to do so, the players themselves must be kept in the game for as long as possible, which is achieved through creating

a level playing field so that every player has, more or less, an equal chance of winning or remaining in the game. Balancing play to create fairness is not limited to humans, it is a trait of play that is also seen in animals, underscoring how foundational shared understandings and rules are across play (Bekoff & Pierce, 2009).

The most important aspects of play are that play is voluntary and that the player is in control (Gray, 2009; Bergen, 2009; Perry & Branum, 2009; Burghardt, 2010). An individual who is forced to play is not really playing, they have not chosen to play nor do they have control over the activity assigned to them, so they are merely going through the motions as instructed of them. A common example of this is physical education class, where children are obligated to participate in sports and games as part of school. These two aspects are present in virtually every set of criteria for defining play (see Table 1). Control over play is seen as internal and is linked to internal motivation (Gray, 2011a; Kimiecik, 2016). When playing in groups, people share this sense of control, playing roles and democratically announcing rules (Henricks, 2009). Above all, the player must be able to choose when they play, what they play and importantly—when they will *stop* playing. If these requirements are not met, then the play is not truly voluntary (Gray, 2009). If players were forced to continue playing, then creating an equal playing field would be unnecessary for the perpetuation of the game, the necessity of shared understanding to forge the equal playing field would similarly be lost, and the play experience would unravel.

Table 1: Definitions and Criteria of Play

Author (Date)	Voluntary	Self-Directed	Actively Engaged	Imaginative	Rules	Shared Understanding	Spontaneous	Fun
Gray (2009)	x	x	x	x	x			
Bergen (2009)	x	x	x	x				x
Bekoff & Pierce (2009)	x	x			x			
Henricks (2008)	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Perry & Branum (2009)	x	x		x				x
Burghardt (2010)	x	x	x				x	x
Henricks (2010)	x			x	x	x	x	
Bergen &	x	x	x			x	x	

Davis (2011)								
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On the note of being actively engaged, some scholars have drawn on Csikszentimihalyi's concept of *flow*, arguing that play often triggers a flow state of pure concentration (Henricks, 2008; Bergen, 2009; Gray, 2009). Flow, otherwise termed the 'optimal experience' (Csikszentimihalyi, 2008), describes a state whereupon challenge and skill intersect to create a moment so engaging that one becomes utterly immersed in their chosen task. This immersion leads to personal growth and development as to remain in the optimal experience, one must continue to challenge themselves and push their skill level higher and higher to meet the demands of the challenges they face. In order to maintain the balance of skill level and challenge, one must concentrate fully on the experience, to the point that one's sense of time disappears and no other thoughts exist. The optimal experience is an enjoyable one, often ending with feelings of great satisfaction and awe of oneself.

Flow and play seem to be closely related, and often co-occur (Bergen, 2009). Both play and flow are intrinsically motivated and allow for exploration, challenge, engrossment, discovery, pleasure, and personal growth (Csikszentimihalyi, 2008). Play and flow can also occur across multiple dimensions and times, both are fluid and are likely to pop up nearly anywhere. Further, both play and flow involve an individual restructuring their experience to gain control over their situations and represent them in novel and engaging manners. Csikszentimihalyi (2008) conducted a study to see how often a group of 4,800 participants experienced flow, and where and what they were doing while immersed in their flow states. His methods involved pinging participants eight random times a day, and having them report whether they were in flow or not. In his findings, participants were more likely to experience flow while at work (54% of pings at work) rather than during leisure (18% of pings during leisure). These findings were explained by the nature of work—using skills to complete tasks (challenges), and the reality of leisure (often low-stimulus activities such as socialization, watching television, eating out, etc), in this comparison work activities were more likely to facilitate access to flow (Csikszentimihalyi, 2008).

Play and flow coexist, they are both fluid and dynamic, and can be experienced across social structures such as work-time (work-time including time spent on chores or other unpaid tasks) and leisure-time. While not every scholar defining play incorporates flow into their

conceptualization of being actively engaged (Burghardt, 2010; Perry & Branum, 2009), it is a trait that is commonly brought up across the literature.

Defining and conceptualizing play can be difficult, not only because some forms of play are not as readily apparent as others, but also because play is both a noun and a verb. Depending on a person's play style, this may not be an issue—for them, playing a sport may actually be play. For others, playing sports is a task, non-play work, or an unfortunate aspect of mandatory gym class. This emphasizes the importance of checking in and asking individuals whether or not they feel they are playing, as it is necessary to disentangle what is play and what is recreation, or leisure, in order to better differentiate the three concepts. Play as a verb can also make searching the literature for studies on play somewhat difficult and tedious. For example, studies that involve participants playing sports may, or may not, be providing examples of play. Unless the research includes follow up with participants to ensure they are operating within a state of play, there is no way to tell whether the research is play-based or recreation-based. Merely knowing that a participant is engaged in a game of basketball, for example will not tell you whether they are playing or simply engaging in a sport. The experience of 'play' during the game must be identified as such and revealed by the players themselves as opposed to being taken for granted.

Some researchers have attempted to circumvent the ambiguity of the word play by instead using the term *ludic* to describe play activities. This term is not overly popular in play literature, and tends to only be used to refer to the most spontaneous forms of play and playfulness, making it a limited option for dispelling confusion.

In summary, free play is loosely defined as an action that is internally motivated, pleasurable to engage in, voluntary, imaginative, having rules, being equitable, and self-directed. How many of these characteristics need to be present in order for an activity to be labeled play has yet to be settled on, though the literature agrees that fulfillment of a single criterion is insufficient (Burghardt, 2011). Within these criteria for play, linkages to wellness are already apparent. Within free play, individuals are building their sense of control (recall the Wheel of Wellness sub-task of the same name), and the positive affect that is promoted through play can be assigned to the *spirituality* centre of Myers et al.'s Wheel of Wellness, which they describe as “the centre of wholeness is spirituality (e.g., oneness, purposiveness, optimism and values” (Witmer, & Sweeney, 1992, p. 140; Myers, et al., 2004).

Play facilitates the exploration of societal roles across the lifespan, and thus the wellness tasks of *cultural* and *gender identity* (Winther-Lindqvist, 2009). Much of play with young children involves negotiating rules, assigning identifies and testing out different roles, allowing children to figure out who they are in relation to their peers and mimicking societal functions within their play time (Winther-Lindqvist, 2009). Exploration of social roles falls into two categories: orderly and disorderly (Henricks, 2009). Orderly play involves activities that, as the name suggests, create order, for example, turn-taking games, or dramatic games where children adopt social roles such as pretending to manage a household or go to work. This form of play explores the construction of society, enables people to find their place within society's hierarchical structure, and reflects cultural values and realities (Henricks, 2009). Within orderly play, people learn and practice how to operate in society, how to cooperate, and how to function in a larger system. In contrast, disorderly play enables people to explore and to assume roles that do not reflect societal structure, cultural, or class norms. For example, children who live in very structured environments, with little control over day to day routines, might play pretend to be kings or overlords, experiencing total freedom and power, or create worlds of their own, designed as they please. An adult parallel to this example can be seen in the carnivalesque draw of amusement parks during the rise of industrialization, rejecting the peaceful pastimes deemed culturally appropriate by the upper class (Cross, 2008). An adult working in a structured, factory environment can seek release, thrill, excitement, and freedom through the fast-paced rides of an amusement park; they are granted power through choice of where to go and what to do. This has continued into modern times, with stilted corporate environments and the lure of casinos, clubs, and bars. In this light, disorderly play becomes a means of allowing the player (whether child or adult) to question authority and norms, and to reclaim self-control. As Sutton-Smith (2008) declares, regarding the disorderly nature of play, "It seems as if [people] are waging a war of sheer originality against conventional commonsense [*sic*] and righteousness" (p. 94).

2.2 THEORIES OF PLAY:

The role of play, its purpose or reason for existence, can be explored through multiple disciplines and theories. Each theory and discipline contributes to the different facets of play, exploring the complexities of play through a myriad of lenses. As noted earlier, academic

research has focused on play mostly in the context of the child, however, the study of play was first examined in animals using an evolutionary perspective.

Explorers and notable figures such as Darwin and Wallace focused on animal play as seen in a plethora of creatures from ants, sea creatures, primates, horses, and dogs, and contemporary researchers have carried on studying the play of mammals, reptiles, birds and insects (Burghardt, 2010; Brown, 1988, Burghardt, Ward & Rosscie, 1996; Sivy, 2010; Panksepp & Burgdorf, 2010; Vanderschuren, 2010). There is wisdom to studying play as it occurs in animals—insights gleaned from the play of other creatures aids in deciphering the evolution of human play (Burghardt, 2010; Vanderschuren, 2010). Over time, the vast spectrum of research conducted on animals soon narrowed to focus on creatures deemed intelligent, and play was studied merely as a means of survival skills acquisition (Burghardt, 2010). Survival of the fittest, or ‘Natural Selection’ (Darwin, 1872; Gray, 2011b), still has a forefront role in attribution to play (LaFreniere, 2011; Henricks, 2014); however, researchers from multiple disciplines are finding new value in this age-old and primal activity.

From a contemporary evolutionist perspective, play has evolved over time to aid in the development of healthy and fit bodies, the practice of social and cultural skills, the establishment of social bonds and knowledge of how to maintain those bonds, as well as the development of impulse control and regulation of emotion (LaFreniere, 2011; Erikson, Paul, Heider & Gardner, 1959; Woolfolk et al., 2008). Even the joy that play invokes serves to inspire children to begin to explore their surroundings, to test their abilities and react to spontaneous situations, preparing them for unexpected events (LaFreniere, 2011).

The feeling of joy or pleasure that is accompanied by much of play prompts consideration of Barbara Fredrickson’s Broaden-and-Build theory (2004). Positive affect, more commonly termed happiness, is more than just an uplifted mood. Happiness promotes open mindedness and encourages behaviours that result in building resources and achieving goals (Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005; Fredrickson, 2004). According to the theory, those who experience joy are motivated to play, and those who experience engaged interest are motivated to seek further knowledge or experience and to explore. Feeling content prompts us to savour, and experiencing love can motivate playing, savouring, and exploring because the individual experiencing love feels *safe* to broaden their behaviours (Fredrickson, 2004; Eberle, 2014). In the process of broadening (i.e., *playing* or *exploring*), a person acquires and builds personal resources, which in

turn increase their likelihood of success and happiness. In this theory, happiness (positive affect) is both an indicator, and facilitator of overall well-being. When we are experiencing optimal life conditions we feel happy, and when we feel happy we continue to behave in ways that broaden and build our resources (Eberle, 2014).

The Broaden and Build theory draws from the concept of *action tendencies*—actions that are prompted from emotions. A classic example of an action tendency is the fight or flight response to fear stimulus. When we feel fear we are motivated to act in either escape or defense. Negative emotions narrow our range of behavioural options in order to prompt quick-action. If the flight or fight response included seven other possible actions we may be harmed while still deciding how we should act. By only stimulating two responses we are able to initiate a specific action much more quickly and save ourselves from harm. In contrast to action tendencies, positive emotions do not produce specific actions, instead they open up a *range* of thoughts and behaviours and broaden the possibilities of action (Fredrickson, 2000). Thus, while negative emotions provide quick responses to situations that endanger our immediate survival and are an adaptive reaction, positive emotions are designated to activities that provide a long-term evolutionary advantage (Power, 2011). This advantage is maintained across the lifespan, but much of play theory and research hone in on the special properties of play during childhood.

The concept of play as influencing child development dates back to the philosophical dialogues of Plato, where Plato observed that how children played informed, and shaped, how they matured into adults (D'Angour, 2013). Children are strongly motivated to explore not just their social environments, but also their physical environments—including the bodies they inhabit (Woolfolk et al., 2010; Gleave & Cole-Hamilton, 2012). Physical development is facilitated through play as children run, jump, climb, test their strength and flexibility, and build their balancing and coordination skills. Erik Erikson (Erikson, et al., 1959; McLeod, 2013) weighed in on play in his psychosocial theory of development. Erikson's theory notes that between toddler years and childhood, the stages of development navigated involve building skills and building independence. Physical play, therefore, helps children move about the world autonomously as they learn to walk, run, and grasp at objects without the help of an adult. Through play, children practice and perfect physical techniques and abilities. Play in children is often repetitive, and through this repetition children reflect and build from their explorations and experiences in a manner that echoes the recursive nature of Game Theory (Marks-Tarlow, 2010).

In game theory, each ‘round’ of the game is built upon the information gathered and events experienced in the previous round. In the same way, through play, children build the internal cognitive structures that they use to make sense of the world around them as they grow (Marks-Tarlow, 2010).

The exploration of the role of play in child development, no two theorists receive more attention than Piaget (Piaget, 1950; Piaget, 1999; Sutton-Smith, 2008, Woolfolk et al., 2008; Winther-Lindqvist, 2009) and Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978; Bodrova, Germeroth, & Leong, 2013; Winther-Lindqvist, 2009; Woolfolk et al., 2008). Both theorists approach play from a cognitive developmental perspective and argue that play is necessary for children’s learning (Henricks, 2008). While Piaget focuses more on children learning through play by testing their ideas about how the world works, Vygotsky’s arguments involve the presence of rules in play and how involvement of an adult during can accelerate children’s learning by means of scaffolding, observing the child playing and helping the child discover new challenges (Piaget, 1950; Vygotsky, 1978; Henricks, 2008). A particular distinction between Piaget and Vygotsky is that Piaget’s Stages of Development are befitting of a more biological, evolutionary perspective, whereas Vygotsky’s theories fit more with other social theories that depict play as a means of learning social order, such as Huizinga’s play-as-preceding-and-creating-culture, or the conflict-enculturation theory from Roberts and colleagues (Roberts, Arth, & Bush, 1959; Winther-Lindqvist, 2009; Lancy & Grove, 2011; Cross, 2008). Piaget’s theories were often cited in conjunction with descriptions of building mental, emotional, physical, and cognitive skills (Bergen, 2009). Vygotsky’s theories, in contrast, complemented discussions on the introduction of social norms, roles, identity creation and maintenance (Winther-Lindqvist, 2009).

Both Piaget and Vygotsky had opinions of social play. When in group play, children co-create meaning and experience, and in doing so they learn and grow together (Woolfolk et al., 2010). Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory explains that as children engage in social play they are building their cognitive development by constructing shared understanding of the world around them. While Vygotsky argued in favour of pairing children with adults or people of higher knowledge bases, Piaget argued in favour of peer-based learning (Woolfolk et al., 2010). The benefit of peer-based learning is that children create meaning together and learn from one another, expanding each other’s cognitive capacities in new and novel ways. Peer play gives children the opportunity to expand their development in social and emotional arenas.

Both Erikson (1959) and Freud (Lacan, 2010; Sutton-Smith, 2008) view play as a means of developing emotional regulation and reconciling emotions and fears, a sandbox in a sense, to confront and cope with adversary (Henricks, 2008; Elkind, 2007). Sutton-Smith (2008) agrees with this view in his own play theories, arguing that play is for “emotional survival” (Henricks, 2009, p. 12). These theoretical contributions to the role of play reinforce Gray’s (2011a) bold statement that lack of play is causing the rise in psychopathology seen in the past fifty years. Without opportunities to build coping skills, confront adversary, or exercise emotional regulation, children will be more vulnerable to mental illnesses. While these theorists grounded their work in the context of the child, play continues to serve by building and maintaining coping skills and sandboxes. This provision provides adults with a safe and non-threatening framework to explore societal structure, negotiate relationships, and confess feelings and fears in a realm where ideas can be tested before practiced in reality (Baxter, 1992). Detailed explanation is provided by Johan Huizinga and Erving Goffman, the final two theorists to be explored. Both see play as both constructing and deconstructing social and cultural norms, as a means of developing necessary social skills and as a phenomenon that is both built and framed.

Huizinga (1949), a play theorist who was more concerned with adults than children, and Goffman (1974), a famous sociologist, both theorize about the presence of separate contexts that can be applied to play (Henricks, 2009; Huizinga, 1949). Huizinga’s theories of play contain a ‘magic circle’ whereupon everything inside this circle is considered ‘play’ (Henricks, 2009; Huizinga, 1949). Similarly, Goffman’s theory of framing provides the understanding that play is framed as a space between reality and fantasy (Henricks, 2009; Henricks, 2011b). Within this separate space, normal behaviours and rules do not apply; instead, the created rules of play, as decided by the players, are the only rules upon which behaviours are judged (Goffing, 1974; Henricks, 2009). This freedom and flexibility allows for the deconstruction and reconstruction of social norms, cultural norms, social identities, as well as the reclaiming of self-control from societal structures. Again, this theme of play as a release and as a place of freedom and imagination is brought up, underscoring that play makes a poor site for social control.

In sum, this collection of theories highlight how play is foundational to health, and can help explain some of the patterns in which play changes as we age. The development of the child, physically, socially, emotionally and spatially, is honed and promoted through play. Within a play frame a child can use their imagination to create any scenario they need to practice

and develop their skills. The nuts and bolts behind these explanations can be found in neuroscience. Playing in enriched environments creates robust neural connections and prompts the growth of a highly complex brain with a better developed cortex (Diamond & Hopson, 1998; Rushton & Larkin, 2001; Brown & Vaughan, 2010). What is key from the original research on enriched environments and development conducted by Diamond in the 1960s (Brown & Vaughan, 2010), is that it must involve socialization and a diverse range of toys to tinker and puzzle over. Lack of socialization and access to playful objects results in the brain developing neural growth in fewer areas, as opposed to the holistic development seen in playful young mammals—animals and humans alike.

2.3 PLAYFULNESS:

Research on play in adults is considered to be an understudied area of inquiry and tends to be limited to play in the context of romantic relationships (Proyer, 2012; Baxter, 1992). Yet, recently there has been a spate of research that has started to look at play, in particular, *playfulness*, in a more holistic manner—analyzing how playfulness correlates with personality characteristics, how playfulness manifests in work environments, and the relationship between play and creativity (Chick, et al., 2012; Shen et al., 2014; Proyer & Ruch, 2011; Proyer, 2012; Proyer, 2013; Yanal & Qian, 2011).

In regards to relationship research, playfulness has been attributed to six functions that maintain and facilitate personal relationships, whether romantic or platonic. These functions of playfulness manifest behaviourally within the criteria of play, in that they involve voluntary practices, shared understandings, are engaged in for their own sake, and create positive affect, but playfulness itself is not studied within the criteria of play, it is seen as the mental attitude from which play spawns (Baxter, 1992). First, play becomes evidence of the intimacy and closeness between individuals. Second, play is a tool used in conflict management, providing both parties in a relationship a means of tackling sensitive issues within the safety of a play frame. Thirdly, play can be used to create a sandbox for communication to test how a partner may react to, for example, a declaration of love, a suggestion for a change, or to see how a partner may handle adversity (Chick et al., 2012; Baxter, 1992). Fourth, through play, partners can showcase themselves as an individual within the relationship dyad, or celebrate their pairing with one another through inclusive games, built with the shared understanding that occurs during

social play (Baxter, 1992). Fifth, play broadens the means by which partners and friends can communicate with one another, moving beyond simple verbal communication. Lastly, play promotes intimacy, becoming a foundation on which partners can build a relationship upon or deepen an already existing one (Chick et al., 2012; Baxter, 1992). When differentiating between romantic relationships and platonic relationships, Baxter (1992) found that romantic partners focused more on the *feeling* of playfulness that being with their partner created, whereas those in platonic relationships focused more on the manifestation of play activities they engaged in while with one another. While play is often seen as a light-hearted past time or state of being, it also contributes to serious functions of relationship maintenance and growth.

Aune and Wong (2002) furthered Baxter's research, focusing on the creation of a theoretical model for play in romantic relationships. Their research built on Baxter's *Forms and Functions of Intimate Play in Personal Relationships* (1992), and also previous research linking self-esteem, humour, and positive emotion to playfulness and relationship satisfaction. The results of Aune and Wong's research showed individual partners' self-esteem and use of humour promoted playfulness in their relationship, and that playfulness led to positive emotions and high satisfaction with one's relationship (Aune & Wong, 2002). The theoretical model Aune and Wong constructed is seen in Figure 3, with feedback loops added (dotted arrows) to their original diagram to better illustrate the results as described in their research.

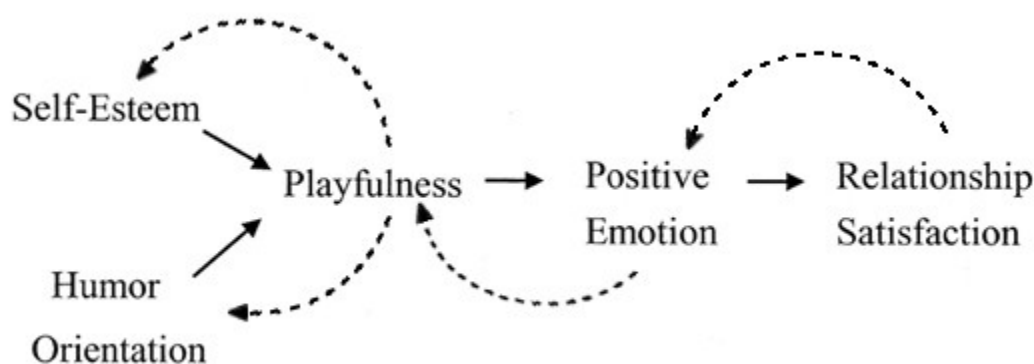


Figure 3: Feedback loops within Aune and Wong's theoretical path model (Aune & Wong, 2002, p. 282)

This model explains how individuals with high self-esteem and use of humour promote playfulness within their relationships, leading to positive emotion, which ultimately fosters

relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction, in turn, generates positive emotion, which stimulates playfulness, and through playfulness humour is encouraged and the acceptance of playfulness bolsters self-esteem (Aune & Wong, 2002). Aune and Wong also comment that playfulness “can be considered from a dialectical perspective” (2002, p. 284). This perspective involves three oppositions that create the foundation for communication within a relationship: “autonomy-connection, novelty-predictability, and open-closedness” (p. 284). From their results, Aune and Wong concluded that play facilitates all three of these oppositions:

“Playful behaviours can allow an individual to stand apart, or remind partners of their bond; they can bring spontaneity and novelty into a routine pattern, or they can be a comforting reminder of the relationship’s history; and finally, play can facilitate disclosure, or can serve as a convenient shield, protecting the inner thoughts or feelings of a partner while still remaining connected” (p. 284).

These results, coupled with Baxter’s (1992) earlier research, demonstrate that play is a resource for both the maintenance and facilitation of relationship building. From communication to intimacy, play and playfulness bring people together and create a framework in which partners can experiment and express themselves in a safe manner, increase their relationship satisfaction, and feel more positive emotions. Given that humans are social creatures, and that social cohesion is a known component of health and well-being (Henricks, 2009), encouraging play as a means of helping people connect with one another could be a potential project or tool to help increase cohesion. This research also collectively showcases how playfulness in relationships builds the life tasks of *love* and *friendship* from the Wheel of Wellness. Aune & Wong (2002) also postulated that playful individuals might experience more positive emotions and relationship satisfaction due to their playfulness building their resilience, which allows them to manage conflict with ease, using humour and play. They recommended that future research examine the relationship between stress, coping, and playfulness to see if playful individuals experienced less stress.

