

“I THINK ADULTS PLAY BY SPENDING TIME WITH THEIR FRIENDS  
AND BY PARTICIPATING IN LEISURE ACTIVITIES”:  
HOW COLLEGE STUDENTS CONCEIVE OF AND EXPERIENCE PLAY  
IN THEIR EVERYDAY LIVES

BY

KERRI R. SCHILLER

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Recreation, Sport and Tourism  
in the Graduate College of the  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2020

Urbana, Illinois

Doctoral Committee:

Associate Professor Toni Liechty, Chair  
Professor Kimberly Shinew  
Professor Teresa Ostler  
Assistant Professor Matthew Browning, Clemson University

## ABSTRACT

Play scholars believe that humans play throughout their lifespan (e.g. Gray, 2009; Brown, 2009). There is a relatively large body of literature about play in childhood (e.g. Smith, 2009), but relatively little about play in adulthood (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015), and most of the work that has been done is specifically about the play of older adult women (e.g. Yarnal, Chick, & Kerstetter, 2008). One exception is the work of Nicholson and Shimpi (2015), who observed that their students (mostly Early Childhood Education majors) saw play as an activity associated with childhood, not something that was part of their current lives. The present study extended the work of Nicholson and Shimpi to focus on students in a different major (Recreation, Sport, and Tourism, or RST) and was loosely modeled after the class on which Nicholson and Shimpi's research is based. The purpose of the study was to further our understanding of play in young adulthood through a play-based discussion group, in which participants were asked to engage in weekly cycles of play, documentation, and reflection. Research questions were: 1) How do young adults view play in adulthood? 2) How do young adults experience play and how does that play compare to childhood play? 3) What factors (if any) constrain play in young adulthood? 4) What factors (if any) facilitate play in young adulthood? The findings showed that the participants felt they did still play, but they did not use that word except in the sense of playing something. Their play was highly social and consisted largely of planned, structured activities. Their personal definitions of play focused on enjoyment and were less strict compared to scholarly definitions. Play constraints included time, obligations, people, and state of mind. Overall, the findings are consistent with Sutton-Smith's (1997) observation on the ambiguities of play, noting that in Western cultures, "children play but adults only recreate" (p. 7).

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
The Research Problem .....	1
Play.....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Significance of the Study.....	4
Position of the Researcher .....	6
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>9</b>
Play.....	9
Leisure Constraints, Negotiation, and Facilitators .....	20
Motivation .....	26
Emerging Adulthood .....	29
<b>CHAPTER 3: METHODS .....</b>	<b>31</b>
Case Study .....	31
Sample .....	31
Data Collection Procedures .....	32
Data Analysis .....	36
Trustworthiness .....	37
<b>CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>38</b>
Play Experiences.....	38
Attitudes and Perceptions.....	51
Facilitators and Constraints .....	69
<b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>82</b>
What is Play and Who Plays?.....	82
Facilitators and Constraints .....	87
Theoretical Implications .....	94
Practical Applications .....	95
Limitations and Directions for Future Research.....	98
General Conclusions.....	99
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>102</b>
<b>APPENDIX A: MEANING AND EXPERIENCE OF PLAY PROGRAM DESIGN .....</b>	<b>111</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: WEEKLY PLAY JOURNAL INSTRUCTIONS .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: FINAL PLAY REFLECTION INSTRUCTIONS .....</b>	<b>122</b>

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### The Research Problem

Researchers have been studying play for centuries (Sutton-Smith, 1997), but the majority of empirical studies have focused on the play of children. This is somewhat puzzling, given that modern play scholars believe that adults play and that humans are one of the few species in which play continues throughout the lifespan (e.g. Brown, 2009). Sutton-Smith comments:

there are the ambiguities that seem particularly problematic in Western society, such as why play is seen largely as what children do but not what adults do; why children play but adults only recreate; why play is said to be important for children's growth but is merely a diversion for adults (p. 7).