The Broaden and Build theory can help answer the questions posited by Aune & Wong. Personal characteristics found to correlate with consistent positive affect overlap neatly with the personal characteristics that correlate with playful individuals. Confidence, self-efficacy, pro-

social behaviour, optimism, healthy coping skills, and adaptability are among the characteristics listed as clustering with both playful individuals and those who experience positive affect (Proyer, 2012; Lyubomirsky, et al., 2005). In relation to coping skills, playful individuals exhibited a tendency to reframe situations to assess them as within their personal control, thus decreasing their perceived stress (Proyer, 2012; Sutton-Smith, 2008; Homeyer & Morrison, 2008). Reframing situations can involve turning a tense situation into a humorous situation, or looking at a situation in a new way that lessens stress, for example, seeing the positive side of a problem or treating it as a challenge instead of an insurmountable barrier. Fredrickson (2000) showed, in a series of laboratory studies, that individuals who experience positive affect directly after a negative experience are able to regulate negative emotions and promote cardiovascular recovery much more quickly than individuals who do not experience positive affect. Taken together, these findings help explain how playful individuals, who by their very nature are predisposed to feel positive affect more often, manage negative emotions by reframing situations in a manner that produces positive affect, and reduce the influence that negative emotions have on the physical body. By prompting positive affect, the playful individual broadens their thought and action repertoire and has greater access to more flexible coping skills.

Magnuson and Barnett (2013) conducted a study examining how playfulness might enhance one's ability to cope with stress and found that, indeed, playful individuals are less likely to perceive adversity as being beyond their capacity to cope. As children, time spent playing allows for the safe tackling of stressors and adversities, which combined with the opportunities to assess limits and capacities within play, boosts children's divergent thinking and coping skills (Sutton-Smith, 2008; Henricks, 2009). Magnuson and Barnett (2013) also found that playful adults are more likely to use healthy coping strategies in comparison to their non-playful peers, and that they used a similar reframing process to look at stressful situations in a way that made them less negative. This reframing process occurs during the initial cognitive appraisal when a stressor is encountered, where playful individuals can minimize the impact of a stressor by reframing it in a manner that yields to their cognitive resources and can be resolved. Playful individuals were also found to use coping strategies involving *engagement* with stressors in higher frequency than those involving denial or disconnect from problem. This finding is unsurprising, given that further research on personality traits that correlate with playfulness tends

to emphasize an internal locus of control coupled with a wealth of cognitive resources with which to actively cope and problem solve (Henricks, 2009; Gray, 2011a).

Traits found to correlate with low levels of stress also correlate with playfulness (Magnusen & Barnett, 2013; Fiorelli & Russ, 2012; Henricks, 2009; Proyer, 2012), raising questions about potential confounding of these constructs. If a trait such as self-confidence is correlated with low levels of stress and playfulness, and playfulness itself is correlated with low levels of stress, how do we know that it is not simply the self-confidence on its own that contributes to decreased stress levels? A detailed examination of the relationship between correlating traits highlights that traits work together and facilitate one another to become a defensive shield against stressors. A person that tackles tough emotional situations through dramatic play increases their confidence and mastery of emotional regulation. Their heightened capacity to handle tough situations then allows them to feel more confident in engaging future situations that prompt emotional reactions, for example. Playfulness is a seed that promotes the growth of stress-nullifying personality traits such as happiness, cognitive-emotional reframing (Magnuson & Barnett, 2013), divergent thinking (Fiorelli & Russ, 2012), social cohesion (Henricks, 2009), and creativity (Proyer, 2012). Through playfulness and play behaviours, these other traits are honed and maintained, feeding back into one another and perpetuating a mentally healthy outlook on life while building a variety of resources to use in the face of potential adversity.

Other personality traits and behaviours that seem to cluster around playfulness include intrinsic motivation, an inclination towards engaging in flow-states, emotional strength, higher intellect coupled with less self-restraint, creativity, spontaneity, positive attitude (Schiffirin, & Nelson, 2010), job satisfaction and high performance in the workplace (Lyubomirsky, & King, 2005), and innovative behaviour (Proyer, 2012). In a series of studies conducted by Proyer (2012), measurements of playfulness were correlated with: the Big 5 personality characteristics (openness, extraversion, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and agreeableness); gelotophilia (people who like to be laughed at), gelotophobia (people who are scared of being laughed at), and katagelasticism (people who like to laugh at others); and, the *Orientation to Happiness* scale, which assesses whether people are drawn more to a life of pleasure, a life of engagement, or a life of meaning. The results of these studies help illustrate how playful people come from a variety of orientations, and demonstrate different *styles* of playfulness.

Facets of playfulness that correlated with measures of personality included the following combinations. Participants who scored low in silliness, but indicated that they liked having fun, scored higher in the Big 5's trait of agreeableness (Proyer, 2012). Participants whose playfulness manifests in creativity also scored high in the Big 5's trait of culture, emotional stability and conscientiousness. Silly and spontaneous preferences in play were matched by lower scores in conscientiousness. Overall, higher scores in playfulness was associated with lower fear of being laughed at, and higher scores in both enjoying being laughed at and laughing at others. In terms of orientations of happiness, playful people were found to have high correlations with both a life of engagement and a life of pleasure (Proyer, 2012).

Proyer's series of studies found that playful adults were highly intrinsically motivated, and held high expectations that their goals would be achieved (Proyer, 2012). Alongside these findings were low scores in extrinsic goals, coupled with low expectations of extrinsic goals manifesting. Proyer summed up his series with the following portrait of a playful person, "the prototypic playful adult can be described as being extraverted, low in conscientiousness, open, gelotophilic, agreeable, following intrinsic life goals with extrinsic goals of being of low importance (and their likelihood to occur is also lowly valued), an endorsement of a pleasurable and engaged life and having both high self-perception of the own ability to be genuine" (Proyer, 2012, p. 120).

Taken together, experts describe the playful adult as one who is instilled with a cluster of wellness-promoting personality traits such as confidence and a disposition towards active coping skills, and is oriented towards seeking happiness. *Sense of humour* is a sub-task of the Wheel of Wellness that is likely to be met with ease by the playful adult. The subtasks of *sense of worth* and *sense of control* are also within the grasp of the playful adult, as they are more likely to be emotionally stable, have positive relationships with friends and romantic partners, and have developed the ability to reframe stressful situations into silver linings.

Research on adult play has honed in on the personality trait *behind* the manifestation of play behaviours. While playfulness research helps clarify what playful people look like and what behaviours and other personality traits can be expected of them, it continues to leave gaps in the overall body of play literature. Areas that require more light include every day occurrences of play, how playful people define play and playfulness, and how aware are playful people of the benefits of play? What benefits do they perceive they reap from their playfulness? Is playfulness

a conscious decision? An exploration of a possible darker side of play has also been urged by researchers as well as delving into the exploration of more intellectual playful pursuits (Proyer, 2012). This research study explores the gaps present in the literature by casting a net of inquiry around play across the lifespan. The everyday play –the play of children, adolescents and teens, adults and seniors– and the perceptions of participants on play and how playing influences their life are teased apart to shed light in the darker corners of play studies.

3.0 METHODOLOGY:

Study Design:

This study utilized a qualitative approach, informed and bolstered by phenomenological values such as bracketing and deep, rich data. Phenomenology stems from the ‘epistemology of idealism’, which considers knowledge to be a product of social construction and both accepts and values subjectivity (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Phenomenological research methodology was the best fit with the proposed research questions because it allowed for the capturing of complex life experiences from multiple understandings and perceptions (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Play is a phenomenon experienced by children, adolescents, and adults (Gray, 2009). Thus, the study of play as a human experience is congruent with the philosophy and methods of phenomenology. The features of phenomenological methodology include exploring the lived experience, bracketing, and interpretation of the experience of a phenomenon that is sub-conscious, or taken for granted as every day (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007; Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003), as is in the case of play. The importance of bracketing, in this particular study, was to put aside the academic perception of play and allow a new understanding to develop from the data itself (van Manen, 2007).

Phenomenology demands rich data and is less concerned with generalizability than with discovering the lived experience of a select group of people, or even a single individual (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003; Mason, 2010). The intent of the research was to achieve depth, rather than breadth, and so even a small sample size would yield a large amount of rich, detailed data to be analyzed. Research in phenomenological methods suggests that sample sizes between 2 and 25 participants are average (Smith et al., 2009; Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003; Mason, 2010; Berinstein, & Magalhaes, 2009), but that ultimately, recruitment should continue until saturation is accomplished.

There are several sub-branches of phenomenology, including transcendental, realistic, and existential (Linsenmayer, 2011). Each of these sub-types has a specific focus, embedded values and philosophies, and limitations that were considered when designing this study. Instead of subscribing to one of these subtypes, a more fitting strategy followed the interpretation of phenomenology by Max van Manen. Van Manen’s (1990) take on phenomenology is a blend of interpretative and descriptive phenomenology, which collects pure experience, describes it, but also interprets it by incorporating the layers of social and structural influence present in the

dialogue, as well as acknowledging the role of the researcher, and reflecting, in the process of research. This decision to not lock the research within the confines of a precise method is backed by the German philosopher Heidegger (1988), who declared that there is no such thing as a single phenomenological approach. Van Manen furthers this thought by adding, “Phenomenological method, in particular, is challenging, because it can be argued that its method of inquiry constantly has to be invented anew and cannot be reduced to a general set of strategies or research techniques” (2006, p. 720). To incorporate both of these research perspectives, the study design utilized for this research was kept as flexible as possible, while maintaining the values of phenomenological approaches to guide the research process.

Sample:

This study aimed to interview adults in order to capture the transition of child-to-adult play experiences. Thus, the minimum age of inclusion was 18 years old, as it is the age of adulthood in Canada, and earliest ‘instrumental’ age at which a participant could recollect the child-to-adult process of aging. The study aimed to collect a wide variety of participants with diverse backgrounds, and so adults of any gender, sex, ability, health status, marital status, and countries or origin were welcome, provided they met the age requirement, were fluent in English, and had an internet connection, which was used for data collection and correspondence. Phenomenological methodology attempts to discover the structure of an essence (van Manen, 1997), and in this study I sought the structure of the essence of play, as it changes across the lifespan, with attention to whether the presence of play influences health. Given that culture also has a structure (Parsons, 1968), I felt that it was necessary to sample cross-cultures in order to tease apart the structure of play from the structure of the culture the play is experienced within. A diverse sample could yield evidence that a cross-cultural structure of play has been discovered, whereas a homogeneous sample could be confounded by the cultural structure the participants reside in. The conceptualization of ‘culture’ is used broadly in this study to denote the culture of locality, geography, ethnic background, gender, or hobby-based community (e.g., the culture of scrapbookers). An international sample was also used to contribute to triangulation of findings, under the belief that if participants from a variety of backgrounds reached the same conclusions and expressed similar experiences, then the likelihood that an essence of play had been discovered would be stronger (Ritchie, et al. 2003).

Exclusion Criteria:

The study excluded people under the age of 18, because they are not considered adults in Canada and this study specifically focuses on the full transition of child to adult, if only bureaucratically defined. People who are not fluent in English were excluded because English is the researcher's native (and only) language, a translator was beyond the research budget, and there were multiple ethical concerns with interviewing people with a first language other than English *sans* interpreter, such as gaining truly informed consent and genuine representation (Koulouriotis, 2011). This study also excluded international participants without an internet connection because an internet connection was necessary for data collection and correspondence. Thus, institutionalized members of society (such as seniors in care facilities) were unlikely to be reached by any of the recruitment strategies described below.

Recruitment:

Participants were recruited purposively via fliers and an email newsletter sent through the Graduate Student Association at the University of Alberta. Further recruitment occurred online, targeting an international discussion site covering a broad range of topics (psychology, world politics, social relationships, etc) as well as an international play listserv attached to The Association for the Study of Play, in-person at a US conference focused on play, and once more online within a Canadian group page comprised of women that focused on a range of hobbies and pastimes. The intention behind recruiting from multiple locations was to achieve a sample of diverse individuals who engage in a variety of play activities and have a variety of different backgrounds.

Recruitment letters and advertisements were used for online recruitment and were posted with permission to the forum, group page, and listserv. These advertisements contained a small summary of the study and included the contact information of the researcher (Appendix A). Participants were responsible for contacting the researcher by phone or email for more information about the study or to volunteer. After doing so, participants were given the Information Letter that contained the details of the study and were encouraged to ask questions (Appendix B). Participants were screened by age and fluency in English by the researcher and notified within two weeks to schedule an interview if they fit participant criteria. Participants

that met the inclusion criteria and still wished to participate were asked to choose their preferred data collection method, as outlined in the next section.

I recruited from several online communities in which I am a participant; my justification for using these sites is that I have belonged to the community long enough that the owners of the sites trusted the legitimacy of my study, which facilitated access to community members (Ritchie et al., 2003). My relationship with individuals on these sites is ‘fellow community member’. The forums and groups I recruited from all have specific sub-forums or posting-protocol for announcements, requests, essentially ‘off topic’ posts, and within the culture of the online forum it is known that all participation and requests are entirely voluntary, and can be completely ignored if non-participation is desired. I was explicit in my recruitment post that there is no obligation to participate. As I did not specifically seek any one particular participant, there should be no feelings of being targeted or pursued. I chose not to target groups or forums where I am considered a core, influential member of the community, and thus I did not have bonds with any of the other members that might stimulate feelings of obligation. Instead, I opted to target platforms where I was anonymous, but present for long enough that fears of being spam or untrustworthy were unlikely to be barriers to participation. With the presentation of the Information Letter, containing my personal information and that of the University of Alberta’s Research Ethics Board, participants and forum and group owners were assured of the legitimacy of this project.

Risks and Benefits to Participating:

There was a low risk of participants feeling negative emotions associated with play experiences. Participants were made aware, throughout the research process, that they did not have to answer any questions they did not want to, without giving reason, and that they could cease participation at any time. Given the loose structure of the interview guide, and the encouragement of storytelling, participants had full control over what experiences they chose to disclose. No participants reported feeling distress, and through the recollection of memories, many participants reported feeling joy and positive nostalgia throughout their interviews. The research project received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “From Childhood Memories to Adulthood Activities: A Study of Play”, No. MS3_Pro00038579, May 25th, 2013

3.1 PARTICIPANTS

Once ethics approval had been granted, eighteen participants were recruited in order to achieve saturation, complying with the average sample size of 15 as recommended by the literature (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Mason, 2010). Once saturation was reached (see Analysis section for details), recruitment of participants ceased. Recruitment began in August 2013 and continued through to June 2014. Interviews and data analysis were also conducted during this period of time. The recruitment process began with four participants sampled from the Graduate Student Association and the international discussion forum, in August of 2013. As interviews were transcribed and preliminary analysis began, further recruitment from these two sites yielded two more participants. A brief hiatus from recruitment occurred in November to December of 2013, allowing the researcher to transcribe and analyze data, and assess progress towards saturation. By December 2013, the age-range of participants was still quite narrow, with the eldest participant being 36 years of age and the youngest being 21. Recruitment continued in January 2014, and four more participants were engaged by mid-February through the discussion forum and the play conference noted earlier. The month of March 2014 was spent transcribing and assessing the data for saturation, with recruitment of participants from a play listserve yielding seven more participants by May 2014. The last two participants volunteered during June 2014, bringing the total number of participants to 18. After the data had been fully transcribed, no new codes emerged after the 15th participant, however, a deepening consensus and richer vision of the experience of play was built through the inclusion of the remaining participants.

The participants included 13 women and 5 men, spanning the ages of 20 to 70 years old. Participants were recruited from four platforms, as shown below in Figure 4, and resided in 5 different countries located on three continents, as can be seen in Table 2

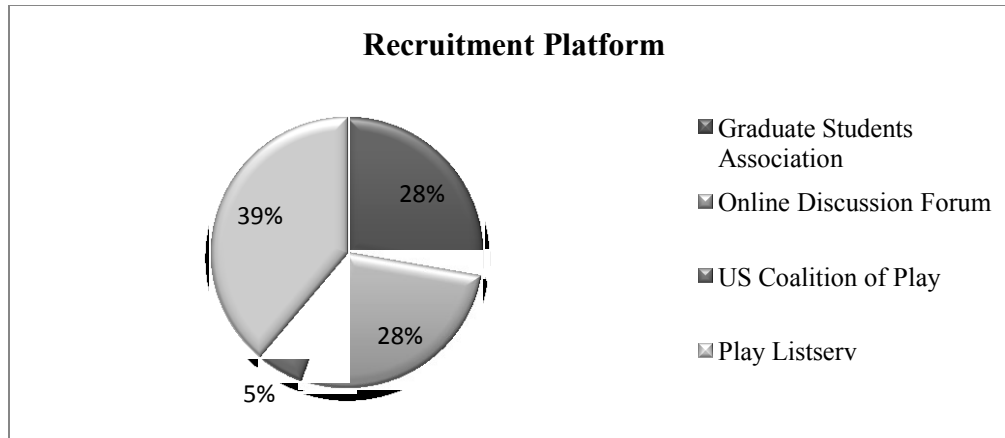


Figure 4: Percentage of participants purposively recruited from different sites.

Table 2: A breakdown of the demographics of participants recruited for the study.

Sample Characteristics:	n=		n=
Age:		Country	
20-29	6	Canada	7
30-39	4	USA	8
40-49	3	Romania*	1
50-59	3	Argentina	1
60+	2	Germany	1
		*Participant moved to Canada during adulthood.	
Sex:			
Male	5		
Female	13		
		Total #	18

3.2 DATA COLLECTION

Prior to data collection, written or verbal informed consent was sought from all participants, depending on mode of interview. For face-to-face interviews and written interviews, written consent was sought (see Appendix C for consent form). For online (i.e., Skype) interviews, verbal consent was sought. The researcher reviewed the Information Letter with the participants and time was granted to address questions and concerns. Consent was documented by means of written forms and recorded, explicit oral consent. This documentation is kept in a private, locked cabinet only accessible to the researcher. Place and people names

were omitted or modified in order to ensure confidentiality. Identifying information that has been retained included age, sex, and country of origin, however, care has been taken to render all other details vague so that participants cannot be identified. Participants were told that they may leave the study at any time with no consequence, up until the final draft of the thesis was submitted.

Data was collected through in-person, Skype, or phone-based semi-structured interviews. Interviews lasted one hour, on average, and in-person interviews were conducted on university campus and within a secure conference centre. Written stories and interviews provided a second means of data collection, and participants were asked to choose their preferred method of providing their information. Written interview questions were sent electronically to participants via email. Participants who asked for a written interview, but did not return the completed interview within a month were contacted by email to see if they still wished to participate. After two re-contact attempts were made, participants whom had still not responded were considered disinterested and no further attempts were made to contact them.

Using a variety of interview options facilitated participants' preferred means of self-expression. Subsequent interviews or questions were requested by the researcher on three occasions in order to clarify participant stories where participant age was not mentioned, when an activity was mentioned that was unfamiliar to the researcher, and for further probing on how retirement affects play.

Most of the participants opted for the written interview, however, all the methods offered (i.e., written, phone, Skype and face to face) were taken up across the participants. The breakdown of method used by number of participants (each participant chose one method only) can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Breakdown of number of participants per interview method

Interview Method	n=
Written	11
Face to Face	4
Skype	2
Phone	1
Total	18

Differences in data did emerge across the various interview styles. In general, it was found that interviews conducted via face to face, phone, and over skype contained very positive accounts of play experiences, whereas written interviews yielded data that encompassed a broader range of emotions, including negative experiences as well as positive. It may be that participants felt safer confiding negative emotions in their written interviews given the added anonymity of not being able to see the researcher or hear the researcher's voice, or simply had more time to compose their thoughts and reflect on their experiences, however these are speculations. Written interviews also seemed to make it easier for participants to choose whether they answered the interview questions one at a time, or as a story.

Storytelling is a means of sharing an experience in a holistic manner that accepts all sensory input, reflection, the reliving of a moment, and the possibility of probing into an experience from multiple angles (Benner, 1994). Storytelling allows for the presentation of a rich context that can be shared with the listener (Benner, 1994; Ritchie, Lewis, & Elam, 2003). Other qualitative methods that rely solely on description would not capture the reflection of play, or the value of play as seen from the perspective of the participant. Given that phenomenology opens the door to capturing complex phenomena, a data collection method that provides flexibility to study complex phenomena must be chosen, and storytelling through a loosely-guided interview met that criteria.

The semi-structured interview was generally broken into three parts: first, a recollection of childhood play experiences with attention to the places, the feelings experienced during play, the social structures of play, risky play, and particular memorable moments. The interview then transitioned to asking questions exploring becoming an adolescent and how play manifested during teenage years. The third part of the interview focused on the adult experience of play-- is it overt or covert? Does young adult play differ from older adult play, (and do recollections differ from current experiences)? What does it look like, feel like, what are the facilitators or barriers, and so on. The intent behind the structure was to create a dialogue that showed how play changes as we age (if it changes at all), with probing questions that explored experiences more deeply and allowed for transition periods to be discussed.

The interview guide (Appendix D) was reviewed by two experts in the field of play and was piloted with two participants of different ages, and then critiqued for flow, comprehension, and face validity. The interview guide was used for all methods of interviewing. Verbal

interviews were recorded with participant permission and transcribed by the researcher using Express Scribe software, using continuous line numbers to facilitate coding.

3.3 DATA STORAGE

Interview files and transcriptions were stored on a private password-protected computer that only the researcher has access to. A password-protected Master List that links data files to participants is also stored with the interview files, and is viewable by the researcher.

Anonymized transcripts (participant names and locations removed) were hosted on a secured, private cloud storage server during the analysis and write up stages of the study production due to the researcher and supervisor being located in different provinces while needing to collaborate. Data (interviews and transcriptions) will be kept for a period of five years post study completion, after which they will be destroyed, completely wiping them off the hard drive.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis ran concurrent to data collection to facilitate immersion in the data, and participant recruitment until data saturation was reached. Total immersion within the data is necessary to produce a detailed and thorough representation and analysis of the phenomenon as lived by the participants (Offredy & Vickers, 2010), both across the data set and within each individual interview. Following Kleiman's (2004) analysis protocol, the interview transcripts and written interviews were first read entirely, without coding, in order to grasp the whole of the interview, and then again to begin the collection of separate themes and to start coding (Offredy & Vickers, 2010). Data was coded inductively and iteratively to allow for the creation and re-creation of themes. The researcher coded by hand as opposed to using software, a personal preference of the researcher, and a codebook was created to render the coding process transparent as well as for organizational purposes (Saldana, 2012). A layered coding approach was taken where codes were formed first as overall impressions of the interview as a whole, also known as Initial Coding (Saldana, 2012), then at the paragraph level, and then using a line by line approach. Codes were constructed in terms of both description and interpretation (Saldana, 2012), making the coding process consistent with the blend of interpretive and descriptive data analysis used (van Manen, 1990). Codes that formed patterns were arranged into categories and then analyzed to discover conceptual themes, both within and across interviews (Saldana, 2012). In order to assess patterns across interviews, an 'At a Glance' tool was created to map out

similarities and differences (Appendix E) by listing codes in a check-list type fashion (e.g., present in the interview or not present). This allowed an immediate visual presentation of which codes came up most often, and which were isolated to a single participant. This visual representation was used to identify the most universal codes across participants, and to capture overall patterns, for example, the narrowing of play behaviours as participants grew into adolescents.

Analysis of the codes, and interpretation and writing of the analysis, were similarly re-written and re-formed as new trends emerged and as coding underwent refinement (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Saldana, 2012). The transcripts were read and re-read during the iterative analysis process to develop, refine and recreate themes until the essential meanings, the universal patterns, and the general structure of the phenomenon were discovered (Offredy & Vickers, 2010; Howitt & Cramer, 2008). The data was revisited once more to confirm the findings of the analysis, and examples of the phenomenon's essence and structure were pulled from the interviews and woven into the analysis to verify the findings (Offredy & Vickers, 2010). Reflections written during and after each interview by the researcher were considered for coding (Saldana, 2012). This was necessary because the first research question posited asks *how* do adults recollect their childhood experiences. Field notes, or jotting, while undergoing the interviews captured observations such as excited facial expressions, laughter, perceived feelings of nostalgia, and the researcher's immediate thoughts, for example. Further thoughts were recorded after the interviews had finished, or the researcher had finished the initial reading for written interviews. After an initial write up of the analysis, the themes and categories created were reviewed by another member of the research team for overlap, gaps in the analysis, and overall data integrity. Bracketing continued during the coding process, and so no theories or literature were used to frame the coding procedure. Once coding was complete, the Wheel of Wellness was used to map the avenues in which play influences health and wellbeing.

3.5 POSITIONALITY:

To give the reader a better understanding of where I stand as a researcher and as the interviewer, I conducted this study in my late 20s to early 30s, I am told I appear feminine despite my identification as androgynous, I am white and I come from a middle-class Canadian family. My political leanings slant towards a medley of socialist, liberal and green orientations. I was raised, and still am, a Unitarian Universalist. I do not want to assume how this collusion of

variables may have affected my participants' willingness to divulge information to me. I did not perceive at any time that I had power over any of my participants, in truth, I did feel several times, particularly with my older participants, that my identification as a student served to place me in a position of *eager learner* as opposed to a leader or guider of interviews.

While knowledge may be co-created, I did do my best to keep as much of *me* out of the interviews as possible. My intention was to listen and seek as many details from my participants as I could without steering them in any forced direction, so that they would be able to tell me any story of their choosing, not of my prompting. I confess my excitement over the occasional shared experience did overcome that intention several times, but I would like to think I reined myself in before my thesis could become an autobiography. I experienced both being an insider and an outsider in regards to my participants, in that some of my participants come from similar backgrounds to me (growing up in a small town, pre-internet, for example), and others lived lifestyles so different to me that I had no experiences of my own to relate to their stories.

The mixed-methods in interviews adds complexity to my positionality relative to my participants, in that only some of my participants ever saw me, some only heard my voice, and most of them never heard nor saw me. Most of my participants opted for a written interview, and as such their only interaction with me was via text. For those participants, they knew my name, sex, my location, that I was a student and that I had an interest in play.

In terms of research inquiry, I consider myself a constructivist, believing that knowledge is created through human experience, perception, and socialization, and is thus, subjective. My academic background is also a mixture, primarily of social sciences, though I harbour a deep love for biology. My two main backgrounds are in linguistics and public health, though I consider myself a play scholar, and feel I belong to the interdisciplinary field of play. This is important, as there are particular values of public health and health promotion that do not necessarily align with those values in the field of play. Social control, and the aesthetic of health as promoted by public health and health promotion, for example, are aspects of population health that conflict with encouraging play. Health promotion will encourage a population to eat particular foods in particular amounts, public health will encourage a population to uptake certain behaviours to prevent disease and disorder. In play, the emphasis is typically placed on having the freedom to do whatever you wish, and whatever you wish may involve illicit drugs, promiscuous sex, or having ice cream for breakfast. When these values collide, I find myself

agreeing with those in the field of play over that of the field of health promotion or public health. It is a reluctant separation, and an awkward one, given that I am currently a student in a school of public health, but the more I research play, the more I feel that public health's involvement in play is a poor choice, and the more I am driven to align myself more fully with other play scholars. It was easy to withhold the values of health promotion and public health during the research process given that I do not agree with them in the context of play, though it does call into question whether I can critique public health's involvement in play from an unbiased point of view. I did pause mid-study to question whether my disagreement with public health stemmed from ideology or science, and I do think my opinion is informed by research, however I realize I may be biased and am perhaps critiquing too harshly.

4.0 RESULTS

The data yielded five main themes and one main barrier to play. Each theme will be presented beginning in childhood and moving towards adulthood. For the purposes of this research, and in the spirit of bracketing, I did not use a set definition of play. Instead, I decided to tease apart what play was to my participants by analyzing their experiences and seeking commonalities. Many of my participants defined play on their own without prompting, but other participants struggled to match a definition of play to the wide variety of their own experiences. Further, as participants talked about the evolution of their play they often transitioned from describing play experiences in childhood and adolescence, to *playful* experiences during their adulthood. Therefore, it is necessary for the presentation of study results, to both define play and playfulness, as they are not quite the same.

4.1. PARTICIPANT DEFINITIONS OF PLAY AND PLAYFULNESS

Most often, play was defined synonymously with “fun” or “just for fun”, with the majority of participants reporting that play also had to be serious. Seriousness was a point of contention, where other participants felt that seriousness negated play, but I also noticed that ‘seriousness’ could mean being very focused and engrossed in play, in which case it was certainly part of what play is and commonly described as Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). Playfulness, by contrast, was a mood that was also fun, but did not necessarily have to be serious, and was more often considered to be “light-hearted”. Participant 16 articulated definitions for both play and playfulness:

P16P29: (Female, 38, Canada)

I see there being a difference between play, playful activities, and playfulness. Play, in its purest form is when an individual is engaged in an experience that for them is all encompassing, enjoyable, and has no specific purpose or goal in/of itself. Playfulness is more a disposition or approach to make anything play or playful.

In discussing play during teenage years, Participant 4 reflected that there was an absence of play, which she described as a lack of doing things ‘just for fun’:

P4L125: (Female, 22, USA)

I don’t remember doing that many things just for fun, like playing after 15 or so

Participant Two also used ‘fun’ as synonymous for play in her description of the ‘element of play’ needed in children’s martial arts classes, and Participant 5 echoed this sentiment by deciding that once she had decided something was fun, even if by societal standards it may be also considered educational or serious, it became play:

P2L196: (Female, 28, Canada)

And, so, it was like all ages and this sort of thing and so you had like little kids, right? And so you had to, there has to be an element of play or else you can’t have little kids doing it if there’s no element of play like they won’t stay and they’ll be really unruly, and... yeah, like you need to be in a situation where you can have a balance between serious practice and fun

P5P12: (Female, 26, Canada)

Much like the expression “one man’s trash is another man’s treasure”, “an activity one person considers boring, is another person’s play”. The definition of play that I came across doing a google search was: “engage in activity and recreation rather than a serious or practical purpose”. I find no serious or practical purpose to reading fiction, and therefore will deem it play. Although a museum or science centre (or doing math problems) could be considered educational activities, I think the minute that I choose to do these things for fun, it become playing, for me.

Conversely, Participant 6 gave me an example of playing basketball, where she reported that she enjoyed it, even loved it, and yet it was *not* considered play:

P6L125: (Female, 34, Romania)

P: Yeah, yeah, you can imagine at that time I wasn’t playing anymore. [laughs]

I: [laughs] No, you wouldn’t be, so, does that also mean, like would you consider playing basketball play or is it something different?

P6: No, no no, there was no way of playing, like no. No no, that was work!

I: Oh, okay!

P6: That was something I loved doing it but, definitely wasn’t the, you know, wasn’t that kind of play, you know what I mean? I mean, there were so many rules, there were so many things you had to do correctly, and, yeah, it was high performance, it wasn’t, okay, community basketball. ... Um, so, I enjoyed it, I loved it, but it was work.

Participant 6 did not specifically use the word *fun*, but she does illustrate that mere enjoyment is not enough for an activity to be dubbed play. In her reference to ‘wasn’t that kind of play’, Participant 6 illustrates one of the difficulties in defining play—play is also a verb commonly

used to describe engagement in a sport, regardless if the ‘player’ is actually *playing*. However, alongside the criterion of fun, the concept of flow, an engrossing state of timelessness, was also mentioned in participant definitions, and may help disentangle play from other pursuits:

P9L279 (Male, 49, Germany)

if you ask me, this was play as well. It made us full and there was flow and there was an idea and there was being together and creating something that evolves into a number of parties and feasts and living well.

P12L368 (Female, 57, USA)

if you can get them to recognize that this is another way to just escape, you know, some people take up hobbies where they can just, become immersed in the hobby, well that’s their play.

P4L222 (Female, 22, USA)

I: [laughs] Okay, so I like that statement of *barely over the line of play*, what would have made it better?

P4: Um, I guess if it weren’t so clearly focused on learning things rather than having fun with it, it was for, you couldn’t really forget he wanted it, us to practice the material or something like that.

I: Okay, yup. So that brings up another question, is part of play being able to just get lost in the activity or is being totally aware of what you’re doing part of play, like which..

P4: Um, I think it would be more being able to get lost in it, like, any game is more fun if you can, if you’re not thinking about the fact *oh I’m just playing a game, this isn’t important*, like it has to sort of become important to you in order for it to be engaging.

At the end of her quote, Participant 4 notes the relationship between something being important, and the ability to become lost, or immersed in the activity, in other words, to achieve a state of Flow. This *importance* of a task was sometimes also used interchangeably with the notion of seriousness, in that if an activity was perceived as important, participants were quite serious, or intensely engrossed, in their play. The seriousness of play will be explored later on during this Results chapter.

Playfulness, by contrast, was described more as a mood or perception that one would *bring to* a situation, or apply to a situation. Participants would often mention taking a very active role in finding opportunities to be playful.

P8P7: (Male, 40, USA)

I would say that I am playful under two different definitions. I seek to amuse myself almost at all time with irregular bursts of energy that allow me to get work done. ... Another way I am playful is through my relationships with others. Most people who meet me think I am the most serious person they have ever met. Most people who know me think I am the least serious person they have ever met. ... I try to make every conversation fun, but usually with a deadpan face.

P5P15: (Female, 26, Canada)

My husband says that I am a playful person. I think it's because I try to find enjoyment in the things that I'm doing, and still have some childish tendencies, like randomly skipping down the sidewalk and short moments of voicing stuffed animals.

P2L230: (Female, 28, Canada)

I: Can you tell me a little bit more about ... being playful at work?

P: Um, it's just a... personality sort of thing? Personality isn't right, but like the ability to not remain in that professional 'yes maam yes sir', like that sort of... like it's almost a collegiality, like a, an awareness that the people you are working with are also people with interests and, you know, they want to have fun too, like they don't.. they want to get their work done and you know, you want to do it well and you want to take pride in your work but you don't want to be an automaton, right? Nobody wants to be an automaton.

Participant 2 furthers the notion of conscious effort to be playful while also seeking to make atmospheres fun for other people as well as herself. (Creating a playful environment at work will be further explored in a later theme: It Is Not What You Do, It Is How You Do It.) Below, Participant 3 explores how her time in university was not considered to be playful because it was too serious.

P3L177: (Female, 32, Canada)

Um, that is like... there is university that just took up like many, many years of, I don't know, it wasn't like playful, it was very serious, right?

Participant 8, quoted above, also hints that seriousness is at odds with being playful,

P8P7: (Male, 40, USA)

I would say that I am playful under two different definitions. ... Another way I am playful is through my relationships with others. Most people who meet me think I am the most serious person they have ever met. Most people who know me think I am the least serious person they have ever met. ... I try to make every conversation fun, but usually with a deadpan face.

From this quote, playfulness and seriousness seem to lie at either ends of a spectrum, and Participant 8 plays with this dichotomy by pretending to be one while actually being the other. In contrast, Participant 18's personal definition of playfulness embraced both lighthearted and serious sides of the spectrum:

P18P23 (Female, 70, USA)

I love being playful – to me that means the ability to laugh and enjoy the silly and serious. It also means still being able to enjoy the game – regardless of outcome. It means taking risks and still willing to explore.

The definitions of play and playfulness continue to be slippery and difficult to pin down. The general descriptor seems to be that play is something fun, and engrossing and that playfulness is the mood of seeking to make something playful or to engage in play without being serious, but neither of these definitions are operational in the sense that they cannot tell you if a person is engaging in play or playfulness or not. It seems to remain that the only means of deciding whether or not something is an act of play is to directly ask the people involved.

4.2 MAIN THEMES

The themes that arose from the data will be presented as capitalized headings, with major categories contributing to each theme being presented one by one as underlined subheadings. Each category will be explored from three points of time: childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, with a summary statement at the end tying the category back to the theme it belongs to. The first theme to be presented is that of Play as Exploration.

4.2.1 PLAY AS EXPLORATION

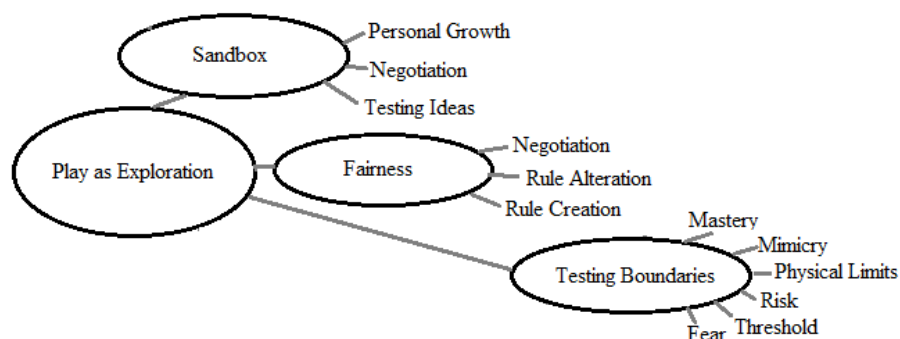


Figure 5: Coding structure for the theme ‘Play as Exploration’.

Childhood play behaviours were defined by most participants as a time to explore. Exploration arose as a broad theme, created from the major categories of Testing Boundaries, Fairness, and Sandbox. Through these areas, participants explored their physical limits, pushed their boundaries of what they could achieve, gained mastery over skills, encountered and grappled with the idea of fairness and negotiation, and discovered personal interests. Each category will be elaborated further, and then discussed as a piece of the larger theme, Exploration.

Testing Boundaries:

Physical limits were most often encountered and explored by seeking the extremes of an activity. It was not enough for participants to learn to run or climb, they were spurred further to run faster and faster, to climb higher and higher, to see how far they, and their friends, could push themselves. In pursuing extremes it is of no surprise that most participants engaged in activities that could be considered risky.

P17P6 (Male, 36, USA)

I suppose you might say I played in ways that could be considered dangerous. As a young boy, I looked to other boys on the playground to see what they could do. The older ones were stronger, faster, and taller, and of course they could climb up to areas of the play structures that were a challenge to the younger kids.... naturally, we younger kids wanted to prove that we could do it too! So I did lots of climbing, lots of exploring, played on structures where a fall would have certainly meant a broken bone or three. I enjoyed climbing trees.

P14P2 (Female, 58, Canada)

We would build ramps and race over them, or climb backyard fences and jump off. I remember biting my tongue one time doing that; it bled all over the place. I also broke my arm doing acrobatics with my tricycle at the age of eight. My mom said I was accident prone but I think I was just a passionate player.

P2L26 (Female, 28, Canada)

I mean I would race, lots of racing and like, how far can you go underwater, how far can you go, or how fast can we go

Risk:

Taking and managing risks was mentioned by nearly all the participants, though it is notable that during childhood, participants reported largely being unconcerned with the risk that their chosen activities may have harboured. Some were not aware of the risk at all. The impulse to have fun, to explore, was the main driver behind engaging in activities that may be considered dangerous to some. As Participant 4 illustrates below, the concept of risk was tied to the promise of something new— the next level, or unexplored territory.

P4L87 (Female, 22, USA)

Also, I guess some exploring out with friends, just walking away farther than we should have gone, but, I guess, yeah, I would say that the risk made it more fun, because you know if you're playing in a place that is completely safe, eventually you run out of things to do there so, you think if you go farther away there must be something interesting out there that's new out there.

P6L66 (Female, 34, Romania/Canada)

I don't think in terms of danger or risk but we would think in terms of how funny it was. [laughs]

P3L132 (Female, 32, Canada)

no, you didn't think about, you know safety or those of things [laughs]. I mean, you'd maybe check to see if cars were coming across the street but it wasn't, I don't know, you didn't think about, *'oh let's go in the ravine and ride along the little path that's quite steep'* ... I just want to ride along it and go to the end.

Other participants did have an awareness of danger, which led to the notion of a threshold. For these participants, once the level of risk had approached the threshold of being viewed as dangerous many participants would reign in their engagement. One participant elaborates on how danger is viewed negatively:

P3L130 (Female, 32, Canada)

I think sometimes if you like, like if you got too high up the tree and it was swinging too much, then I think you'd get a little nervous and be like, *'okay I think I need to climb down a little bit'*

Another participant talked about a threshold, where a certain level of danger was okay, but they would not seek to go beyond it.

P1L376 (Male, 21, Canada)

...we found that there was always an acceptable level of danger we'd, like I'd say, and we found that-- there was always the teachers didn't want anyone getting hurt but like, somebody got a little bit hurt we were okay with that, but there wasn't like any kind of a, like a high level of danger.

The transition from childhood to adolescence comes with a transition in how participants viewed the dangers associated with risky play. The notion of danger went from 'scary' to 'alluring', and was more willingly sought out as adolescents continued to engage in risky behaviours as part of testing boundaries and exploring their potential. Participant One mused about the difference in how he perceived danger as a teenager as opposed to how he viewed it as a child:

P1L399 (Male, 21, Canada)

P: Um, yeah, when we were older, definitely it was like, you know, the danger factor was like, *awe yeah*, the more danger the more fun, but we didn't really think about that when we were younger, like probably like, one-- fourteen and up when it was always like, oh, jump off the roof or something like that, but um, I think when we were younger the danger would get ratched up because we thought, you know it would be more fun, but then we'd also, we were young enough that we realized you know this was kind of scary ... but, yeah, it wasn't really the allure, later on of course, but when we were younger it wasn't, it was only kind of, what we thought was fun, if we thought it was dangerous it was, we didn't really do it a whole bunch.

The above quote also provides an example of how fear was a barrier to playing. Participants who felt scared during childhood play would scale back to a level more comfortable and within their boundaries. In adolescence and teenage years, the feeling of adrenaline when encountering a risky situation became attractive and sought after. Participant 8 echoed the sentiments of Participant 1's risky teenage play, discussing the lure of adrenaline and how pursuit of the rush led to dangerous behaviours:

P8P5 (Male, 40, USA)

I started drinking, driving fast, full contact sports such as football, and other foolishness, such as throwing apples at a house until the owner came out and chased us, all for the adrenaline.

During adolescence, participants who continued to play experienced testing boundaries primarily in two domains: social and physical. Structured sport became the main play activity for many, allowing participants to challenge and push themselves physically in an environment that encouraged competition. Verbal play became the main mode for connecting with others and maintaining friendships while providing opportunities to test social boundaries through games such as Truth or Dare, as well as pushing at social norms. This transition from childhood to adolescence is marked by refinement in both play style and friend group. Several participants discussed a different sort of testing boundaries and taking risks than those they had engaged in during childhood. One participant labelled these activities ‘dark play’:

P14P16 (Female, 58, Canada)

What I did do through my teenage and early twenties would be more accurately described as ‘wreckreation’, or dark play. I drank too much, was sexual promiscuous, played dangerous games of chicken, and struggled to find lightness and love in my life. But I do think this play despite its cynical bleak appearance did serve the same purpose of exploration and personal growth.

Here the participant lists activities that are typically deemed negative in our society, and yet the participant argues that there is still learning in this type of exploration, and acknowledges the value of such experimentation. Through this ‘dark play’ the participant is exploring not only who she is, but who she is in relation to others.

P14P16 (Female, 58, USA)

[I] was driven by a strong desire to prove myself tough and independent, to extend my limitations, to push myself just as my play as a child had done. As for the benefits, who can say, I learned plenty during that time, I learned what I did not want or like in my life, who I was not happy being, and what hurt me

The concept of reckless play was not always clear, and some participants struggled with deciding whether or not their adolescent behaviours were play. Ultimately, it came down to whether they thought the activity was fun, even if it had negative consequences. Participant One spoke about speeding down the street in his car, sometimes going up to 160 km/h, and how during an episode of reckless play he and his friend were driving towards one another and were unable to dodge each other’s cars:

P1L461 (Male, 21, Canada)

we ended up like running into each other at like 40 and then you know, nobody was really was seriously hurt but like, my car was totalled and his car was- he didn't get it back for like 8 months, but like, you know. It just kinda put you know, the fear of god into us like *holy shit, you know, that could've been a lot worse*, no like, one, I think one kid broke his nose, and that was the worse we had, like that, that I guess you would kinda call that play?

He continued to weigh the concept and ultimately concluded that such behaviour did belong to a 'broad definition of play'. Several participants shared the sentiment that while they were adolescents they did not consider their actions to be in the spirit play, however, looking back they really actually were playing.

P1L475 (Male, 21, Canada)

yeah, it's tough to say like, to look back on it now, it did, yeah it doesn't.. thinking of it that way it does seem like play and more immature and then, but if you'd ask me that same question, you know, three years ago I'd have thought, *oh that was the coolest thing ever*.

The perception in this quote was that a 'cool' activity was thought to be more adult, more mature, in comparison to childhood play, however at a later age, in reflection, the behaviour was now viewed as actually immature, and still an act of play. This desire to separate oneself from behaviours developed in childhood will be covered more fully in the theme of Stigma.

Fairness:

Not all of childhood and adolescent play past-times involved dangerous activities or pursuit of new and grandiose adventures. Exploration in play was also described in social interactions where participants grappled with notions of fairness and began to negotiate with their peers regarding the structure of the games they would play. Multiple participants noted that an unfair game ceased to be fun, and were motivated to keep the playing field even in order to perpetuate the game. Two participants had similar experiences with the board game Monopoly:

P4L56 (Female, 22, USA)

Um, well, for example for Monopoly we always thought it was kind of unfair that you couldn't, that so much depended on luck, when just what you land on, we came up with

this whole bargaining system, once all the properties were sold, there would be steps you could follow to buy and sell properties and like that.

P14P11 (Female, 58, Canada)

However for all our playing together there was little competition in it. We often reinvented rules in games such as monopoly to create collaborative games out of them. I have always hated losing but felt equally bad winning as that meant someone else had lost. ... We always made exceptions for younger children in our games on the street, it was the inclusion that counted, not who won.

Another perspective on fairness was presented by two participants who enjoyed competitive games, but considered an even playing field as a means of maintaining the level of fun throughout adolescence and adulthood:

P1L.62 (Male, 21, Canada)

...you'd try to make it so it's even I guess, we would find, that, 'cause if one team would kind of run away with it no one was having any fun, right

P17P16 (Male, 36, USA)

I don't play for the recognition, but it's nice to be the best player in the arena, because I can control how the game goes. In fact, if my team is super far ahead in points, I will go back to the vesting room and get a different pack and join the other team just for the hell of it. I want games to be fair and not grossly one-sided, because that's no fun, and I want people to have a good time and come back

Participants thus alter rules, switch teams, and create games to ensure that fairness is maintained and fun is uninhibited. Rule alteration and the creation of fairness involved a great deal of negotiation, where games were decided on democratically by the participants as they explored which roles they wanted to play and how they would fit in to what their friends were planning.

P1L205 +282 (Male, 21, Canada)

At school like, we would play, it would almost become more like a rugby sport or, you could pick up the ball and run with it, and it was you know, you kinda made the rules as you went—people would be like oh, *you can't do that, you know it's a new rule after this*, so, yeah ... later on, even now, like when we play like, shinny hockey we're like okay you know, are we playing like touch-icing or you know, something like that, if you really want to get technical about it because like everyone understands the different levels and

rules at that point, like there is amateur rules and professional rules and that sort of thing, so, we made an agreement on what we're going play.

P3L39 (Female, 32, Canada)

...as I got older I remember it was more, it was like less play but more talking about, *well you should do this, and I'll do this, and then we'll pretend this and*, so, it, it took awhile to actually figure out like what you were gonna play like 'cause you're talking it out and do all that stuff.