A 2012 survey by JWT Intelligence seems to reflect some ambivalence about play. The survey reported that 92% of American adults felt that play should be a part of adults' lives, but 78% said they sometimes miss being able to play like a child. This raises a number of questions: What does it mean to "play like a child?" Is this different than playing like an adult? And what is keeping adults from engaging in the type(s) of play they desire?

There is a significant body of research on play in childhood, much of it involving play's benefits, which include developing children's bodies, sharpening their minds, and helping them develop critical social skills (e.g., Pellegrini, 2009; Smith, 2009). The popular press tells us that play has benefits for adults, too; it touts play as a way for adults to relieve stress, improve their interpersonal relationships, and keep their brains sharp (among other things; see for example HelpGuide.org, n.d.) but there has been relatively little scholarly research on play in adulthood (Chick, Yarnal, & Purrington, 2012; Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015). Most empirical evidence about the benefits of play comes from research on children or animals. The small body of research on

play in adulthood is dominated by research on older adults (e.g. Yarnal, Chick, & Kerstetter, 2008; Cheang, 2002). This leaves a big gap in our understanding of play among young and middle age adults. This is problematic because if play really has the benefits it is said to have, it could be a healthy and fun way to relieve the stress that is pervasive in modern life and to improve our physical and mental wellbeing.

## **Play**

Play has been examined by scholars in many fields including anthropology, education, evolutionary biology, history, psychology, and zoology (Pellegrini, 2009). Despite extensive debate on the topic, play scholars do not agree on one definition of play (McInnes & Birdsey, 2014; Henricks, 2015b). For this project, I will use the following definition of play, which is based on Huizinga's (1950) classic definition: Play is a voluntary activity that actively involves the player; it is undertaken strictly for the enjoyment of the activity itself (it is not motivated by extrinsic rewards or goals); it is highly absorbing; and it has a strong, positive affective component. The first two characteristics (play is voluntary and intrinsically motivated) are common to definitions of play that come from psychology (e.g. Gray, 2013). Huizinga focused on the play of human adults and he recognized fun as the essence of play, an idea that is also supported by research from Cosco (2017) and Yarnal et al. (2008).

Play is considered a fundamental activity of childhood and a means for children to develop the physical, intellectual, social, and emotional skills necessary to be healthy and productive adults (for a comprehensive review see Pellegrini, 2009, or Smith, 2009). Although play is commonly associated with childhood, scholars contend that humans continue to play throughout their lives, and that adults reap benefits from play (e.g., Brown, 2009; Gray, 2015; Henricks, 2015a).

Play research in adulthood has largely focused on the play of older adults, with the largest body of research on women who are members of the Red Hat Society. The Red Hat Society is a social organization for women over 50. The Society's mission, as originally described by its founder, is to provide a place for members to play, be silly, and build relationships with other women their age (Cooper, 2004, as cited in Yarnal et al., 2008). Studies on the Red Hat Society confirm that it not only fulfills its mission, it also provides other benefits: it gives members permission to be silly and have fun; it allows them to receive positive public attention; it is an outlet for self-expression; it provides relief from everyday problems (Yarnal et al., 2008; Yarnal, Kerstetter, Chick, & Hutchinson, 2009); and it allows members to experience positive emotions, make new friends, form close social relationships, and develop a more optimistic outlook on life (Mitas, Qian, Yarnal, & Kerstetter, 2011). Cheang (2002) studied social play in a group of older Japanese Americans who met regularly to let "the child in them come out to play" (p. 312). Some of his findings are similar to those found in Red Hat Society research: The group provided a space where members could have fun and be silly; it allowed them to express a part of themselves that was not socially acceptable in other settings; and it allowed them to be valued and appreciated for that part of themselves. Unlike the Red Hat Society, however, this group did not provide instrumental social support or promote the formation of close friendships.

Other empirical studies on play in adulthood include play in the "intimate relationships" (romantic partners or close friends) of college students (Baxter, 1992); humor as play in college students (Mannell & McMahon, 1982); pretend play throughout the lives of graduate students in education and adults who participate in improvisational theater (Perone & Göncü, 2014); adult toy play (Heljakka, 2013); two studies on play across the lifespan (Nicholson & Shimpi, 2015; Cosco, 2017); and a test of The Signal Theory of Adult Playfulness on undergraduates (Chick,

Yarnal, & Purrington, 2012). With these few exceptions, research on play in young adulthood is rare.