Participant One went on to describe how the concept of fairness evolved as he grew older: how in a group of players with different skill levels, while it was unfair to stack the game entirely towards more proficient players, it was also unfair to restrict them. He goes on to describe how a compromise was made:

P1L287 (Male, 21, Canada)

...where there were other students who weren't, I guess you know, kinda, as athletic... they were allowed to go until they actually hit something, and then, for awhile there was kind of like discontent among the other students like, *aw we're going to be here forever*, but like as we got in to grade 11 and 12 it was kind of like, *oh, you know like, [John]* or whatever, the one student, he never really excelled at any sports but we like, kinda try to cheer him on because he was trying really hard and you know, he'd hit a ball and we'd all kind of like *oh good, you got her*, and you know. So. Yeah so. I think, it does as we matured we kind of understood why at the same time it was, yeah.. and I think other students as they matured realize that, *ok, even if I'm not that good, I'm going to have to play with the rules*, so there is kind of a compromise is met, I guess, kinda like an unspoken one, students realize, *okay, you know, I didn't get it this time but maybe the next time*, you know

Sandbox:

Negotiation has similar qualities as 'play as a sandbox', a category more concerned with the internal exploration and back-and-forth of testing new ideas. Whereas in negotiation participants are interacting with their peers and exploring how they behave in relation to others, in sandbox they are exploring their own potential and development from within. I noticed many of my participants engaged in storytelling, world creation, and dramatic play from childhood straight through to their adult years. Curious, I asked them what this particular form of play provided them with, what the allure of it was, or why they thought they engaged in it.

P4L258 (Female, 22, USA)

Hm. That's a good question, I think a lot of it was inspired by, a lot of reading, but I was also... but then, have to ask, what makes that so appealing to, and, it's just, I guess to be able to try out, try out different lives then, than the one you currently have.

Other participants, engaging in a myriad of play activities, echoed the sentiment of trying out new things and exploring interests, ideas, and possibilities. These quotes all reflect the 'safe' nature of this form of play, where within a playframe the participant can toy, tinker, and daydream without fear of serious consequence.

P7P9 (Male, 25, Canada)

Racing games were my strong point, and I truly believed my high ability and persistence in a racing simulator made a much better driver of me. It also sowed the seeds for an interest in mechanics and motor sport.

P15P15 (Female, 60, USA)

It allows you to travel new and different paths in a hopefully safe way--a "play with ideas" sort of stance.

P16P8 (Female, 38, Canada)

Play during childhood always involved a lot of imagination, thinking of 'what is possible', 'what would happen if'.

The theme of exploration was pervasive throughout childhood all the way to adulthood. As children, my participants described stretching their capacity to run, climb, and jump. They forged friendships and negotiated complicated, dramatic, play scenarios, as well as pushed their physical limits with structured sports. Rule creation and alteration initiated by participants ensured an even playing field as they sought fairness in their activities. In adolescence, structured sport and social games such as Truth or Dare (a game in which players take turns choosing to either reveal a truth or enact a dare as directed by another player) furthered the pursuit of exploration. Also arising at this time of life was a new form of explorative play, deemed 'dark play', which encompassed activities such as experimenting with drugs and vehicular speeding. Adulthood saw exploration in the continuation of games allowing participants to try on new roles and identities, and seeking opportunities to engage in sports with like-minded people striving to be their best. The drive to explore led participants to encounter and engage in risky activities where they could have been (and sometimes were) injured during their play. Unanimously,

participants that engaged in risky activities were dismissive of the risk and either failed to even notice it as children, or thought it made play more fun. There was a consensus that yes, you may get hurt, but it was worth it, because you were having *fun*.

It is no surprise that in exploring their bodies, environments, friendships, and future selves, participants also linked play to health and wellness. Wellbeing emerged as a theme across the lifespan, largely focusing on positive affect in childhood, maintaining and creating social connections in adolescence and adulthood, and primarily contributing balance to their lives in adulthood.

4.2.2 WELLBEING

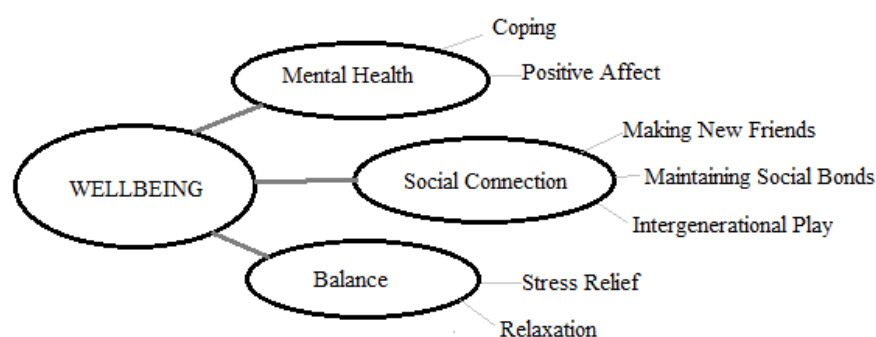


Figure 6: Coding structure for the theme ‘Wellbeing’

The benefits of play during childhood are commonly linked to the domains of physical activity and education. In this study, only three participants mentioned the physical health benefits of play (and all did so during the ‘adulthood’ portions of their interviews), but all participants engaged in physically active play as children. For many of them, this activity continued into adolescence, but physically active play was not as universally engaged in during adulthood. This does not, of course, mean that participants decreased their physical activity; it only implies that for some of them, physically active pursuits ceased to be considered play.

Social connections become the main focus of adolescence and it is no surprise that participants recalled their early teens as time spent with friends. The activities they undertook as play at this time being less important than the people they undertook those activities with. Still, participants in the extremely playful categorization retained robust play repertoires and were attuned to their need and love for play, refusing to relinquish it for the sake of societal norms. It is interesting that, in reflection, some participants believe their social conversations with friends

were, in fact, play though they never would have considered it so at the time. Other participants were adamant that their conversational behaviours were not play at all. The reasoning behind the sudden disconnect from play is examined more in depth under the theme of Stigma: however, in this section I will explore the perceived benefits participants feel they receive from their time spent playing.

Adulthood was characterized with the introduction of work, responsibilities, and the corresponding stressors that accompany having duties and deadlines. Participants maintained the social aspects of their play, but now mental health benefits were being recognized more often as well. Reflecting on the role of play across their lifespans, participants expressed holistic and complex webs of influence where play contributed vital components to their lives, such as joy and coping in the face of adversity. They then further underscored a more powerful message: that play is central to life.

Mental Health:

Participants emphasized play's contribution to mental health, time and time again. Happiness, in particular, arose in every interview. In my coding, I designated Mental Health as a category, primarily made up of the codes Positive Affect and Coping, yet there is some overlap with Balance, another category. Balance is comprised of Stress Relief and Relaxation, i.e., participants recounted the relaxing and stress-relieving effects of play in relation to both their mental health, and in maintaining equilibrium in their lives. Finely nuanced, maintaining equilibrium via pursuit of playful relaxation is different from stress relief in terms of reclaiming energy levels and making time to balance different needs such work related productivity and family time. In contrast, mental health was most often spoken of in terms of emotions—happiness, depression, and coping. In a nutshell, Balance is about what you do, and mental health is about how you feel. Participant 13 helps show the differentiation:

P13P17 (Female, 59, USA)

I think laughter is healing, in part because it creates distance from harmful situations, but also because it can jar you out of a negative perspective into a positive one. Play allows me to laugh, socialize, relax, get distance on situations, allow my subconscious to work on writing projects.

Here we see the divide between the constructs of healing, creating distance, and positivity, and those of socialization, relaxation, and subconsciously letting ideas percolate. On the one hand, healing, distance and positivity are creating a mentally healthy state of being, whereas on the other hand, the participant is balancing work and duty with time to see friends, time for relaxation, and taking a break from the conscious focusing on projects. Continuing with the category of Mental Health, no emotion was mentioned more than happiness.

Happiness (positive affect):

Positive affect, or happiness, was prominent from childhood to adulthood and featured in nearly every participant's reasoning for their play behaviours. Every participant mentioned the positive affect they gained from play, often using identical descriptors of their experience.

P3L403 (Female, 32, Canada)

Interviewer: What do you believe is the purpose of play and when I say that, I'm thinking like, childhood, teens, adulthood, like, in general just why do we do this?

P: I think one its fun, like it makes you happy, it makes you feel good

P7P29 (Male, 25, Canada)

It promotes good mood, a sense of belonging and purpose. Occasionally I am in a good mood, I'd say it's a requirement for sustaining play.

P11P16 (Female, 20, Argentina)

Being playful makes me feel happier, makes me feel good with the people around me and myself.

P14P21 (Female, 58, Canada)

What does play do for me? It makes me happy, helps me learn, opens me to interactions with people, animals, and things. It relaxes me, fires me up and gives me much to think about as a student of play.

P15P10 (Female, 60, USA)

What does it do for me? Just makes me feel good, feel connected to others when we share a laugh.

P6L204 (Female, 34, Romania/Canada)

I think it gives me, it makes people laugh, it makes me laugh, it makes me feel good, it just keeps me in a good mood, positive.

It just makes you feel good, seemed to be the consensus, the bottom line of why we play across our lifespans. I was left with the impression that even if play did not contribute to physical, emotional and social growth, even if it didn't provide stress relief or relaxation, increase our productivity or contribute to our health, people would still play. In the face to face interviews these descriptions of feeling good, of just being happy or having fun, were often accompanied by disarming shrugs as if the proclamation was just simple and sweet with no other words necessary.

Mental Illness and Negative Moods:

During the interviews a trend arose concerning mental health. Seen from both sides of the coin per se, positive mental health was deemed both a facilitator and by-product of play, and mental illness was seen as a barrier to play and considered incompatible with play. My participants' stories articulated how they could not play when they felt sad or depressed. Other participants expressed that while playing they were able to disconnect from their depression and gain respite. I asked my participants if they had ever used play to get themselves through a difficult time. Not all of them had, but participants agreed that it was easier to play when they were feeling cheerful.

P3L322 (Female, 32, Canada)

I think when you're upbeat it's a lot easier to be in that kinda playful mindset and it just comes a little easier, yeah.

P7P15 (Male, 25, Canada)

Yes, but it was a bit escapist usually. It is difficult for people to cheer me up.

P18P22 (Female, 70, USA)

I loved my childhood play experiences and can't remember being unhappy or sad until high school. During that time I developed several problems. However, I believe it was my ability to laugh and enjoy things that these were mitigated.

Two participants, in particular, mentioned struggling with depression. One of them expressed his depression as being a barrier to play, whereas the other articulated how playing allowed her moments of escape from her struggles. Here I asked Participant 7 if he considered himself to be a playful person. His response was short and to the point:

P7P27.5 (Male, 25, Canada)

Not much for the time being (depression).

P14P14 (Female, 58, Canada)

In the last decade I have had both a serious illness and a depression and both times I struggled with the idea of play; feeling I had lost the ability to play, that play was lost to me. During my chemotherapy puzzles helped me; it was not demanding play and the quiet hours shifting shapes and colours helped me get through the days. During my depression I would walk my dogs for hours in the woods, aimlessly wandering singing to myself, observing the flora and fauna and gradually when I began to recover I realized how life saving those walks had been. Beauty and nature helped to lift me beyond the narrow black world of despair.

Further into Participant 7's interview, he elaborated on the conflict between depression and play and poignantly opined on the loss of play:

P7P40 (Male, 25, Canada)

I believe, it is a sad day when a person loses the motivation to engage in play. When nothing is interesting enough to command curiosity, of equal and opposite magnitude. I'd link most of it to depression or mental exhaustion of some sort. Though I'd blame the outlet availability rather than question the motivation/creativity of the individual. Balanced play should always be part of the routine, this deficit is surely amongst the worst kinds of poverty.

Balance:

Stress had a similar effect on participants, though it seemed easier for participants to engage in play despite it. The causes of stress will be outlined more fully in the Stigma section of this analysis; here I will provide quotes and stories from participants in how play provided relief from the stressors they faced. The benefit of play in stress relief was often expressed as the opportunity to disconnect or take a break from situations causing stress so that the participant would feel refreshed and ready to take on their life after engaging in play. This engagement had the effect of providing balance, where stress would tip the participant into a negative state, and play would lift them back into a positive state.

P2L408 (Female, 28, Canada)

...with the playing D&D once a week you have this absolute place of stress relief, even if it will mean that you will have to do something later, it means that you're in a mindset

where you're like, *okay, this is no longer everything I've ever done is this work, like nothing else exists*, it's like *something else did exist, and now I'm relaxed and now I can sit down and write this, this thing*. And I often find that if I'm having trouble, say, formulating an argument for a paper or something what I should do is I should go and make some jewellery or go and write a story that's completely unrelated or go and draw a picture or something like that, or even, you know, there's a ... swing set by my house right now, so you know, I'm getting frustrated I'll just go over to the swing set, and do some ... swinging... for an hour [laughs] and ... I'll come back and I'm like *yes, perfect, wonderful, now I can write my paper*. So, I, I honestly don't know how people who don't do that sort of thing get through life... and I don't know if, if they probably do do these things and I just don't see them doing it.

P3L425 (Female, 32, Canada)

And I know like if I'm stressed or work, like it's not a great day, you know going to work, I feel so much better after because you're playing and hanging out with the kids or if we go see our nieces like you leave and you can't help but smile because you had so much fun doing that stuff. Yeah.

P11P21 (Female, 20, Argentina)

I believe that the purpose of play is to free yourself, forget about the every day and the worries and be happy.

Participant 2 elaborated on combatting stress through play in her description of weekly game nights with her friends. She mentions the idea of disconnecting, which allows for the return of positive affect and return to a mentally healthy state:

P2L318 (Female, 28, Canada)

you know, you've got to coordinate a bunch of people if you're doing an on-going campaign and it can be difficult and so it was like, no, it's at Wednesdays, and you know there were days when it was like, *oh, you know I don't, I don't really feel like going, like I've got so much to do...* and I never regretted going, like, it relaxes you, it makes you feel more prepared to move on, it lets you, it lets you be something else and do something else for just a short period of time, like whatever the issues are in your life, or [laughs] like you don't need to think about those while you're there, it's just... it's just fun, you know?

Social Connections:

Emotional well-being was often linked to the presence of friends and the development of social bonds. Play and being playful did not just help participants meet new people and forge new friendships; it also helped them maintain those friendships throughout their lives. Across their interviews, participants talked about how being playful allowed others to feel more comfortable around them, how it reduced feelings of shyness, and how laughter stimulated a

positive, shared experience. I asked Participant 3 why she thought people played, and she spoke of that desire to be with other people and to engage in something fun:

P3L404 (Female, 32, Canada)

I think part of it too is that it's that socialization it's, you kinda, I don't know, for most people like they really like to be alone but I think there is that craving or yearning to be around other people and, um, and I think that if you're doing that and it's in a fun way, like of course you want to go out and do those things, um, and I think be out of that you get your, sort of your emotional wellbeing and that kind of stuff and I think that's why you do it. Mhm.

Connection was another word that came up repeatedly as participants reflected on their play histories and on how play shaped their ability to interact with others.

P15p15 (Female, 60, USA)

Play is critical in life. It allows for connection, collaboration, a positive energy. ... It creates culture and connection for adults and children.

P10P21 (Female, 47, USA)

In many ways play facilitates connections, helping people become more comfortable with each other. Most usually it just happens, but now and then something structured/predetermined is useful.

Participant 17 observed how play had transformed across his life, raising the interesting point of how certain forms of play become more central at different stages of life. Social play is more fluid across different environments and can be adapted to a large number of settings, making it a more accessible form of play even in structured, professional atmospheres.

P17P11 (Male, 36, USA)

I would say I'm a playful person, in that I like to keep things lighthearted and fun, and crack jokes. Again, it seems to have changed format, from physical to mental and now to social. I still enjoy board games, and to some extent video games, but now my playfulness is geared toward the social aspect. It's certainly a more appropriate format when one's in an office job - no playground or basketball hoop, no time to play a long game of chess while faxes and phone calls are incoming. 😊 But it's fun to joke to each other about pop songs in the background, about getting together for karaoke, recounting funny tales for coworkers. In this way, play serves the dual function of keeping us knit together as a group that would otherwise have nothing in common, and of keeping the atmosphere light and (indirectly) keeping all of us productive.

P18P30 (Female, 70, USA)

I think play changes over time but I don't think it becomes less important or loses its value. Being able to play is refreshing and provides a wonderful social opportunity in any number of settings.

Play at work came up in nearly every interview and will be discussed at length later in this paper, but in this example provided by Participant 17, we can see that the social aspect of play contributed a great deal to the participant's experience. Being playful made work more enjoyable, it helped forge connections between people who would otherwise not have much in common, and it served to maintain productivity. In the next theme, Play as Serious, I will discuss some of the myths of play, one of which being that play is a frivolous waste of time.

Backing up Participant 17's experience, other participants focused more on family settings and explained ways in which being playful strengthened family bonds, helped family members participate and engage with one another, and resolve conflicts. Social play can also be seen as a gateway into other activities as friends and family introduce one another to new pastimes.

P16P12 (Female, 38, Canada)

My family is very playful – lots of laughter, lots of jokes, lots of pranks, lots of games. My grandmother was very silly, as are my parents, my siblings and my nieces/nephews. I believe that playfulness helps create and foster positive healthy bonds with others. It also helps create spaces in which others can start to feel more comfortable to be themselves.

P14P22 (Female, 58, Canada)

I find that as always play comes with/ through my family, in particular my children who continue to play with me. They are now in their twenties, my daughter just hit thirty, but when they visit we get silly and make jokes and puns and even chase each other around, or throw things at each other much like they did as kids. I laugh until I cry. In fact with my kids it seems all I ever do is play. I always have a puzzle on the living room table for our Christmas visits which is surprisingly quickly completed (could I say even competitively so!). Living in the country means that we do outdoor activities like skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, canoeing, swimming, biking together when they come here and if I visit them they often take me to music festivals or various shows.

P15P11 (Female, 60, USA)

Play has a huge role in family relationships. We love to get silly with toasts and roasts when sharing a dinner. Younger members of the clan learn to laugh along with the silly grown ups and even develop resiliency when the teasing turns to them. You have to be able to laugh at yourself. My closest friends have always been playful and could see the humour in things--politics, TV shows, pop culture, etc.

My husband and I have always used play fighting and silliness as a part of the way we interact. It really helps manage the "bumps" in life. He is also silly with our daughters--way sillier than I am in fact.

Relationships, the term used broadly to denote platonic, kin and romantic bonds, and play have an interesting relationship in the participants' narratives. In the theme of Wellness we saw how play facilitates social connections and the emotional wellbeing that comes along with having friends and family. In this next theme, Play as Serious, I will illustrate how play style affects whether or not people become friends, and how having a different play style from those around you can have a negative impact on your life. Play is often linked to childish pursuits, and people disdainful of play may carry the opinion that play is frivolous, a waste of time, and seem outright offended at the thought of a person acting silly. In this theme we will see how play is actually quite serious, and is often taken seriously.

4.2.3 PLAY AS SERIOUS

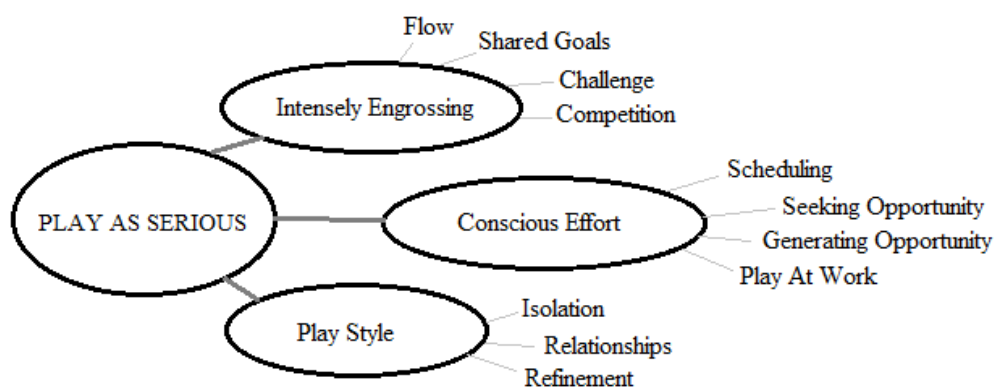


Figure 7: Coding structure for the theme 'Play as Serious'

Play as Serious is a theme made up of the categories Intensely Engrossing, Conscious Effort, and Play Style. These categories are in turn built from the experiences and concepts of flow, shared goals, competition and challenge, seeking play opportunities and generating opportunities, as well as isolation. One of the clearest divides amongst my participants can be seen in this theme: competitive play styles versus non-competitive play styles. Participants who just want to have fun are serious about this intent, too much structure, or having a fellow player who either will not commit to the game or places their desire to win over the shared experience of engagement, can ultimately ruin their play. Conversely, competitive participants spoke that

when fellow playmates were not interested in intense games and competition, their ability to play was diminished and they could not push themselves as hard as they wanted to, thus lessening their joy. Most participants were careful about who they would play with, to ensure that their playstyles matched their playmates'. The serious nature of play operates at multiple levels; however, participants did not just invest in compatible playmates, they were also engaged in creating space and time to play

Making a conscious effort to play was mentioned by most of my participants. This effort tended to come in two forms: scheduling play time and seeking play opportunities. As children, play was largely unsought, it simply happened wherever they were, with whoever was around. During adolescence unstructured play was sometimes more of a challenge, as participants grappled with wanting to distance themselves from childhood, but more participants became engaged in scheduled, structured play. It is also during adolescence that some participants actively sought 'dark play' opportunities, as highlighted in the theme of Exploration. It was really in adulthood that conscious effort was undertaken to make sure that play continued to be present in my participants' lives. I quoted Participant 2 earlier in regards to her weekly game nights, and during the interview asked her to elaborate on the importance of that scheduled play activity:

Conscious Effort:

P2L309: (Female, 28, Canada)

I: Can you tell me more about... um, kind of taking this time out of your week to do that, like was it a really conscious effort, was it really important to do that?

P: It was, we actually kicked someone out of our group [laughing] for not being there all the time. Um, and like, you know, everybody is understanding of like, okay, I have my exams we have to let it go, and like I've had a busy time at work and I can't make it, or like my character can't be there, like.. play for me, or, or you know, or have them fall down a hole and I'll get out next time. [laughs] But no, it was, it was a, like it had to be sort of enforced or else it didn't happen

This quote speaks to the conflict of structured adult life, and need for relaxed, social, play time. The schedule of which had to be enforced, to the point of kicking members out if they could not commit to the weekly schedule, because consistent social play *matters*.

P5P11: (Female, 26, Canada)

I would say that I was not an overly playful person during my bachelors because I was really busy being focused on school, but in the masters/post-school era, I've remembered that play is very important and fun. Examples of being playful now: weekly board game nights with friend and family, still participating in organized play (choir, skating), playing flash games on the computer, lightsaber duels, reading, going to the playground at 9pm (hoping there are no kids or cops), going on "adventures", like camping, visiting the science centre, [historical park], [park], the ... waterpark, bowling, mini-golf...

Participant 5's list of play activities is an example of some of the litanies I collected during the interviews. Not all participants had such robust play inventories, but many engaged in play in a myriad of ways. The conscious effort of *making time* for play and seeking play opportunities is displayed in the quotes from Participant 5 and the next few participants:

P15P16: (Female, 60, USA)

I think more often than not, it just happens but I am also open to the opportunities and aware. I try to "leave space for play" in my life by not overbooking my life.

P11P11: (Female, 20, Argentina)

I never felt I was too old to play, and I think I never will, and if that happens one day, I want everybody to remind me how important play is. On the contrary, I'm always looking for play, in any way I can.

These quotes show how participants strive for balance between keeping space open for spontaneous play, and also consciously seeking out play opportunities. Spontaneous play carries its own lightheartedness, the surprise and delight of a moment of play springing into creation, but because of its nature, it cannot be planned.

Intensely Engrossing:

Intensely Engrossing is a category made up of codes including challenge, shared goals, competition and flow. These aspects of the category all contribute to how seriously participants viewed play. Many of these codes contribute to other themes, for example challenge, competition and shared goals often overlapped with Exploration, as participants tested their limits during childhood and adolescence. However, the assignment to this theme is derived from the emotion they felt *while* engaged in testing their boundaries was intense focus, and this focus allowed them to enter flow states. For some participants, the intensity of play made the experience more fun

and motivated them to continue their engagement. Many participants articulated to me that this serious focus was part of what made play *play*:

P14P19: (Female, 58, Canada)

I know as a small child I took all my play as absolutely seriously and as real, how can that not translate to what I do now, that as an adult playing I can take myself as seriously and believe as much in the reality of my play. Actually it is not really play if you don't take it seriously.

Challenge:

Another aspect of Intensely Engrossing was challenge. Participants often remarked that they found certain play activities to be challenging, which motivated them to pursue further engagement and seek to achieve mastery. Challenge was seen as both a motivator as well as the spark that prompted a participant to play. I noticed that across this theme there was very little transition: across the lifespan from childhood to adulthood, the influence of challenge never seemed to falter.

P7P34: (Male, 25, Canada)

Definitely in most of my jobs I tried hard to become a team player and acquire the skills for the task. The purpose of the game was to excel and outrank, learn all the secrets, etc... and hopefully move on to greater objectives at regular intervals.

P18P15: (female, 70, USA)

We also skied a lot at the country club where there was a rope tow and a small to medium size hill. There were a couple of places where we could practice jumping which I always found was a fun challenge and eventually became quite good at it.

P6L71: (Female, 34, Romania)

...but other games we had, um, two sets of stairs, one on one side of the school and one on the other side of the school. One was for the students and one was for the professors, the teachers, the instructors, and we were not allowed on those set of stairs, but, guess what? We would go, of course. So we would try not to get caught by the teachers and we would count how many times you went and at the end of the day there was a champion.

At the end of Participant 6's quote, she draws on another facet of the Intensely Engrossing theme, that of competition. Competition was quite similar to challenge, though challenge was often experienced as a solitary pursuit to better oneself, whereas competition tended to involve an external pursuit to better oneself in comparison to others. There is clearly

overlap between the two areas, but I find that challenge aims to constantly improve, whereas competition is more about winning over another, no improvement necessary so long as one person comes out ahead.

Competition:

Among participants, the presence of a competitive nature in one's play ended up being quite influential as to how play transitioned during adolescence. Participants who were not interested in competition found themselves on the outside of athletic sports and often turned to other pursuits, generally intellectual in nature. Competition was often linked to being serious, however some participants experienced no issue blending joyfulness, seriousness and play all together:

P12L239: (Female, 57, USA)

my husband I probably play some form of European board game 3 or 4 times a week, in fact on Saturday we played a four and a half hour game and it is stressful because it's a competition but its joyful because you're problem solving and planning ahead

P2L190: P2L196: (Female, 28, Canada)

the dojo was very serious, like very competitive dojo and people had fun, but it was.. you know, we're striving to be the best of the best and super serious and all this sort of thing and the, the dojo that I had been at before for my, my Judo, it was at a community centre ... And, so, it was like all ages and this sort of thing and so you had like little kids, right? And so you had to, there has to be an element of play or else you can't have little kids doing it ... and... yeah, like you need to be in a situation where you can have a balance between serious practice and fun and, and it's actually kind of wonderful if your kid starts being whatever someone just picks him up [laughs]

Participant 4 told me her experience with a daily competition involving her school's back field and how there was a hill at the very back that every student wanted to hang out at:

P3L81: (Female, 32, Canada)

P: And it was fabulous, and that was the place where everybody wanted to go. And yeah.

I: Did you have to race?

P: Oh yes.

I: Our territory.

P: Yes, and you'd claim your little, your little, your house or fort area and, and it was like, *you don't get to go in there*, and I remember I think there was stuff with, I think it was like pinecones and rocks, and then people were like trying to take them, and it was a very big deal, yeah. And I don't remember what it was for but it was like, you had to have those things and hide them. Yeah.

Her experience touches on complex competition. There is first a race to acquire 'territory', and then the subsequent competition to hoard pinecones and rocks, to steal and guard them as if they were precious currency. The entire play frame containing this experience is both competitive and serious in nature, without compromising the fact that it is play. For other participants, competition *did* diminish the experience of play, either by taking away the enjoyment of it, or by the competition fostering a hierarchy where some participants were left out of play due to their non-competitive natures.

Whether a play activity should be competitive or non-competitive seemed to generate conflict in a manner that no democratic rule altering could solve, whereupon play activities were portrayed by participants as being competitive or non-competitive with no grey area in between. This was most vividly seen in dialogues surrounding structured sport. Several participants explored the notion of competition in sports from different perspectives:

P1L528: (Male, 21, Canada)

But, I think, yeah, like their example would be they definitely missed that level of competitiveness in junior hockey whereas, university hockey at that, the ACC level, not so much the [team] here, but it's kinda of, it's a different style of hockey and I think some of them adapt better to that and its, it's kinda the same way I'm talking about with like the high school hockey to a rec hockey where its, you know, nobody takes it that seriously, and if you do kinda take it too seriously you're kinda ridiculed I guess.

Participant 1 is describing how recreational hockey is aligned more towards the "for fun" side of the play spectrum, and that players playing in this league are ridiculed if they are too serious about their gameplay. In contrast, Participant 17 describes a different issue he experienced in school-organized sport teams:

P17P8: (Male, 21, Canada)

I'd say that transition started to happen around age 10-11. By then, many of the boys in school were starting to focus on sports more than less-structured playground games. Basketball became popular among my classmates. The focus of those games became achievement and competition, leaving the "fun" element behind. You didn't just play for "fun", you played to win. And if you DID play for fun, as I did, your skills weren't as

good as the kids who practiced more often, and you weren't taken seriously. In essence, you became the little kid in dodgeball all over again, despite being the same age as your classmates.

Here the opposite issue occurs. School-based hockey is more aligned on the 'competitive' side of the play spectrum, and players less interested in being competitive are seen as being less serious. Both participants felt serious about their intent to play, but their play style is at such odds that they cannot reconcile with members of the opposite play style. This perception, of non-competition being less serious, resulted in social rejection from the sports team:

P17P9: (Male, 36, USA)

By the time I was 13-14, there was a clear divide between the kids who were good at sports (the eventual "jocks") and the kids like me who would have had fun playing, but who weren't wanted on the teams.

Although Participant 17 is a competitive participant, he enjoys the social aspect of play, in his adulthood (as quoted earlier in the chapter during the category of Fairness) he continues to play competitive sports, opting for a more recreational environment in order to achieve the sense of fun he wishes to pursue. However, a certain degree of competition and intensity is required of school-based sport systems and some of my participants found that distasteful. For Participant 1, intensity and seriousness made sports more fun, but he also observed how this seriousness could prompt negative emotions:

P1L260: (Male, 21, Canada)

P: Uh, as I got older, kind of like, hockey always seemed more competitive, and like a lot more, kinda like anger-- I shouldn't say anger, people would become angry at times, not like I-- I wouldn't get angry but like, I always felt like I was better at kind of like realizing it was just a game where other students in my class who were a little more competitive were-- you know like, we have, I grew up with a guy whose now, now plays in the NHL and he would really good at, he was a really good athlete obviously, and we have another guy who plays a high level, like senior baseball right now, he was named, never like a pro, and they would always kind of clash because they were kind of the two best athletes, but um, yeah like, we would have like clashes amongst them

In summary, how participants viewed competition impacted what types of sporting activities they engaged in. As previously seen in the Fairness category, non-sport related competition was often dealt with using rule adaptation if participants wanted to level the playing

field or engage in less competitive play. Comparing adolescent and teen sports teams, which were viewed as very serious, with community-provided sports teams, which seemed more fostering of lighthearted play, we see a spectrum in provision of physically active play opportunities geared to both ends of the competition spectrum. Participants did not often mention engaging in recreation-centre sports during their teenage years. Rec centre environments seemed to become available to participants during their young adulthood years, and in contrast, competitive sports ceased being available to participants once they were out of the school system. Whether participants considered themselves competitive or not is part of their play style, the general patterns or genres of types of play they engage in.

Play Style

Participants often spoke of the people they played with. As children, many of participants reflected that their playmates were friends by proximity, as opposed to shared interests or backgrounds. These other kids lived nearby and thus became playmates because they were there and available, not necessarily because of compatible play style. As participants grew to adulthood, however, play style increased in importance, creating a transition as participants started off with general playmates and then honed in on playmates with harmonious play styles. Participants 3, 7, 2 and 15 illustrate how playmates in childhood were typically acquired:

P3L13: (Female, 32, Canada)

...it was just whoever was outside, gathered together, you'd see some kids down the street and go join them and you know, play tag or your make believe games that you kind of made up, right?

P7P4: (Male, 25, Canada)

My best friend happened to be a grade lower than me. We didn't have that much in common except proximity

P2L103: (Female, 28, Canada)

...you know when you're a little kid and you don't know the difference between a good friend and somebody who is just there and therefore your friend?

P15P1: (Female, 60, USA)

We also had neighbourhood group games like "Kick the can" and would sled and explore the woods together around our houses.

From these experiences it became clear that geographical location played an important role in who participants played with during childhood. Several participants also mentioned having cousins that either lived close by or were visited enough during the year that they became regular playmates. In adolescence, a focus on play style started to emerge as participants began to discuss their specific play groups and what they had in common with other players that cemented their bonds. Extremely playful participants attracted like-minded friends, those who would play with abandon, but they also maintained friendships with teens who were not particularly playful. Other participants befriended those who were in similar mindsets of wanting to distance themselves from play due to its association with childhood. A common thread across interviews was participants finding people who would play the same way they wanted to play.

P7P25: (Male, 25, Canada)

In high school, I also drifted off from my earlier friends, and was a group jumper, no intense socially playful relationships lasting more than a year. (I withdrew.) Then we started smoking together, and eventually shared some of the same friends. I preferred concrete play, or one on one conversations. Never did well in group play.

P11P8: (Female, 20, Argentina)

My play was influenced by the people I wanted to play with or that were with me at that time. What I mean is that I never played the same games with everyone, with a group of friends I would play certain games, and with my best friend I would play some other types of games.

P16P4: (Female, 38, Canada)

When there were other people in the picture, play started in involve attending hockey games, chasing after boys and alcohol. It was not as 'free' in a sense as play with other people other than my best friend involved having to take account social norms and did not feel as free, silly or natural.

The above quotes help show that play activities became more central to engagement in play than mere proximity of people. During childhood, participants tended to play with anyone around them, most often neighbours or family members. Adolescents formed friend groups based around activities they enjoyed and were more discriminating in who they played with, often citing that they had a special 'group' of friends. In adulthood this *choosing of friends* became further refined as participants sought out similar styles of play and playfulness (recall that a main transition from childhood to adulthood was that play often transitions to *playfulness*).

P16P14: (Female, 38, Canada)

I am naturally attracted to (and usually maintain friendships with) those who are playful as well. While I am open to having relationships with others who are very serious, I enjoy those who help scaffold and join in on playful behavior. With those who are not necessarily playful and silly, I find as though I am more on guard or must help them feel more comfortable whereas others who are naturally playful I feel as though we are on the same playing field and they help bring joy and laughter into my world. Our relationships can grow through the playful lens we share. The types of playful behavior or humor, however must be shared as those who are extremely silly or playful in ways that I do not necessarily relate to annoy me very quickly.

P2L513: (Female, 28, Canada)

P: Yeah, yeah, like I can there are people who I can be like work friends or school friends with, you know? And you're cordial and you're friendly and you tell jokes but these aren't the people that you know, you know you won't be able to hang out with them for several hours at a time, and it's... like, it's, there's nothing wrong with them, it's nothing against them, and, but you know, if.. like you couldn't do it! [laughs] You know that you wouldn't, like, in some cases they are the sweetest people in the world and I just.. you know, I'd want to like run out in front of a train [laughing] if I had to hang out for like ten hours or something so, yeah, whereas so, I have these other friends since high school and so it's, yeah! And again I think that's just how people interact, I don't think that's a mark against like how they play or what they're like, like I say most of these people are wonderful people and it's just...

I: It's just different.

P: Yeah! And that's okay, in fact that's great, you need this variety.

P3L308: (Female, 32, Canada)

I: Nice, do you think that is sort of playfulness helped draw the two of you together?

P: I think so, I do, and I think there's times like, I think, I, I am playful but I think he's probably more playful and so then he'll be like '*don't be so serious*' about a few things and so then it helps make a bit more light-hearted and um, those kinds of things, but I do think it does draw you together and you kind of see someone that, you kind of have the same sense of humour the same idea of what's fun, and so then you naturally wanna, yeah, hang out and joke around and do those kinds of things so.

I: Absolutely, and so is that the same with your friend group as well?

P: Yeah, it's, yeah, I think so, everyone's pretty easy-going, just likes to have fun and you know, joke around and laugh and that kind of stuff, so, yeah, and I think that the few that didn't... I don't, you're still friends with them but it's maybe not as deep as a friendship over the years just because you don't have as much in common and, or the same kind of viewpoint of life and that kind of stuff, so.

Participants 2, 16 and 3 discuss how play style influenced who they spend time with. They also acknowledge that they are still friendly and friends with people who are not similar to them, but that those friendships do not deepen or grow, and in Participant 2's case, remain at a 'colleague' level only.

Play style was not only relevant in whether or not relationships deepened, it also influenced how participants played. Social play, in particular, was susceptible to play style, as participants who did not have similar play styles as their peers were often isolated.

P7P20: (Male, 25, Canada)

For social games, I had trouble/distance since college. Didn't see what most people were laughing at, or why I should join in. I constantly saw people teasing/insulting each other, it made no sense, I preferred exchanging facts or discussing opinions. I tried, but my insults weren't "ok", so I stayed on the side line more and more only "coming in" to drop jokes, overrule advice or play a game, change a track...I figured that was kind of pointless and set all my efforts to solo/impersonal types of play/flow through my interests.

P5P4: (Female, 26, Canada)

I remember that I used to get picked on at school a lot and left out of games at recess which was why I liked playing on the playground doing solitary things like the monkey bars and flying fox, or climbing up on the roof of the little huts and sitting there alone. I used to get "picked" as the tire pusher and didn't get to be on the swing as much.

For Participants 5 and 7, having a different play style from their peers resulted in them engaging in solitary play and feeling left out. Having differing play styles is not necessarily the end of all communication, for example, Participant 14 has a different play style from her husband and discusses their differences:

P14P23: (Female, 58, Canada)

As for my husband I always call him Master of Leisure as he is unwavering in his pursuit of extreme sports in his leisure time. Though oddly this creates somewhat of a fracture between us as I am not interested in his sports (motorcycles, kitesurfing) finding them

frightening and he does not read much for pleasure so I find we often play separately. But then there is sex and that is very playful between us.

Even though Participant 14 has a different play style from her husband they still share common ground. She remarked later in her interview that they both love animals and have other shared interests.

From these examples we see that, in adolescence, play style can dictate whether you play with others or alone, but in adulthood, different play styles do not lead to isolation so much as simply not playing together. Similar to the quotes above from Participants 2, 16 and 3, adults are still open to relationships with people of other play styles, they just tend not to spend their ‘play time’ with them. Participant 2 also mentioned the idea of work friends and how playfulness can manifest at work. As previously mentioned in the chapter, play at work was mentioned by nearly every participant. Some manifestations of this came in the form of playfulness—banter, jokes, and pranks, but other participants created games and play activities to motivate themselves throughout the day. Some of these forms of play would be very difficult to ‘diagnose’ as play from observation alone, which brings us to our next theme: It Is Not What You Do, It Is How You Do It.

4.2.4 IT IS NOT WHAT YOU DO, IT IS HOW YOU DO IT

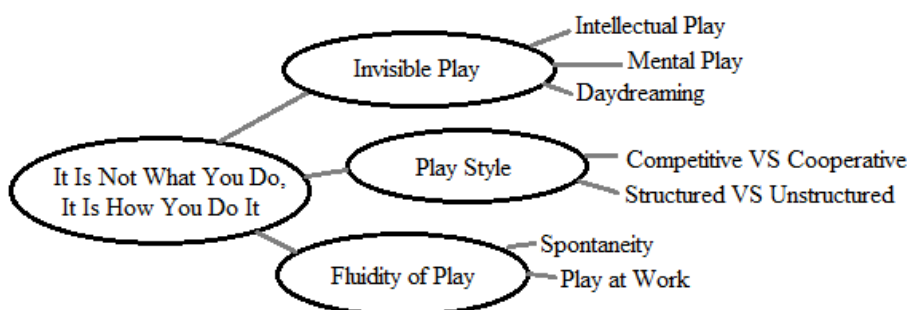


Figure 8: Coding structure for the theme ‘It Is Not What You Do, It Is How You Do It’

Sometimes the same activity can be both play and not-play, depending on the context in which the activity is engaged in. An example of this was presented earlier, with Participant 2’s experience with structured martial arts, where in one setting this became play, and in another setting it was deemed too serious and ceased to be play.

P2L187 (Female, 28, Canada)

I did Tae Kwan Do again briefly afterwards. I consider them play, but I don't think everybody else that does them considers them play, and it, it depend on the gym, the time that I went back to, to Tae Kwon Do, I think mid-way through my undergraduate degree, I don't even remember, but the dojo was very serious

Many of my participants mentioned similar activities, but disagreed on whether or not that activity was play. We have already seen an example of this with intense, structured sports, which is play to Participant 1, but was not considered play to Participant 6, despite her enjoyment of it. Reading also came up as an activity that some participants listed as play, but others considered it to be a pleasurable past-time and nothing else. This brings up an interesting point for thought: we often think of play as something we would recognize if we saw it, but as my participants recounted their memories, they gave me a series of examples of past-times and activities that many people would not consider play, and likely would not 'diagnose' as play if they were to observe someone engaged in them. I have dubbed these examples 'invisible play', which is a category of play behaviours made up of the codes educational play, intellectual play, and mental play.

Invisible Play:

Educational play emerged most often within this category, but I also considered daydreaming, reading, and chores to be coded examples. Chores-as-play will be explored more thoroughly in another category, Play at Work, though I felt it overlapped with both. Invisible Play is more concerned with play activities that if observed from the outside would probably not be seen as play. Participants 5, 7, 8, and 11 all illustrated situations where educational or intellectual activities were considered play to them. These experiences spanned childhood to adulthood, showing that these invisible forms of play are stable across the lifespan.

P5P9: (Female, 26, Canada)

I was a studious type, so I spent a lot of my time doing homework. Looking back on it, some of that could even be considered "playing", like doing an entire math work book or French verb conjugation booklet, without it being assigned, because I wanted to. (As an aside, I finished my masters in January, and I've actually reached the point where I miss school work enough to want to dig out textbooks and do practice problems, for fun! I actually had a ridiculous amount of "fun" studying for the Fundamentals of Engineering exam in April

P7P1: (Male, 25, Canada)

There was a bit of educational playtime that I enjoyed, doing arithmetic exercises.

P8P8: (Male, 40 USA)

On my 45-minute commute home or to work I listen to audio books on quantum theory and metaphysics

P11P14: (Female, 20, Argentina)

But my play changed recently also. A couple of months before I turned 20, I discovered my passion for writing. I discovered that once I started writing I couldn't stop. And I know that writing is also a way of play, a different one. Because I can play with the characters of the stories, I can play with different life situations and resolve them the way I like.

Again, from the perspective of an outside observer watching someone commute to work, write, or do their math homework, I am skeptical that these activities would be labelled play. There were also examples of purely mental play, which is completely hidden from external view. Participants 14 and 15 both provided examples of mental play, or daydreaming:

P14P18: (Female, 58, Canada)

I feel I play all the time in my life and nothing is so exciting to me than a profound conversation (or book) full of ideas in which I can feel my brain going ooh and ahh as my neurons carve out new pathways and eureka moments light up my head. Writing these responses to your study fascinates me and I play around with these ideas as I write happily. I also love nature and being in it and when I garden or kayak I find myself in conversation with the earth or water, creating little scenarios, developing imaginary narratives, fantasizing different lives, different ways of being.

P15P8: (Female, 60, USA)

Yes I think it served the same role as when I was younger as it was away from adults but more private, a more internal pursuit. I could be alone with my own thoughts, day dreaming. I still liked walking places with my friends and being independent.

Mental play is interesting because not only is it completely hidden from view, but it also exists in a place unshared by any other person. This form of play is completely isolated and private and can occur anywhere and during any time as it only requires the presence of a mind. While there are some facial cues that might identify someone as being lost in thought, it would be very difficult to discern whether or not someone was mentally playing without actually asking them.

Many of the above quotes would be considered unstructured play, perhaps with the exception of Participant 5's homework sessions for school that ended up becoming intellectual play for her. There is conflict within the play field regarding whether or not structured play actually is play, given that it is not player-directed. Continuing with the theme of *It Is Not What You Do...* I found my participants largely all participated in both structured *and* unstructured activities and considered both to be opportunities for play.

Structured and Unstructured:

Participant 17 mentioned how his play transitioned from unstructured games in childhood to more structured games in adolescence.

P17P8: (Male, 36, USA)

I'd say that transition started to happen around age 10-11. By then, many of the boys in school were starting to focus on sports more than less-structured playground games. For Participant 2, adding some structured play to her routine meant that she had dedicated social time and was able to engage in more group play:

P2L387 (Female, 28, Canada)

And then, yeah, and, again, like, the structured play was very, very nice, it was, it was... a very good way to, first of all, ensure that you actually saw your friends, that you don't become too insular, it was a way to explore creativity in a, like all my other creative pursuits are very-- like they're just, they're just me, you know?

Participant 10 agreed that structured play has its place.

P10P21 (Female, 47, USA)

In many ways play facilitates connections, helping people become more comfortable with each other. Most usually it just happens, but now and then something structured/predetermined is useful.

Both of these participants emphasized the social benefit of structured play, where structure allows for parameters that allow people to set aside time for play, and be more comfortable engaging in playful behaviour. Participant 12 provided a comical example of adults relearning how to play with loose parts in an *unstructured* environment. Her story begins as a workshop she conducted where adults reconnect with their playful selves. The workshop involves piles of loose parts that the adults are to explore and play with, on their own without instruction.

P12L368 (Female, 57, USA)

Now what is hysterical is that we don't look at them, because they keep waiting for us to stop and they are embarrassed, and they don't feel comfortable, and they are kind of looking around the room seeing what everybody else is doing first, ... it is priceless to watch it happen, and then after about, maybe five or ten minutes it takes them, then they begin to pick up the materials and to look at them, and then it takes them maybe 15 or 20 minutes to get fully engaged, and then once they are fully engaged, we let them play and the room is absolutely quiet except for the sound of materials.

Participant 12's example also illustrates that while some adults are rusty with disuse of their unstructured play muscles, they *can* relearn how to play and take initiative without structured direction.

4.2.5 STIGMA

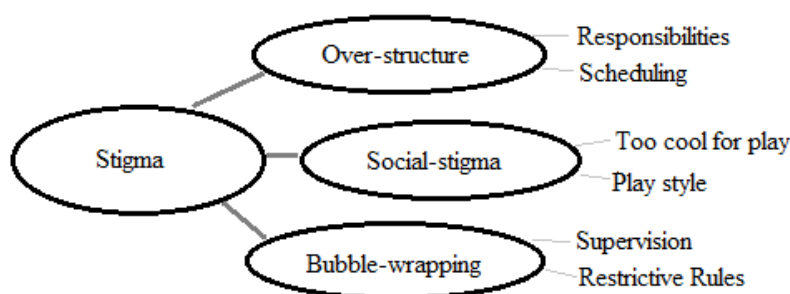


Figure 9: Coding structure for the theme 'Stigma'.