In summary, some of the gaps in the literature include conflicting views on whether or not adults play; limited information on how the general population views play in adulthood; how adults experience play (if they do play) and whether that experience is qualitatively different from childhood play; and facilitators and constraints to play in adulthood.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to further our understanding of play in young adulthood through a play-based discussion group, in which participants were asked to engage in weekly cycles of play, documentation, and reflection.

Specifically, research questions were:

1. How do young adults view play in adulthood?
2. How do young adults experience play and how does that play compare to childhood play?
3. What factors (if any) constrain play in young adulthood?
4. What factors (if any) facilitate play in young adulthood?

### **Significance of the Study**

Play is said to have many positive outcomes, including stress relief, better interpersonal relationships, improved mood, and better cognitive performance (Brown, 2009; HelpGuide.org, n.d.), all of which have great potential to impact our health and wellbeing. However, there is little empirical research on play in adulthood (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015). Van Vleet and Feeney refer to the subject as “ripe for investigation” (p. 639). The research that has been conducted on adults’ play to date is heavily weighted toward the play of older adult women (see for example Yarnal et al., 2008, or Yarnal et al., 2009), with very little attention to young and

middle-aged adults. This study will add to the literature by exploring young adults' views and experiences of play.

Finally, recent evidence seems to indicate that adults have a complicated relationship with play. In a 2012 survey of American adults, 92% of respondents indicated that play should be a part of adults' lives (JWT). However, adults in other studies describe play as something that children do, not adults, and that there is a stigma around play in adulthood (Nicholson & Shimpi, 2015; Cosco, 2017). Some adults who choose to play fear being judged, particularly if they engage in activities typical of childhood (Nicholson & Shimpi, 2015). Older adult women who are members of the Red Hat Society noted that play in their younger adulthood was limited or even absent due to social and cultural expectations (Yarnal et al., 2008). This may be an example of what Nicholson and Shimpi describe as a "gradual and invisible disappearance of play" (p. 1612) in adulthood.

Even if we accept that a large number of adults believe play is appropriate for grown-ups (as indicated by JWT), 78% of these same adults said they sometimes miss being able to "play like a child, with no rules, boundaries and restrictions" and 82% wish they could "recapture some of the imagination, fun and creativity of childhood." This seems to indicate that something is lacking, even among those who believe it's acceptable for adults to play. Perhaps the adults surveyed by JWT long for the feelings they associate with childhood play. At this point it seems reasonable to ask whether it is even possible for busy, responsible adults to experience this feeling, but Nicholson and Shimpi suggest that it is: When their participants re-integrated play into their lives, they used terms like "connecting with their inner child" and feeling "like a kid", as they recounted their most joyful and meaningful moments of play" (p. 1612). Although it required courage, support, permission, and some imagination, it appears that they were able to

recapture the feeling of playing like a child. This study adds to the literature about how adults play, how they view play, and what facilitates and constrains play in this stage of life. By better understanding how adults view play as well as the factors that constrain and facilitate their play, we can better design and promote experiences that adults want but aren't currently getting.

### **Position of the Researcher**

I began this journey as an adult who missed doing some of the things I did as a child: Swinging on the swings; chasing my brother around the neighborhood on my bike; dressing up in costume; or “going swimming” with my friends with the understanding that this meant doing cannon balls, playing Marco Polo, sliding down the waterslide, and generally laughing and being goofy, *not* swimming laps for 30 minutes.

Over time I met other adults who expressed a desire to do some of the same things that kids do, so in 2010, while working for the YMCA, I asked my boss if I could start a play class (“Recess for Adults” or “Recess”). When I started the class, I just thought it would be a chance to do something fun, but the class affected me in ways I didn't anticipate: My mood was frequently better after class than it had been before. I felt happier, more optimistic, and better equipped to take on the rest of the day. I don't know how it made other people feel, but I noticed my class members laughing and talking to each other, something I didn't see in a lot of other classes. It's important to note that our play was physically active (we played games like red light green light, four square, and tag) and, as a result, it was likely to have some of the same benefits as exercise. However, as a certified fitness trainer and a lifelong exerciser, I know how exercise affects my mood and energy, and I generally felt happier after playing with my class than I did after a traditional exercise session.