Many participants felt that during adolescence they were intentionally distancing themselves from prior play behaviours in order to express that they were no longer children. Here there is a division between participants who are extremely playful and participants who are more moderately playful, a differentiation explained further in depth during the adult portion of this theme. Extremely playful participants were less concerned with what others thought of them, and continued to invest in playful pastimes and generate playful opportunities. In contrast, moderately playful participants mentioned their conscious efforts to distance themselves from play, and for some, feelings of sadness or regret that they had to choose between friend groups and playing.

P11P13 (Female, 20, Argentina)

And when you start getting older, specially a teenager (at least, that's what I observed here in Argentina), is that they think that because they are teenagers they are, boys and girls, more cooler, and that play is for children.

P14P13 (Female, 58, Canada)

Adolescence was terribly serious for me and I felt at the time I had lost play, or the ability to play. I have a vivid memory of being with my family on a trip to our country place stopping for one of our famous winter picnics (basically you stand around freezing eating sandwiches) when my younger brother and sister started fooling around and I let loose and joined them, swinging them around in the snow, falling down and laughing and I was very aware of how I had let down my adolescent defensive attitude in that moment and how much I missed playing like that.

P3L143 (Female, 32, Canada)

I don't know, there wasn't much... I don't know, and it was strange because as soon as you hit grade 7, like junior high, it was the same friends but then you got there and it was like, no, we're too cool to play tag, we're too cool to go run to the back of the field and get the pinecones and whatever, it's like *'no we're not doing that, we're just doing to walk around and yeah, just talk, right?'* [laughs]. ... So it's like, kinda lame [laughs] Oh well [laughs].

During my interview with Participant 3 we explored the idea of perhaps not play, but still some playfulness during adolescent years. Her story touched on reckless play, a common fixture in adolescent play behaviours, and distancing, but also incorporated a shift in perspective, where what was 'cool' as a teen was no longer deemed 'cool' as an adult, similar to how in Participant 1's story about driving, what he thought was cool as a teen was later deemed immature and an act of play.

P3L151 (Female, 32, Canada)

I: But, in your talking, your hanging out, did you see like aspects of playfulness, like banter, teasing, laughing?

P: Yeah, yeah of course, it's like joking around and trying to, um, I guess there was one, like we would go, my one friend's house it was just really unique the way it was laid out, I think they had two stairwells and I just remember going over there and we played ... but there would be the like the wood beam with the towels so kind of like tag, with towels [laughs] so and you'd kinda that would sort of be going on in the middle of sort of hanging out and yeah, the mom would get mad because all her stuff would get wrecked, right? So. Yeah, and then I think we, we I don't know, it's like playing, maybe playing

some card games ...like Crazy 8s or those sorts of things, like I think maybe doing that but not very often it was more just hanging out, kinda joking around, yeah.

I: Strange how that happens.

P: I know, you're just too cool, right?

I: Yeah you are. You're too cool but the things you do are so lame.

P: I know, very lame! [laughs] Like we're all just sitting in the room, like staring at each other like—fun! [laughs] Yeah.

Social Stigma:

In contrast to the distancing behaviours and change in perception of my moderately playful participants, my extremely playful participants continued to hold pro-play beliefs throughout their adolescence. This attitude became the main difference between participants who were moderately playful (but would give playing up if they thought there might be a negative social reaction) and extremely playful participants (who would continue to play no matter what another person thought of them). Here are a series of examples of my moderately playful participants contrasted against my extremely playful participants.

P13 (Female, 59, USA): I had to force myself to stop “story stringing” ... (my father and brothers and sisters used to make fun of me for doing it)... I didn't really want to stop doing pretend play, but no one my age would pretend anymore and I was considered weird enough anyway.

P4 (Female, 22, USA): So yeah it kind of it is, I guess, like if it would be more acceptable to go out and build weird little things in the background I might not have played Minecraft as much.

P3 (Female, 32, Canada): I think [play] started seeming more important college age, like around 18 or so. 19. Because, then, at some point you stop being so worried about trying to be an adult and then you realize it's important to have fun, too

These quotes provide examples of barriers to continuing play in adolescence. Participants mentioned wanting to fit in with their peers, like Participant 13 above, or being shamed for their play behaviours as reported by Participant 4. Participant 3 shared her experience, echoed by

others, of wanting to be an adult, and having this concept that to be an adult meant not having fun or playing. Extremely playful participants displayed a very different set of beliefs and behaviours:

P11 (20 Female, Argentina): I never felt I was too old to play, and I think I never will, and if that happens one day, I want everybody to remind me how important play is. On the contrary, I'm always looking for play, in any way I can.

P16 (Female, 38 Canada): I don't recall a time when I have felt too old to play. Play has always been a core piece of who I am.

P15 (Female, 60 USA): Play has a huge role in family relationships. We love to get silly with toasts and roasts when sharing a dinner. Younger members of the clan learn to laugh along with the silly grown ups and even develop resiliency when the teasing turns to them. You have to be able to laugh at yourself.

P2 (Female, 28, Canada): ...so I think [my friends] really want to like, put themselves out there as this like hyper-professional, hyper, and you know, I'd rather put myself out—as me! [laughs] If they don't want to hire me that's fine, I probably don't want to work for them! [laughs]

The last quote, from Participant 2, was regarding how her friends would portray themselves as 'professional'—meaning no play, and no evidence of caring for non-work related interests, in response to the difficult economic situation facing new-graduates. Quotes from extremely playful participants exuded confidence, adult playful role models and families, and a strong internalization of playfulness that was central to who they are. The commonality across these quotes involves social modeling, where if moderately playful individuals felt they would receive a negative response for their play behaviours they would cease them, and where extremely playful participants had pro-play family members and felt comfortable being themselves regardless of what others might be doing.

The stigma against play, shrugged off by my extremely playful participants, was noticeable and several of my participants commented on how society shapes play behaviours. As my participants reflected on play as adults they tended to critique mainstream social perceptions of play:

P14P19 (Female, 58, Canada):

It took me years studying to adult play to recognize what I do as play, to realize the limitations of our prejudicial stereotypical view of play as what children do.

P16P27 (38, Female, Canada):

I feel as though society does not value play, which is very sad considering all the ways it has been shown to benefit animals, children, and adults. While society see play as losing its value at younger and younger ages, I do not feel as though play should ever be de-valued.

P17P7 (36, Male, USA):

In a sense, children are the most free humans - they can play, invent, imagine, and only later in life do other people start to place constraints upon them and shame them for being "silly".

P14P34 (Female, 58, Canada)

Never, it is our perception of play that shifts and much of that is due to a cultural bias, in the social stigma that play belongs to children and young animals. I have rarely met an elderly person who does not play or know the value of play. Actually I think those in their third age are more playful than most teenagers I know as they are substantially less self-conscious, and not burdened with the need to prove themselves.

Participant 14 touches back on the perception that some participants reported having as adolescents that play is strictly for children. Many of my moderately playful participants echoed this sentiment, internalized it as teenagers, and later began to shrug it off as they grew older.

P4L125 (Female, 22, USA)

P: So... I'm trying to think of other things that I would have done around that time. Um. It's kind of sad, I don't remember doing that many things just for fun, like playing after 15 or so.

I: Was there something that got in the way of it or were you just not interested, or...?

P: It was, some of it was that, with, with most of my friends they were not, I don't know, kind of trying to be grown up and like not do childish things, um. Oh, I guess on my own I did some crafty things, I was kind of into making jewellery for awhile and I wasn't very good at it, but it was fun.

P1L438 (Male, 21, Canada)

I couldn't tell you why it became less cool but... it's kinda just like, I don't know, my sociology training is like *societal norms*, it just did, it fell out of favour, seen as kind of kid stuff, so I don't know if we were trying to distance ourselves from student, like

obviously we knew like the younger students, the younger grades but, you know, *aw, that's for young kids we don't do that anymore.*

Over-Structure:

During adulthood many of my participants voiced the struggle to find time to play. Play, seen as a pursuit only for children, is not included in the social structures and schedules that adults find themselves ushered in for work or school.

P16P20 (Female, 38, Canada):

Playfulness is a part of me, all the time. It remains dormant, however, when too much structure is placed on my activities or my tasks

P5P19 (26, Female, Canada):

I wish that I had played more during my bachelor's degree because when I look back on that time, I feel like I spent too much time doing homework and studying, especially on courses that I didn't enjoy

P11P10 (20, Female, Argentina):

Sometimes when I'm really stressed I want to go back when I was 5, 6 years old because all that mattered at that age was play and no worries, no responsibilities.

The lament of over-structure, desiring a respite from responsibilities, from proper behaviour, or wanting to go back to that freedom of spontaneous play was a common thread across interviews. Participants reflected wistfully about the freedom they felt they had as children, and often spoke about being able to do whatever they liked during their play time.

P8P3 (Male, 40, USA)

When I think back on my early childhood I think of all of the carefree quiet time, childhood wonder, and close friendships.

P9L31: (Male, 49, Germany)

I had to be back by dusk, and my parents were completely relaxed about me coming back because that was the iron law as we say, there was no way around being late, and they didn't bother really what we did. So we went into the forest, where we lit fires, we had little battles from the other village, and that was complete freedom.

P14P12 (Female, 58, Canada):

Remembering this makes me feel nostalgic for childhood and the freedom to just be whoever you imagined yourself to be at the moment, to have those long stretches of time

ahead of you on a summer day, where life seems full of promise and rich with potential. These days when I have a day free of responsibilities I often find myself fretting at the non-productivity, it takes me a number of these days to finally unwind and revel in the pleasure of strolling, daydreaming, doing nothing.

Participant 14 also reflected on the struggle to allow herself to have free time, and how it can be difficult to let go of the notion that we should be productive all the time, to just relax and play instead. It is unfortunate that this sample did not also include children, as it would have been interesting to see if children perceive themselves as free from expectations of productivity or if they, too, feel burdened by work and expectations to be *doing* things during their free time.

Summary:

Overall, as participants aged, play transitioned in several ways, all of which involved a process of *refining*. Participants recollected that as children they began with the capacity to play with anyone, anywhere, at any time. As they grew older, participants told stories of transitioning into adolescents and young adults, navigating peer groups and social expectations, and how their perspectives and behaviours of play changed during this time. Some participants displayed extraordinary playful capacities; they resisted social barriers and identified strong urges to maintain play, despite the nature of that play evolving, as they aged. Other participants shared memories of faltering during adolescent years and losing their ability to play as freely as they would have liked, although most were able to begin playing anew in adulthood.

From childhood to adulthood, play habits began as being expressed largely through physical movement in childhood, motivated by the need to explore. Social games and structured sports emerged during adolescence, and these behaviours narrowed to mostly social playfulness in adulthood, with each participant offering a cluster of play-based activities they enjoyed with friends or on their own. Within each individual interview, participants refined their range of play behaviours as they grew older, honing in on activities and playful orientations they enjoyed and could share with friends, solidifying their own, unique, playful identities. Most participants reported similar specific play habits in childhood that they continued to engage in during adulthood. Participants that enjoyed sports as children still enjoyed sports as adults, and participants that recollected world-building activities in childhood (Lego, imaginative story telling) continued to engage in these forms of play as they grew older (filming movies, engaging in role-play games, writing). In these stories, personal play styles became more apparent as

participants held on to certain play behaviours across their lifespans while discarding others, and by participant friend selection, where friendships with similar play styles were retained and allowed to deepen, while individuals with differing play styles were often only kept as acquaintances.

When recounting childhood memories, participants spoke of their play habits and activities as spontaneous and constant. As they grew older, their memories shifted towards planned activities and having to make a conscious effort to find opportunities for play. Playfulness, by contrast, seemed to remain spontaneous, and was consistent across the lifespan. The findings of this research were largely consistent with the literature and can be explained by theories of play from a range of disciplines. There were, however, points of contrast and areas of illumination. These consistencies, contrasts, and illuminations will be explored in the Discussion chapter.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to discover how play changes as we age, to seek the value of play as experienced by participants, to find out how adult participants perceive their current engagement in play, and whether or not there are vulnerable points in the continuity of play across the lifespan. The study was undertaken within the discipline of health promotion, however the biases and values of health promotion were purposefully set aside during the interview and analysis to comply with the qualitative process of bracketing. The results of this research aligned with pre-existing literature, particularly data that emerged from participants' memories of childhood play. This chapter will explore: the definition of play as provided by participants contrasted against the definitions of play purported by academics; the main themes relative to extant play literature and theory; and, aspects of wellness, framed by the Wheel of Wellness, which were often overtly implicated by participants' in their discussions of play. One of the difficulties in discussing the findings in a linear manner is that the various facets of play yielded from the data were commonly interrelated across themes. Some of these interrelated pieces, such as stigma, or play at work, will be explored separately, in full, and touched on briefly within the themes they overlap with. Following this chapter, implications for public health and health promotion, including a critique of public health's current involvement in play will be discussed in Chapter 6: Conclusion and Implications for Public Health and Health Promotion.

5.1 CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF PLAY

The most obvious difference between definitions of play, when comparing academic literature to participant responses, is the emphasis on *fun*. Participant definitions of play stressed that fun *must* be an aspect of their play behaviours or they could not be considered playing. The moment an activity becomes fun is the threshold to which an activity becomes *play*. Some academic researchers have been hesitant to claim fun as being necessary to play as they saw having fun as being at odds with the serious nature of some play experiences (c.f., Henricks, 2010), while other researchers take up the opposite stance and believe that fun is mandatory for an experience to be play (c.f., Bergen, 2009). The ancient philosophers Plato and Aristotle both seemed to hold the idea that play could be either fun or serious (D'Angour, 2013; Motte, 2009), but the participants of this study did not dichotomize seriousness and fun, instead they welcomed both states simultaneously.

The inclusion of flow into play experiences was largely agreed on between the literature and participants. Most participants were already familiar with the concept of flow and used the term explicitly. Other participants eluded to flow by mentioning total engrossment in their chosen play activity, combined with the sensation of losing track of time and spending hours in the moment. This is an area that warrants more exploration. Play can be fluid and spontaneous, sometimes only existing for a mere moment (Henricks, 2008); such fleeting experiences of play seem unlikely to spawn flow states, so it is plausible that there is play without flow. What does play without flow look like compared to play with flow? Do these two different states of play have different functions?

Flow can be described as the equation of concentration, plus clear goals, immediate feedback, and the intersection of challenge and skill level, that together equal a positive experience notable most for its erasure of sense of time (Csikszentimihalyi, 2008). In participant responses, flow and play coexisted in multiple variations. Flow experiences during solo play often involved physical or intellectual tasks that challenged the player to push boundaries (the goal) and were engrossing to the point of flow. Flow experiences during social (or group) play manifested in a different manner. In social play, the concentration of the players is focused more on their fellow players, reading body language, altering rules, and both co-creating and maintaining a level playing field. While there may be skills required to play the game or activity engrossed in, another set of skills - social competence and emotional intelligence - are being honed to be able to read fellow playmates and make the necessary adjustments to the game to keep the play experience continuous. The ultimate goal of play is to keep as many players playing for as long as possible.

It is unsurprising that both academic and participant definitions of play prove troublesome for providing diagnoses as to whether someone is playing or not. Play is the manifestation of the trait playfulness, which lies in the mind, away from view (Gray, 2009). This can be readily seen through the 'invisible' play behaviours of the participants, many of whom turned every day activities into play (school work, commuting) or played alone in their heads with their thoughts (day dreaming). Daydreaming is an interesting form of play in that it is completely private. It can be shared with others after the fact, but in its moment it exists purely in a world of one's own making. This private world can be an ideal location to sort out personal worries and problems through imagining different possibilities and rehearsing strategies to

situations that may (or may not!) crop up in the future. In essence, this form of daydreaming is the adult equivalent of the ‘floor is lava’ - where problem solving, creativity and divergent thinking are exercised in a realm of fiction. Daydreaming can also be a source of whimsical entertainment for when a person is bored and in an environment where more overt forms of play may be inappropriate. Not all mental play involves daydreaming, however. Participants in this study also shared a fondness for mental stimulation in the form of intellectual pursuits - playing with scientific ideas and computing answers in their heads for the sheer fun of it. The benefit of this invisible form of play is that it requires no props or tools, it can be undertaken anywhere and costs nothing to engage in.

The lasting impression fostered by the participants’ definitions of play was that play invokes a particular sense of joy that is uplifting and deeply motivating. Though the results of this study are not generalizable (and are not meant to be), future attempts to define play should take care not to neglect this aspect of play, as it is possible that fun is a pivotal characteristic of what separates play from other states and orientations. A detailed analysis of happiness and play is presented further on, in the theme of Wellbeing.

Lay conceptualizations and definitions of both adult play, and to a lesser extent, adolescent play may be subject to stigma. The stigma against adult play in Western societies has been articulated by play scholars as the product of Protestant influences and the values of industrial growth, which promote arduous labour and productivity over lighthearted fun (Cross, 2008; Henricks, 2008). In a capitalist society, there is still heavy emphasis placed on an individual “being productive”, a stance that disproportionately values work and pushes play to the fringes of acceptable behaviour. Yet, play and productivity are not at odds: examples of this can be found from the participants in this study, who used play *during* work to create games that would motivate them to work faster and more effectively. Some forms of play may indeed be frivolous, may involve disconnecting from productive work, and these forms have become overgeneralized as the mascots of play (Barnett, 2007; Proyer, 2012). This focus on certain forms of play over others predisposes some individuals against the notion of play simply because they have not been exposed to types of play that resonate with their own play styles. The inclusion of invisible play may also obscure the full range of what play can be, leaving the more overt forms of play to take centre stage. In particular, loud, silly, unruly play tends to garner the most attention and has gained a reputation for inciting poor behaviour (Peeters, 2007). Much as

there are play styles for competitiveness and collaboration, I believe there are play styles for chaos and order that can be seen most vividly in an individual's preference for either structured or unstructured play.

Many adults *do* seem comfortable with the notions of play and being playful, however. Pranks, teasing, and banter are among many ways that adults express playfulness in ways that would not be categorized as leisurely or recreational pursuits, as they exhibit the spontaneity and fluidity of play, as opposed to structured, time-bound activities. Conversely, several participants in this study also overtly mentioned that some structure can be helpful in coaxing inhibited individuals out, and allowing them to become comfortable with playing. Using structured forms of play to ease self-conscious adults into playing shows that a person can become more playful over time with the right encouragement and environment. Recall the example given by Participant 12 that involved a series of workshops she ran on adult play where adults required more instructions and wanted to know 'what do I do?' before they felt confident enough to engage and eventually switch to free play. It would be interesting for future research to investigate how people who self-report low levels of playfulness define play and conceptualize play. Would there be patterns in their definitions? Do they have a narrow conceptualization of play or is there a particular aspect of play they are adverse to? Do they wish they were playful (or that others were not)?

5.2 PLAY AS EXPLORATION

The theme of play as exploration is widely supported by academic literature across a range of disciplines (LaFreniere, 2011; Burghardt, 2010; Henricks, 2008; Winther-Lindqvist, 2009; Lancy & Grove, 2011; Bergen, 2009; Woolfolk et al., 2010). Differing disciplines focus on different facets of exploration (social, physical), and how play-based exploration contributes to development, primarily childhood development. The results of this study help tie all of these disciplines together and locate play as a foundation to wellness. Across interviews with participants, exploration was experienced across multiple domains: social, physical, and introspective.

In social play, study participants reported group play with peers more often than family play, though there were many instances of both. In their group play, participants often created new worlds, negotiated rules, and explored the idea of fairness and boundaries. These forms of

play help develop the child's value system and cultural orientation as they construct and deconstruct meanings taken from the world around them (Woolfolk et al., 2010). Participants often discussed incorporating ideas that they read about in books, or watched on television, into their play, but they also created worlds simply from their imagination. Media is often portrayed negatively and as a barrier to play, however participants in this study used what they learned from media outlets to try new possibilities and ideas, shaping them and exploring them, and making them their own. Often the games that children created, inspired by media, became very physical games, variants of tag such as Cowboys and Indians (two groups of children chasing one another in territorial battles), or pretending to be wizards from Harry Potter and running around casting spells on imaginary foes.

Physical exploration during play was readily seen across all interviews, where participants described running, climbing, swimming, and jumping during their childhood years. As participants discussed play across their lifespan, their physical explorations were increasingly confined to structured sports, though a couple of participants mentioned they rode their bicycles around town with their friends. The desire to engage in physical exploration continued to taper in adulthood, however it is important to note that just because a participant did not consider physical activity to be play, it does not indicate that they have abandoned physical activity altogether. Play changes as we age, it evolves and refines relative to life experiences and circumstances. Across these interviews, participants recounted the strong push to be active, and the idea of physical activity being fun seemed to drop off in adolescence in favour of social exploration.

The transition of play from physical exploration in childhood to social exploration in adolescence is best explained by Erik Erikson. The fifth stage of psychosocial development, according to Erikson, is that of identity versus role confusion (Erikson et al., 1959; Woolfolk et al., 2010). During this stage, adolescents strive for identity both individually and through their peer group. Noticeably, participants recollected stories of striving to 'fit in' with their group of friends, and having to either adjust their play activities accordingly, or specifically aligning with friends who would play the same way the participant wanted to. Peer groups are important during adolescence as a source of social connection, influence, and social development (Woolfolk et al., 2010). Given that people are able to foster and maintain social relationships and positive bonding through play, we might expect an extremely playful adolescent to experience

buffering from stressful or negative situations, greater than their lesser-playful peers. Research in this area shows that playful adolescents *are* less affected by stress (Hess & Bundy, 2003), but that playfulness may hold an indirect role in stress management by prompting adolescents to engage in more play behaviours, feel happy about their play behaviours, and thus mediate the adverse effects of stress (Staempfli, 2007). Other research indicates that highly playful adolescents report better self-confidence than their less playful peers, which likely influences their perception of stressors as within their control (Staempfli & Mannell, 2005). Playful participants in this study did have positive memories of their adolescence, though a minority of participants mentioned hiding their playful tendencies from some friends, and only indulging in their play with ‘best’ friends or as solitary pursuits.

Another explanation for engaging in social play during adolescence is that through play, adolescents can practice and try on new versions of themselves through imaginary play, and in doing so help hone their visions of what type of person they want to become (Bergen, 2009). Examples of this social exploration can be seen in the participants who engaged in world-building activities as teens (drama, or story-telling), and in adolescents who played experimentation games like *Truth or Dare*, another form of testing boundaries and figuring out where they fit in. Building worlds of their own allowed participants to experiment with creating laws, societal structures and infrastructure, depending on their medium of choice, as well as participating in the worlds they created by casting themselves as characters and trying on new lives and different personas. World building play allows people to make connections between the reality of the now, and the potential of a future, imagined self (Bergen, 2009). World-building play does not require other people, it can be a solitary event through writing or construction play, but participants most often engaged in this activity with others, either collaboratively or in parallel play. Participants continued world-building play habits into adulthood, through mediums of writing, role-play games and day-dreaming.

While most research on ‘play as driving exploration’ comes from studies on children, the building interest on adulthood helps to capture social exploration through play (Fredrickson, 2004). Sociologist Huizinga (1949), theorized that culture itself is built through play, and that the play of individuals (his research focused on adults) create the arts in which our societies treasure and express themselves, great literary works, plays and musical compositions, to name a few (Henricks, 2008; Henricks, 2014). Participants in this study did engage in play, both structured

and unstructured, and often chose play activities that expanded their knowledge (audio books, museums and science centres), built artistic skills (such as writing), or engaged them in crafts, or allowed them to take on new roles and characters (role-play games). Many participants, however, mentioned their sense of *playfulness*, their ability to change an everyday occurrence into play, or the social play that they initiated across different environments (work, school, family and friends). Playfulness seemed easier for participants to engage in, as it can be done anywhere with anyone at any time, whereas play activities often involved specific places, people, and things.

Overall, participants explored themselves, their peers, and their surroundings through play from the time they were children to their current ages (young adult to elder hood). There was a clear transition from physical exploration to social exploration concurrent with aging described by participants across interviews, but many participants who engaged in structured sports, in particular, continued to engage in them into their adulthood. Transitions from physical to social engagement in play revealed in this study mirrored literature and theories of child and adolescent development (Erikson, et al., 1959; Piaget, 1950; Sutton-Smith, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978; Gray, 2011b). Of the themes that arose from the literature, Play as Exploration yielded the most consistent results with current research (Gleave, 2009; Frost et al., 2004; Fiorelli & Russ, 2012; Eberle, 2011), and contained very few surprises, likely due to the fact that exploration is entwined with development, and this facet of play is without a doubt the most studied and researched.

An issue within exploration that is not researched as thoroughly, is the idea of holistic risk. Risk, particularly when studied from health and educational fields, often focuses narrowly on physical risks undertaken by children and teenagers (Kimbrow, Brooks-Gunn & McLanahan, 2011; Hemming, 2007; Brockman et al., 2010; Veitch et al., 2007). Risk in active play is currently a contentious issue as parents and teachers are fearful of letting their children experience risk lest they be injured (Fox, 2004), yet active play is currently promoted as one way of mitigating the risks associated with sedentary behaviours among children (Fox, 2004; Kimbrow et al., 2011; Kriemler et al., 2011; Trost et al., 2008). Attempting to restrain children from more active forms of play does not block children from experiencing risk, as children are adept at finding risk elsewhere, either in unconventional spaces like ravines or as part of social risk, chiefly on the internet (Jenkins, 2006; Frost, 2012; Internet Society, 2012; Turkle, 1995). The internet can be one of the few environments where children can be anonymous and unsupervised

in their play, making it a virtual playground for all manner of social and emotional risk. Social and emotional risk are not just for children; teenagers and adults engage in risky play within these domains as well. Examples of risk from social and emotional domains can include playing Truth or Dare, watching horror movies, reading adventure or thriller books, or pretending to be someone else in a digital game or social media site. Like physical risk, social and emotional risk carries the potential for hazards or genuine dangers, and also like physical risk, children and adolescents must learn to navigate these waters safely as part of optimal development.

5.3 WELLBEING

Childhood memories of play incorporated words of fun and happiness, and while those themes were ever-present across interview foci across the lifespan, the emotions spawned by play were most present in the participants' recollections of play experiences as adults. This transition towards an emotional driver of play was accompanied by the transition of social play becoming emphasized over physical play. Participants often spoke about how the positive affect provided by play helped them connect with other people and build their social bonds.

Happiness and social connection also both contribute to wellness. As seen in the Wheel of Wellness (p. 96) positive affect is a component of spirituality, which lies at the center of the wheel. Social connection contributes to several of the life tasks and subtasks outlined by the wheel, notably those of Friendship, Love, Community and Family. From the participant stories in this study, the positive affect and social connections provided through play also contributed to subtasks of stress management, coping, sense of control, and self-care. Participants managed stress and coped with adversity through play by gaining distance from troubling issues, letting their subconscious tinker away at problems while they focused on their play, and surrounding themselves with friends and laughter which increased their happiness and relaxation. These findings are not entirely surprising: previous research notes that playful adults are more likely to use healthy coping and active coping strategies than their non-playful peers (Proyer, 2012).

The happiness that play invokes, maintains, and motivates is crucial to play's role in wellbeing. Positive affect is a prevalent feature in models of wellbeing (Ryff, 2014; Roscoe, 2009, Ryan & Deci, 2001; Renger et al., 2009), and is often located within an overarching trait domain, for example, emotional health (Myers & Sweenet, 2004; Ryan & Deci, 2001; Renger et

al., 2000). Using the Wheel of Wellness as an anchor for this discussion, play-driven-positive affect can be seen below as influencing multiple areas of the wheel.

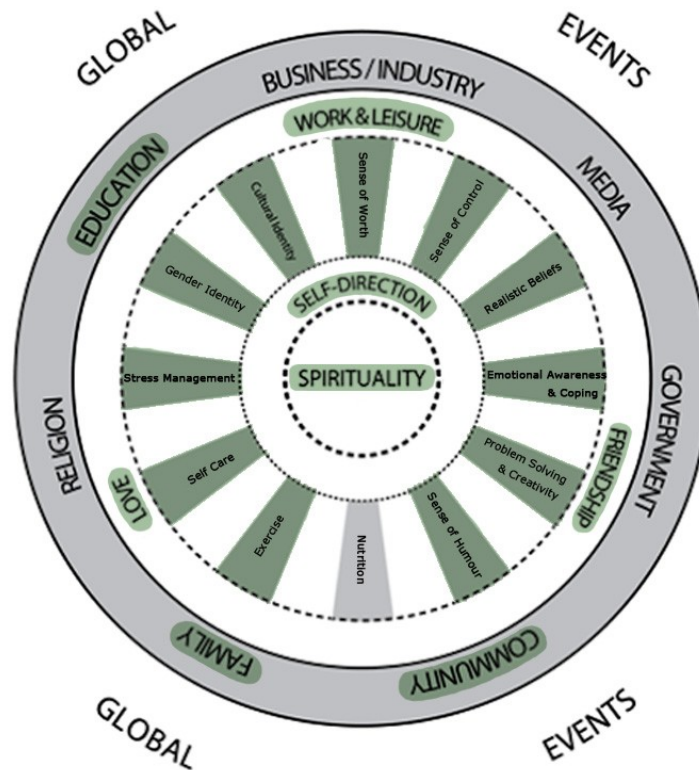


Figure 10: Components of the Wheel of Wellness facilitated by play.

The state that happiness brings also calls back to the Broaden and Build theory, which explains how happy people broaden their minds to new ideas and opportunities and can expand their available resources (Fredrickson, 2000; Fredrickson, 2004). Participants in this study echoed this theory by commenting how when they played they felt happy and open to new experiences and connections with other people. The result of this positive-affect-driven openness was that participants broadened their social networks through play, and reported creating new ideas while playing. Participants also created balance and cared for their mental health through play - achieving happiness during stressful periods of life by making sure they had time to play. The joyful aspect of play is not only important to differentiating play from other concepts, but it is also a significant pathway in which play influences and promotes wellbeing across multiple domains and subtasks. Ultimately, the relationship between play and positive affect leads to the creation of two outcomes: reframing and broadening. A model of this relationship can be seen

below:

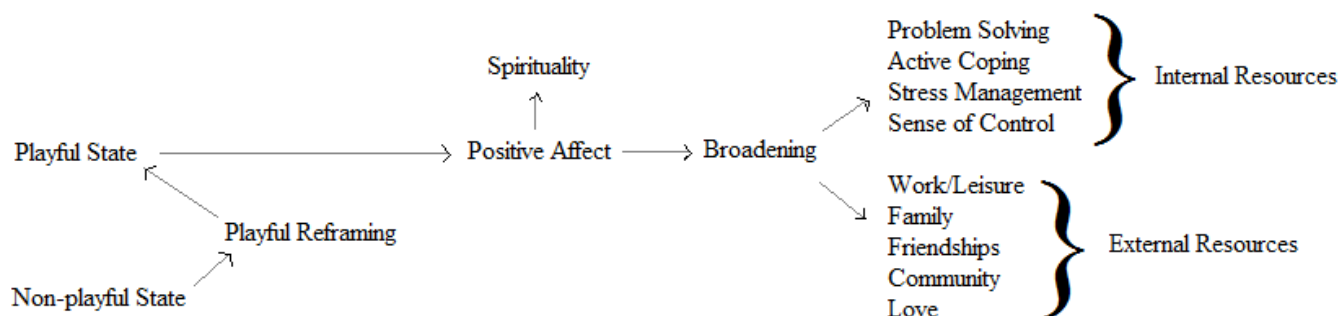


Figure 11: How play facilitates positive affect, and encourages the broadening of both internal and external resources.

Playful states broaden an individual's resources and options for action, whereas negative states narrow an individual's repertoire for action. The participants' stories of positive mental health and play, in combination with Sutton-Smith's research on the polarization of play and depression (Sutton-Smith, 2008), make me question whether it is possible to be simultaneously depressed and playful. It seems unlikely that the two opposing states could be maintained at the same time given that one state broadens while the other narrows. Several participants voiced their experiences with depression and noted how being depressed could become a barrier to play, but if that barrier was surmounted, that play provided welcome respite. Such breaks from negative affect seemed to serve as lifelines, and as tethering moments, that kept participant's heads above tumultuous waters.

Positive affect was ultimately the underlying universal aspect of play that arose from this study. Every participant mentioned the positive emotions they felt while playing, and many of them described how happy they felt just reminiscing about their past play experiences. While there is a large body of research trumpeting the benefits to experiencing consistent, positive affect (Gordon, 2014; Fredrickson, 2004; Furlong, Gilman, & Huebner, 2014; Lyubormirsky, et al., 2005; McCabe et al., 2011; Isen & Reeve, 2005; Schreffrin & Nelson, 2008; Schueller, 2009; Tay & Kuykendall, 2013), happiness still seems to be an emotion taken for granted and is not viewed as a permissible end in of itself in public health campaigns. Positive affect is a core component of every day mental health and wellness, and should be considered a viable outcome

for health promotion-based initiatives, not just those in the domain of play (Allmark, 2005; Scorsolini-Comin & Santos, 2010; Keyes, 2007; WHO, 2004; Pollet, 2007). Even within the field of play, happiness tends to take a background position to the perceived educational and physical health benefits of play (Graham & Burghardt, 2010; Mayfield et al., 2009; WHO, 2004; Fiorelli & Russ, 2012; Gleave & Cole-Hamilton, 2012).

5.4 THE FALSE DICHOTOMY OF WORK AND PLAY

There seems to be societal perspectives that to adopt professional behaviour, one must be serious, responsible, and dutiful (van Mook et al., 2009a), and that there is no room for playfulness within a professional environment. This perception of play clashing with professional behaviour is likely due to the concept of self-regulation, in that professionals are supposed to self-regulate their behaviour, and playfulness is often portrayed as a wild abandon of delighted indulgence (Swales, 2003; Henricks, 2008). Participants in this study did not subscribe to such a dichotomy, and provided multiple examples of how play at work bolstered their experience and increased their productivity and happiness at the same time. Many participants recounted how they observed the societal stigma and misconception that to be playful somehow means unproductive, and their stories were often voiced with disdain or bewilderment in the face of such an opinion.

From participant stories and recollections it is easy to see that being at work does not in of itself provide a barrier to play. Participants played both while at work and with those they worked with. The curious perceived dichotomy of work and play can be found back to the time of Plato, who scorned the divide and argued long that one whose work was play lived a life transcended over others (Ardley, 1967). Work is defined by dictionaries as either a task or effort that requires either physical or mental capacity to achieve some sort of objective (“work”, n.d.). From this definition, taken from the Merriam-Webster dictionary and corroborated with the online dictionaries from Cambridge and Oxford, it is easy to see that work is not play, but that there is nothing about work that would prevent play from taking place. Work is not done for its own sake, it is done for an objective or result, in stark contrast to play, which is done simply for itself. However, moments of play can squeeze into work by influencing the environment (for example, the playful banter mentioned by participants; creating games or races against colleagues during breaks), or by turning tasks into games for the sheer fun of it.

The opposite of play is not work, it is depression (Brown & Vaughan, 2010). Brown and Vaughan argue that play and work are the two pillars of life that support us. With play we are granted newness, spontaneity, a refresh, and with work we are granted a purpose, a means of contributing to something larger. Integrating the two together creates a feeling of positivity and momentum. To play during work makes work more satisfying because play makes us feel good, it connects us to our colleagues and strengthens our bonds with them. Participants echoed this view by giving examples of the coworkers they enjoyed who played the same way they did, or how they purposely made their work environments more playful so their colleagues would have fun.

5.6 PLAY AS SERIOUS

Play as Serious manifested in many ways across interviews. At different points in participants' lives, play was serious for different reasons and along different dimensions. Play was taken seriously in childhood and adulthood, play had a serious impact during adolescence, and continued to have explicit serious implications into adulthood. Why play was serious emerged in terms of the intensity of the engagement in play, the need to have time to play, and the depth of relationships that one could forge with someone who played similarly to them, or dissimilarly to them.

Seriousness arose in childhood as a marker of the engrossed engagement that participants remembered their play episodes invoking. Whether it was being totally dedicated to pushing their limits and stretching their physical capacities or completely becoming an imagined role, participants remembered taking their play very seriously. The shared understanding dimension of this seriousness manifested in the elaborate worlds children created with their peers and playmates, the rules they created and enforced, and the fierce competition their games engendered.

In relation to the Wheel of Wellness (Figure 1), the serious intent with which participants played as children can be understood as contributing to their *sense of control*, their *emotional awareness and coping*, *exercise*, *problem solving and creativity*, and *identity*. Serious intent is part of the drive of mastery, previously discussed in the Play as Exploration theme, and that mastery brings with it sense of control, sense of competence, and confidence. The seriousness with which children *become* the roles they create in their dramatic play lends intense focus towards their playmates and fellow actors, paying attention to emotional cues and body

language. The challenges undertaken in play and the focus required to overcome them drives problem solving and creativity. In this way, Play as Serious during childhood aligns with the founding of wellness through the development of key wellness skills and orientations.

During adolescence and teenage years, the seriousness of play had less to do with the nature of the activities undertaken and more to do with the reactions that other people had to play habits, the play styles considered acceptable or unacceptable, and the social consequences of matching play habits to friends. Social perceptions of play that affected participants as adolescents and teenagers are discussed in depth within the Stigma portion of this chapter. Given the importance of peer groups during adolescence, as raised in Play as Exploration, it is no surprise that participants recalled struggling to align their play with that of their peers. Some participants found they could not engage in their preferred play styles with other people their age, either because their peers disdained certain goofier forms of play, or because ‘play to win’ replaces ‘play for fun’ in school sports. The conflict of play style can have a serious impact on friendships, allowing some to deepen while forcing others to collapse. Play style mismatches also caused some participants to abandon forms of play they wanted to indulge in and pursue new forms of play in other areas. These changes in play can be seen as refining, or transitioning due to circumstances.

True refinement of play style, unhindered by social pressure, is a facet of self discovery. Some participants mentioned a sense of loss when they were shamed or pressured into giving up pieces of play that made up who they are. Ideally, play style should be nurtured in the same manner in which hobbies and interests should be nurtured, as play contributes to self confidence and self-esteem. The spokes of the Wheel of Wellness that this nurturing would promote are *self worth*, *identity*, *spirituality*, and *sense of control*, but depending on how the play style of the adolescent manifests, it may also bolster *friendships*, *community* and *family* as well. In play, teens discover who they are, practice skills, hone social relationships, and build on the developments begun in childhood. Their successes and mastery during play become positive experiences and raise their confidence and perceptions of their competence.

Play as Serious in adulthood manifested across multiple domains. The most blatant of these domains was participant recognition and value for play. Nearly every participant spoke of explicitly pursuing play during adulthood. Several mentioned reaching a stage after their teenage years where their prior decision to distance themselves from play was now seen as folly, and that

during their 20s they realized how important play was. I have categorized these instances as serious because it demonstrates a dedication to play, and an adoption of play into core needs. Participants also recognized that without play they often became stressed or sad, and this knowledge motivated them to take time for play despite busy schedules. Not only were these situations serious due to dedication to play, but they were also serious in that there was a mental health consequence for play deprivation.

During their adulthood, participants explained how they played and were playful in and around the social structures of their life. The concept of being over-structured and having to juggle multiple responsibilities and time constraints was mentioned as a barrier to play, but often participants found ways around this hardship. Leaving space for play by not overbooking themselves with other priorities was one such strategy, creating a sort of 'white space' where play could take root. Another strategy was to consciously create a block of time in their schedule where a participant would play, often with their friends.

Participants voiced how important their play time was, and many expressed how they were constantly looking for opportunities to play and be playful. This dual-tactic of both making sure their schedule had room to play, as well as actively seeking more play opportunities, meant that participants in this study overtly incorporated play and playfulness into their daily lives. Maintaining consistent playfulness contributes to the *self care* facet of the Wheel of Wellness, in that participants both recognized that time to play and have fun is vital to their well-being, and so they made sure they created time and space for it.

Commitment to play may be a possible explanation or contribution to the research finding that playful individuals experience less stress than non-playful individuals (Magnuson & Barnett, 2013; Goldmintz & Schaffer, 2007; Proyer, 2014). Role-conflict and over-crowded schedules are contemporary stressors most adults face (Goldmintz & Schaefer, 2007; Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006), but participants in this study prevented themselves from being overwhelmed by protecting pockets of time to just have fun and play. Another aspect of role-conflict concerns the behaviours expected of individuals performing those roles (Örtqvist & Wincent, 2006; van Mook et al., 2009a), mentioned previously in the discussion about what constitutes professional behaviour. In this study, most of the extremely playful participants simply rejected the notion that professionalism and playfulness were at odds, catered away from jobs where they could not play or be their playful selves, and avoided that form of stress altogether.

5.7 STIGMA

Stigma against play was threaded throughout the interviews and came up across the lifespan, as mentioned within each theme. This stigma took on different forms, sometimes it acted against who was playing (child versus adult), where someone was playing (home versus work), or how someone was playing (societally acceptable past times versus not).

This encounter of stigma was reported across the stages of life: in childhood memories of parents and teachers portraying play negatively and as conflicting with educational goals; as teenage memories of peers disdaining play as a barrier to growing up; and, in adult memories of colleagues and peers assuming play was only for children, and was an unproductive past-time. Not every participant received this negative feedback, however. Half of my study participants recounted playful adult role models (usually parents) who encouraged play throughout the participant's life, and were adult figures with whom the participant could play with. These participants with playful role models never abandoned play during their adolescence and came across as more confident and sure of their playfulness than participants who had received negative feedback about their play habits. This finding was perhaps the most striking of the research—a pro-play adult role model might help set playful children on a trajectory of increased positive mental health and wellness, higher self-esteem and confidence, as well as a stronger sense of autonomy in comparison to their peers. Adolescence was shown to be crucial time point in the lifespan where half of the study participants relinquished their playful behaviours to perceived social norms, and the other half sailed on in playful disregard of societal pressure.

Given that, in this study, there was an even divide between adult figures that supported and denied play, and an even split between extremely and moderately playful participants, it can be tentatively reasoned that abolishing play in adolescence is not simply a natural aspect of growing up. Children are taught to either embrace play as a human characteristic, or to indulge in it only in their early years, with consequences that may shape the rest of their lives.

5.8 IT IS NOT *WHAT* YOU DO BUT *HOW* YOU DO IT

Perhaps one of the hallmark differences between play and recreation, and to a lesser extent leisure, is that play cannot be diagnosed by the nature of the activity engaged in. *What* one engages in is irrelevant, it is instead *how* one engages in an activity that governs whether or not that activity may be deemed play. What constitutes a playful activity for one person may not be a playful activity for another person. Further, what may be a playful moment of engagement at one

time may not be playful the next time. Play is fluid, it is a mental attitude that flows across situations, environments and time itself, capable of being in constant flux. In contrast, recreation and leisure are often deduced by the activity engaged in. Taking yoga classes, joining a curling team or going to the gym are activities that can be considered recreative in nature, while reading a book, enjoying a picnic at the park, or having a spa day could be considered leisure activities. This same list of activities may or may not have aspects of play, we cannot tell from simply listing them, but if we asked people engaged in these activities whether or not they were playing we might discover there are playful elements—or not.

The implication of this finding is that research methods used in the study of play must contain a component for participant check-in, to validate whether or not the participant is playing. While self-reported data is sometimes thought of as weak or infallible (Lance & Vandenberg, 2009; Stone & Shiffman, 2002), for play studies it may be necessary in order to avoid miscategorizing a behaviour as play when it is not, or vice versa. With the inclusion of invisible play, self-report data is possibly the only way some manifestations of play could ever be studied.

5.9 SUMMARY

The data from this study not only elucidated how play transitions as people age from children to adults, it also provided further evidence to support the idea that play is foundational to wellbeing.

5.10 REFLECTIONS ON STUDY METHODS

5.10.1 On the Note of Memories:

It has long been found that memories used in research are fallible (Yarrow, Campbell & Burton, 1970; Rubin, 2000). Research on the accuracy of memories seems to focus on two types of memory: cases of abuse or trauma (Chu, Frey, Ganzel, & Matthews, 1999; Hardt & Rutter, 2004), and the study of everyday experiences (Reis & Judd, 2000, Sobel, 1990; Yarrow, Campbell, & Burton, 1970). From this body of research, certain characteristics influence accuracy of recall more than others. Unsurprisingly, memories of more recent events tend to be recalled more accurately (Reis & Judd, 2000). Moments in life that involve unusual circumstances, or heightened emotion, tend to colour recollections of past memories, so that a small number of very emotionally-charged moments can influence one's impression of a longer-

term situation or relationship (Reis & Judd, 2000). How a participant feels in the moment can also influence the emotions that they recollect from the past, where participants will report emotions from previous memories that parallel how they currently feel (Reis & Judd, 2000).

A counter point to the accuracy of adults recollecting childhood memories comes from Sobel (1990), in his article of adult and child memories of special places. In this text, it is reasoned that childhood experiences cannot always be fully grasped, or understood, until later in life when we have the language and maturity to comprehend what we have experienced (Sobel, 1990). In this argument, the adult recollection adds an extra dimension of understanding on top of the childhood experience that provides a more genuine recounting because the adult is able to express themselves more fully than the child, and can also add the depth of meaning as it is carried across time and age. It is my opinion that the memories of participant's childhoods, in this study, are more likely accurate than not, as most memories concern not specific details so much as routine and frequency of play habits (for example, the participant who would play in the park while his brother undertook swimming lessons, or the participant whose family would go to the lake every summer and her father would pretend he was a sea monster and chase them). The details given that may be more guesswork or embellishment did not influence the analysis, and largely addressed the specific ages participants gave to their earliest play memories (most participants mentioned being four years of age), or the height of objects they jumped off of as children. Aligning participant stories with general trajectories of child development, no participant remembered engaging in situations that seemed divergent for the age they reported themselves as being, so while precise ages may be incorrect, I do not believe estimations were off by much.

Looking back on one's childhood may invoke a sense of nostalgia, and participants in this study reflected on the freedom they perceived they had as children. I questioned whether this perception was genuine, and also whether or not current children felt their childhoods were as free as the childhoods of my participant's. In reading literature from the 1960s to 1990s I was struck by how much the study of play has changed, from adult-focused to child-focused, from acceptance of the fluidity and ambiguity of play to developmental-based and purposeful. What stood out the most, however, in accounts of children's play from 30 to 40 years ago, was the absence of dialogue on risk, homework, structured play, scheduled tasks, surveillance and safety (Erikson, 1963; Schwartzman, 1976; James, 1998; Opie & Opie, 1969; Sutton-Smith, 1977).

While I could not find accounts of children proclaiming their freedom, I suspect this was because freedom to play was not an issue, there was no question of whether they could play freely because this research was conducted before the leashing of childhood began. It would not surprise me if children's perceived freedom has changed dramatically over the past four decades, and that the perceived freedom of my participants was genuine.

5.10.2 INTERVIEW OPTIONS

The multi-method approach I used for interviewing (i.e., written, Skype, face-to-face and phone options) resulted in different findings per method, which was anticipated in the original study design, although I did not predict how the differences might manifest. In designing this study I opted for multiple interviewing options in hopes of meeting the needs of participants by allowing them to express themselves in whichever manner they felt most comfortable with. The most obvious difference between the methods used was that participants who established a face to face connection (via in-person interviews or skype interviews) reported entirely positive accounts of play. Participants who wrote their interviews tended to give more comprehensive emotional ranges, delving into barriers, moments of exclusion, and struggles with health and happiness. This is not to suggest that participants interviewed in person necessarily withheld negative experiences, but perhaps the in-person conversation prompts a more positive account, whereas the written word is more facilitative of a multi-faceted reflection (e.g., due to fewer time restrictions or social conventions, and permissive of multiple episodes of editing or iterative responses to capture nuance and depth). This is speculation. In-person and skype interviews were accompanied by a great deal of laughter and smiles, and the interviews themselves often became playful with banter and jokes. While a charming state of affairs, this did become a difficulty when transcribing the data, as words were sometimes engulfed in giggles.

5.10.3 LIMITATIONS:

The limitations of this study are many. A more experienced researcher would likely have been able to more critically interview participants in order to achieve a richer sample of data, whereas my attempts provided only a general glimpse of play across the lifespan. However, this study does provide a sound platform for future research in this area to build on. The exclusion of children in this study is another limitation, as it would have allowed better comparisons between

adult recollections of typical childhood play behaviours and actual childhood lived experiences in the moment, *per se*. Children were not included in this project due to the extra ethical considerations their presence would require, and the lack of resources on my part to provide the environment necessary for children to take part (i.e. renting an interview room where a parent could wait outside, having a second researcher or assistant during the interview for the security of the child)(Fargas-Malet, Mcsherry, Larkin & Robinson, 2010; Gibson, 2012). The participants involved in the study were overwhelmingly in favour of play, and thus this research misses the voice of people who are not playful and do not wish to be playful. The findings drawn from the data regarding the many benefits of play can therefore be challenged under the basis that these benefits could be achieved from other non-play practices. The sample of participants included 18 people, aged 20 to 70 years of age, and while three of these participants came from countries overseas, the sample was ultimately predominantly North American. This sample provided a mild step up from being entirely homogeneous, however, it is not diverse enough to make generalizable claims on the nature of play. There may be other cultures fully invested in play as opposed to the Western belief that productivity is a more worthwhile pursuit than playfulness.

In contrast, the strengths of this research include multiple interview methods, which facilitated different responses, a lifespan approach which rejects the construction of age-based silos, and utilized qualitative methodology to explore the lived experience. The lifespan approach also allows for links between childhood and adulthood play habits and patterns, which captured the refining aspect of play's transition as we age. Research studies on adult playfulness have thus far focused on quantitative methods that capture perceptions of play without room for real examples. This research, thus, both begins to fill a research gap and is complementary to other adult playfulness studies. The findings from this research provide valuable, fertile ground for future research in child-to-adolescent and adolescent-to-adult play transitions, the importance of playful adult role models, and research methods appropriate for capturing invisible forms of play.

6.0 CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND HEALTH PROMOTION

6.1 On Play and Wellbeing

The variety of play behaviours and activities that arose in this study was surprising. A range of activities spanning a diverse spectrum of areas was expected, but even still some of the gems unearthed, such as listening to physics audio books, were new and amusing. The magnitude of importance assigned to play by my participants was also a surprise, given that so much of the play literature describes play as either taken for granted or disdained (Gordon, 2014; Goldmintz & Schaefer, 2007; Singer et al., 2009). Part of that finding is likely due to selection bias, in that this was a study of play, openly recruiting participants to discuss play, and it is unlikely a non-playful individual would be interested in participating.

The themes of Play as Exploratory and Wellbeing were expected, much of the literature on play from the fields of Education and Psychology, in particular, weigh heavily in these areas (Mayfield et al., 2009; Fiorelli & Russ, 2012; Gray, 2009). Play as Serious, particularly the findings concerning participants' conscious effort to generate play opportunities in adulthood, was an important theme to arise, in that it gives evidence to a desire for play in adulthood. The theme of Is Not What You Do, But How You Do It, is often indirectly eluded to in research that defines play as a mental attitude (Brown & Vaughan, 2010; Barnett, 2007; Eberle, 2014; Motte, 2009), and having clear examples of how that manifests in the real world will help bring attention to this concept. The importance of realizing that play is not an activity, but is a mindset, is that all too often people and organizations assign the word play to activities that are not actually considered play to those engaged in them. This essentially means deciding for someone, or a group of someone's, how they feel joy. It undermines the voluntary component of play, in that only the player can decide when they are playing, and that they can always opt *not* to play, even if participating.

Play clearly has a role in contributing to holistic health from childhood to adulthood. Although play changes as we age, it evolves as we grow, continuing to meet our needs for joy, social interaction, challenge, balance, and most importantly—fun. Participants in this study shared a diverse array of lifestyles, needs, priorities, and orientations. The play habits of each participant were as individual as the lives they led, highlighting how personal one's play style

becomes, changing as we change, refining as we mature, and adapting to our needs and priorities.

The transitions of play during adolescence proved to be the most influential indicator of play during adulthood. Social conditioning from adult role models, particularly parents and teachers, seemed to influence whether participants felt play as ‘just for kids’ or whether they felt comfortable continuing to seek out fun, playful adventures as they aged. Some participants reflected that even though they shied away from calling their teenage banter or risk-taking play, they felt now during their adulthood that those activities were actually playful in nature. It is an interesting puzzle in terms of the definition of play—can you retroactively label an activity play? Can an activity be *unplayful* at one point in time and playful in reflection?

6.2 CONTRIBUTIONS TO RESEARCH:

The findings in this study are important in several ways, both to the field of public health, should it continue its interest in play, and to the larger interdisciplinary community of play scholars. In terms of research methodology, the concept of invisible play and play as a mental attitude carry with them consequences for appropriate methods used in studying play, regardless of the disciplinary lens invoked by the research.

Play studies that aim to capture play in its entirety must fully embrace the nature of play in that it is a mental attitude, not an activity. For research methodology, this means checking in with participants and explicitly asking them “is it play?”, rather than having the researcher diagnose play based on the activity the participant is engaged in. Awareness must be formed that if a study is built around a single activity, or single genre of activity (for example, sports) that play may be missed in the data collection, and any findings may not be generalizable to play as a whole. This is particularly salient for those interested in the area of ‘active play’, which is more about promoting physical activity (as a mitigator of childhood sedentarism and risks of obesity) than it is about promoting active forms of *play*.

For practitioners and program marketers, play as an attitude (not an activity) effects the accuracy of how programs and campaigns are labelled. Marketing for children often uses ‘fun’ as a selling point, and in a health context, often labels health-based practices as ‘fun’ in order to coax children into engaging in them (Alexander et al., 2014). This does not, by default, make these programs play. The usage of ‘play’ as an anti-obesity treatment by Health Canada and other health authorities in both Canada and the US is similarly a label and not indicative of actual

engagement in play (Alexander et al., 2014; Kimbro et al., 2011; Hemming, 2007; Brockman et al., 2010; Veitch et al., 2007). The conflation of play with physical activity is problematic for both domains: obscuring the necessity and importance of having a variety of forms play in one's life, and potentially assigning health and social benefits (i.e. wellbeing) to the physical activity domain that cannot actually be achieved.

Another problem with institutions adopting narrow, or inappropriate, definitions of play is that it runs the risk of certain forms of play being neglected in favour of perceived 'better' forms of play (Biddle, Gorely, Marshall, Murdey & Cameron, 2004). An example of this phenomenon occurred in the field of education, where educational play has taken hold, and where unstructured, free play has become a negative activity that takes away from productive, school-based pursuits that are seen to preferentially support curricular competencies (Pellegrini, 2008; Elkind, 2007). This movement is in the process of reversing, but the impact of such a belief is that many children no longer have unstructured, free play during school (Frohlich et al., 2013; Elkind, 2007; Brown & Vaughan, 2010) or during preschool programs, potentially compromising early childhood development (Gleave, 2009; Alexander et al., 2014; Elkind, 2007). In public health, a similar stigma is building against sedentary forms of play, particularly video games, despite those forms of play having unique benefits, such as bolstering creativity, developing coping skills, and building imaginations (Eighenbaum, Bavelier, & Green, 2014; Biddle et al., 2004; Graham, 2010). Sedentary play activities listed by participants in this study included reading, writing, arts and crafts, board games, video games, singing, and puzzles/logic games. Some of the benefits participants mentioned from engaging in these activities including allowing them to distance themselves from stressful situations, helping them maintain their social connections, allowing them to engage in creative and intellectual pursuits, and providing balance so that they could feel like they have done more in their day than just toil at work.

Play style and program provision is also an interesting area that would benefit from more attention. Participants in this study agreed that play opportunities in school, particularly from their adolescence to their teenage years, largely involved competitive sports, with no 'for fun' activities being offered. Conversely, when they left school, participants noted that sporting opportunities became more 'for fun', and less competitive. This left gaps for several participants, whose play styles did not line up with the play opportunities available to them. This may also

mean that more research is needed to better understand different play styles, and the prevalence of different play styles, to better inform play provision.

From the findings in this study, other future research efforts examining play across the life span are recommended in the area of social conditioning. What percentage of the population is told to stop playing as an adolescent? How many children have, or had, playful role models? Is social conditioning the reason why some individuals cease playing and other individuals continue playing as they age? It would also be interesting to know how self-reported non-playful individuals define play, and what activities or situations those individuals find fun.

Recommendations for practitioners and providers of play are simple—let play be. Instead of attempting to engineer a specific goal deemed attractive by the practitioner, refocus on the *process* of play, and allow it to evolve naturally. There is no such thing as play-for-education, or play-for-health, there is only play-for-play. Recognizing that play is for its own sake, that it is beneficial in all its forms, and that it must be self-directed and voluntary, should help guide play opportunities provided to children and teenagers. Attention to play style, particularly competitive versus cooperative play, could help ensure that play opportunities meet the needs of more individuals, especially those school-aged and older.

6.3 A PARTING REFLECTION:

Play, at its best, is unrestrained, and uninhibited, by the desires and motivations of others. The underlined, underscored, and emphasized conclusion of my participants is that play *makes you feel good*. The dialogues of fitness, of fatness, of developmental discourse, risk and hazard, are academic and do not meet the lived experience of play, nor should they be imposed on the lived experience of play. The irony of forcing play into any particular health or educationally-oriented direction in order to reap a reward, is that the benefits derived from play are immediately limited, and the perceived value of play – in and of itself – societally diminished. The experience is narrowed; the play begins to diminish. An easy example is active play programs, which carry with them an unspoken top-down rule imposed on to the games of children. In active play the play must be active. The moment a child is too tired, the game stops. The play stops. In unstructured play, the game can keep going, it can *evolve*, it does not have to be anything, you can be still, catch your breath, and leap into action once more.

Left to wander, saunter and run on its own accord, play will enrich one's life in a myriad of directions. Play will provide balance all on its own, in a chaotic schedule play can provide tranquility, and during dull routine play can liven up your life with adventure. Play is fluid, that is its state, attempting to capture it and force it into particular shapes denies play its truest manifestation, the characteristics of play, that set it apart from time and setting-bound leisure, recreation and work. Contemporary literature on play makes the argument that children must be allowed to roam freely, I argue that play, too, must be allowed to roam freely.

At the end of the day, the only question that remains for me is why joy is not seen as enough to encourage play. If not for a health benefit, an educational benefit, a *productive* benefit, play is swept to the side, we only focus on it now because of the curious idea that play is salvation from obesity. Why does it seem more important for national health institutions that our children be slender instead of happy? Why do we promote only one form of physically active play and disregard the imaginative, and dramatic play that fuel our earliest adventures? Why do so many adults strive to bend our adolescents into becoming stern, miniature adults instead of growing, lively teenagers that smile, and laugh and take delight in the world around them? Why do we so rarely acknowledge that adults can be silly and play for the sake of play? What happened to joy?

The conclusion of this thesis is that play brings happiness, and happiness is enough.

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Appendix A
Recruitment letters and bulletins

Recruitment Letter for Discussion Boards / Online Groups / Mailing Lists / Play Conference

Hello, I am posting regarding an opportunity to participate in a research study. This study explores how adults remember their childhood play experiences, and how play changes as they age.

To enter the study, participants must be aged 18 or older, and fluent in English. Participation will involve 1 interview that will be conducted in person, verbally over Skype or written through email or messaging software. There is no obligation for you to participate.

If you are interested in participating, or want more information about the study, please contact the researcher, Sarah Cosco, at cosco@ualberta.ca

Thank you for your consideration!

This research is being conducted through the Centre for Health Promotion Studies at the University of Alberta in Canada. The research has been approved by the Research Ethics Board.

Recruitment Letter for University of Alberta Graduate Students:

Study Recruitment: Childhood Memories of Play – We are looking for volunteers (over the age of 18 and fluent in English) for a study on play. Participants will be interviewed in person or over Skype (~ 45 minutes – 1 hour), or may submit written stories about their memories of childhood play, and descriptions of how they play now as adults. The aim of the research is to explore how play changes as we age. Contact Sarah Cosco, MSc Health Promotion at cosco@ualberta.ca or 604-440-2968 for more information.

Appendix B Information Letter

Information Letter
Co-Investigator: Sarah Cosco, MSc C
School of Public Health
Centre for Health Promotion Studies
Ph: 1-604-440-2968
cosco@ualberta.ca

Supervisor: Candace Nykiforuk, Ph.D
School of Public Health
Centre for Health Promotion Studies
Ph: 1-780-492-4109
candace.nykiforuk@ualberta.ca

Background

This research is part of my Master's thesis. The draft title of the study is "From childhood memories to adulthood activities: A study of play". Participants are being recruited locally, in Edmonton, across Canada, and internationally. The goals of the study are to learn how adults remember their childhood play experiences, and how play changes as they age.

Purpose

This study would like to capture the different ways people play as children. Where participants played, what they played, and who they played with, will all be explored through loosely-structured interviews and storytelling. As the interview continues, the focus will change from childhood to adulthood, to better understand how play changes as we age.

You are being asked to participate in 1 interview; either face-to-face, over the phone, over Skype, or, if you like writing, email or messaging systems will be made available. The interview is expected to last about an hour. If you feel later on that you have more to add, an extra interview can be scheduled.

Confidentiality

The interviews will be tape recorded if you agree. In our records, you will be assigned a number and your name will only appear on a Master List that links your name with your project number. This way, any information you give us will only linked to a number. This will help protect your privacy. The tape recorded information and the Master List will be stored in a password-protected, private computer as an encrypted file, at the Centre for Health Promotion Studies, University of Alberta. These materials will only be available to the researcher and her supervisor. After 5 years, these materials will be destroyed.

Your name and exact location will not be mentioned in the thesis or any articles published. Fake names will be used in place of real names and locations will be obscured, for example, "an urban city located in [province/state]" would be used in place of a city name.

At any point in time during the study you may leave with no penalty. You may also choose to not answer any of the questions asked, without having to give reason.

Use of Data

With your permission, quotations and summaries of the interview will be used in journal articles and presentations. Before any material is published it will be sent to you for double-checking to ensure you are being represented truthfully. These articles will be available to other researchers, and decision makers who are interested in how people play.

The information will be used to help decision makers understand why play is important, and what steps need to be taken to reduce barriers that get in the way of letting people play. This information may help inform decisions regarding recreational and park development, as well as decisions regarding working conditions.

Possible Risks and Benefits

Possible benefits of you participating include:

- Adding to research and helping educate researchers;
- Reliving the joy of childhood play experiences;
- Having the chance to share your experiences with play.

There is minimal risk with you participating in this project. You do not have to answer questions you do not want to. You can stop participating in the project at any time without penalty. If you feel any distress the researcher can provide you with helpful resources.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns, or would like to stop participating in the project at any time, please contact either:

Sarah Cosco, Co-Investigator (1-604-440-2968; cosco@ualberta.ca) or Candace Nykiforuk, Supervisor (1-780-492-4109; candace.nykiforuk@ualberta.ca)

If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a participant, or how this study is being conducted, you may contact the University of Alberta's Research Ethics Office at 780-492-2615. This study has been passed through ethical review at the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Panel

Appendix C Consent Form

Informed Consent: Written Version for in-person interviews
From Childhood Memories to Adulthood Activities: A Study of Play

Co-Investigator: Sarah Cosco, MSc C
School of Public Health
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Ph: 1-604-440-2968
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Supervisor: Candace Nykiforuk, Ph.D
School of Public Health
Centre for Health Promotion Studies
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Do you understand that you have been asked to be in a research study?	Y	N
Have you read and received a copy of the attached Information Sheet?	Y	N
Do you understand the benefits and risks involved in taking part in this project?	Y	N
Have you had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study?	Y	N
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study at any time, without having to give a reason?	Y	N
Has the issue of confidentiality been explained to you?	Y	N
Do you understand who will have access to your responses?	Y	N
I agree to take part in the study.	Y	N

Who explained the study to you?

Signature of Participant

Printed
Name

Date

Signature of
Investigator _____

Date _____

Consent Script for Verbal Interviews

Verbal Script for Obtaining Informed Consent

(See references for original script)

“Hello, my name is Sarah. I am a graduate student at The University of Alberta in the Centre for Health Promotion Studies, and I am in Canada undertaking research that will be used in my Master’s thesis.

I am studying adult recollections of childhood play experiences, and how play changes as we age. I would like to ask you about how you played as a child, and over the course of the interview work towards what you do as an adult that might be considered play or being playful.

The information you share with me will be of great value in helping me to complete this research project, the results of which will inform the research community about the value of play during childhood, the experience of play in adults, and what supports, or gets in the way, of play.

This interview will take about an hour and fifteen minutes of your time.

There is no risk of a breach of confidentiality. I will not link your name or location to anything you say, either in the transcript of this interview or in the text of my thesis or any other publications.

There is a potential risk that hearing these questions will make you feel uncomfortable, if this occurs, you are under no obligation to answer any questions and again, you are free to stop participating at any time with no consequence. If you feel any distress as a result of the interview, the researcher will provide resources for where you can access help.

Participation is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will be no consequence.

I would like to make a tape recording of our discussion, so that I can have an accurate record of the information that you provide to me. I will transcribe that recording by hand, and will keep the transcripts confidential and securely in my possession. I will erase the tape after my data analysis is complete.

If you have any additional questions concerning this research or your participation in it, please feel free to contact me, my thesis supervisor or our university ethics office at any time.

(The respondent will be given an information card, when applicable, containing name, institutional affiliation, and contact information.)

Do you have any questions about this research? Do you agree to participate? [If yes] May I have your permission to record the interview?

Great, let's begin!"

Original script provided by Gunther, R. (2010).

Appendix D

Written Interview Guide

These questions are part of my thesis research, studying adult memories of childhood play, and how play changes as we age. You are under NO obligation to answer any of the questions, please feel free to write in story-format, or narrative if that is more comfortable for you! You may withdraw your participation at any time during the study. Questions and interview answers may be directed to Sarah Cosco, at cosco@ualberta.ca, thank you for your participation!

CONSENT:

I, _____ agree to participate in the From Childhood Memories to Adulthood Activities: A Study of Play research. I give my consent that I understand the research process I am participating in, and understand that I may withdraw my participation at any time.

Demographics:

Age:

Sex:

CHILDHOOD:

1. When you think back on your childhood, how did you play? What did you do?

Prompts: (These are just suggestions, touch on as many or as few as you feel comfortable with)

- Who did you play with?
 - Did you ever play pretend? What did you pretend?
 - Did you ever engage in risky play, or did things while playing that might be considered dangerous?
 - Did you ever use play to get through a tough time? Can you describe that?
 - What influenced or inspired your play?
 - Did you create any games while you were a kid? How did you play the game? Rules?
 - What does thinking of childhood play invoke for you? How does it make you feel?
2. Did you ever reach an age or time in life where you felt too old to play or outgrew playing or even using the word ‘play’, hit a time when it wasn’t considered ‘cool’ to play?
 - Looking back on those activities, would you now consider them play or something else?
 3. Did how you play change as you became a teenager? What did play look like during your teens?

- Do you think play served the same purpose or had the same benefits during your teen years as it did your childhood years?
4. Before we move on to adulthood is there anything you'd like to add about your childhood or teenage play experiences?

ADULTHOOD:

5. Would you say you're a playful person? Can you give me examples of being playful?
 - What does being playful 'do' for you?
6. Thinking about your personal relationships, do you see aspects of play or playfulness there?
 - What role does play have in your relationships with friends, family or partners?
7. Do you belong to any communities that were formed around play or a playful activity? Tell me a bit about that!
8. Do you notice play or playfulness in other domains of your life? For example in your work or school?
9. What do you believe is the purpose of play? Do you feel that play enhances your life in any way?
 - Is playing or being playful important to you? Do you make a conscious effort or does it just happen?
10. Is there an age or time in life when play becomes less important or loses its value?

Great! I think that is all I have to ask, is there anything else you'd like to share? Thank you so much for participating in my thesis research!

Appendix E At A Glance Tool

AT A GLANCE:

Participant #: ____

What forms of play are present during childhood?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physically Active | <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social | <input type="checkbox"/> Dramatic (RPing) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sibling | <input type="checkbox"/> Limit Testing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Solitary | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structured | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Animal | <input type="checkbox"/> Risky |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Imaginary (Pretend) | <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Pranks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Games with Rules | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Elaborate) |

What forms of play are present during adolescence?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physically Active | <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social | <input type="checkbox"/> Dramatic (RPing) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sibling | <input type="checkbox"/> Limit Testing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Solitary | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structured | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Animal | <input type="checkbox"/> Risky |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Imaginary (Pretend) | <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Pranks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Games with Rules | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Elaborate) |

What forms of play are present during adulthood?

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Physically Active | <input type="checkbox"/> Unstructured |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Social | <input type="checkbox"/> Dramatic (RPing) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sibling | <input type="checkbox"/> Limit Testing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Solitary | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Structured | <input type="checkbox"/> Creative |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Animal | <input type="checkbox"/> Risky |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Imaginary (Pretend) | <input type="checkbox"/> Competitive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Construction | <input type="checkbox"/> Pranks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Games with Rules | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Elaborate) |

What supported or facilitated play during childhood?

What blocked or restricted play during childhood?

What supported or facilitated play during adulthood?

What blocked or restricted play during adulthood?

Settings mentioned in childhood:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yard | <input type="checkbox"/> Basement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Street | <input type="checkbox"/> House |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Body of water (natural) | <input type="checkbox"/> Playground (<input type="checkbox"/> School <input type="checkbox"/> Park) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pool | <input type="checkbox"/> Field (Farm or empty) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School | <input type="checkbox"/> Beach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forest | <input type="checkbox"/> Rec Centre |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Park | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Elaborate) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gym | |

Settings mentioned in adulthood:

- | |
|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Yard |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Street |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Body of water (natural) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pool |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Forest |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Park |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Gym |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Basement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> House |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Playground (<input type="checkbox"/> School <input type="checkbox"/> Park) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Field (Farm or empty) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beach |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rec Centre |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (Elaborate) |

Did the participant stop playing during adolescence?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Played, but didn't call it play

Does the participant play as an adult?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Fluctuates (Reason: _____)

Does the participant describe themselves as playful?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Fluctuates (Reason: _____)

Why does the participant play?