I led Recess for five years at the YMCA and after moving to Illinois I led classes for University of Illinois employees as part of a workplace wellness program. My beliefs about play are strongly influenced by these experiences. Some of these beliefs are:

- Play can be fun and appropriate for adults, and this includes all types of play, even those that are silly, loud, or commonly associated with childhood, such as playing kickball or dressing up in costumes.
- Adults have different obstacles to play than children do. These obstacles include a fear of being judged as immature; a fear of getting hurt; and a lack of opportunities.
- Play needs to be voluntary.
- Different people enjoy different types of play. What is play for one person may not be play for another.
- Play has benefits for adults.
- The benefits of play probably vary depending on the type of play one engages in and one's personal play preferences.

In addition to my experiences as a play leader, there are a few other experiences that are strongly related to my worldview. I had a relatively happy, uneventful childhood with plenty of time for play. I was a “good daughter” and a good student, roles that I identified with strongly. However, as a young adult, I had two experiences that forced me to let go (to some extent) of what others thought of me or expected of me. In my 20s I realized I was gay, and in my 30s, I left an unfulfilling engineering career to work as a fitness trainer and wellness coach, a job that was highly meaningful to me but that was judged by some to be a step down from my previous career. Both of these experiences contribute to a sense that I am different and that I don't fit in. However, I think being “on the outside” has also made me question societal norms, including

what is important in life and what success means. It has also led me to believe our personal experiences influence how we see the world.

Other beliefs that are relevant to this study include:

- The Protestant work ethic is not healthy. Regular leisure time, and in particular, having time to do the things that we really enjoy, leads to a better quality of life.
- How we see the world is strongly influenced by our beliefs and our life experiences, making it difficult (maybe even impossible) to see things objectively.

As a researcher, I recognize that my beliefs and life experience have influenced my choice of research topic and they affect my interpretation of the data. This is consistent with a constructivist perspective:

The constructivist approach perspective shreds notions of a neutral observer and value-free expert. Not only does that mean the researchers must examine rather than erase how their privileges and preconceptions may shape the analysis, but it also means that their values shape the very facts that they can identify (Charmaz, 2014, p. 13).

My research design included methods for examining my preconceptions (reflexive journaling). It also used grounded theory techniques (including initial coding, in which codes are created from participants' own words and ideas) to help me see things from my participants' perspectives rather than my own.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Play

Play scholars assert that humans play throughout their life span (Brown, 2009; Henricks, 2015a; Sutton-Smith, 1997) and we are thought to be one of the few species that continue to play beyond adolescence (Brown, 2009). One might expect this to be a source of much scientific inquiry, but research on play in adulthood is limited (Van Vleet & Feeney, 2015). Gray (2015) notes that psychologists seem averse to the very word “play” and speculates on the reasons for this: Play is hard to define; play can’t be controlled; and play is seen by many to be unimportant. This aversion seems to extend beyond psychology to the study of play in general and may be even more pronounced when it comes to the study of play in adulthood. However, there has been some empirical research on play among human adults. This research covers a range of topics including who plays, how they play, and why they play. First, however, it’s important to address how “play” will be defined for this project.

**What is play?** Scholars from many disciplines have attempted to define play, but there is still a lack of consensus about what play is (Pellegrini, 2009). Some say that although play is hard to define, most of us recognize it when we see it, but Pellegrini shows that both adults and children sometimes have trouble recognizing what is play and what is not play (2009). This has led many to conclude that it is pointless to even attempt to define play (Gordon, 2008).

Despite this lack of scholarly agreement, it is still useful to be clear about what one means when using the word “play.” To a large extent, play definitions reflect the disciplines of their creators. For this reason, the definition of play used in this project is derived from Huizinga (1950), who was concerned with the play of human adults. Huizinga was interested in play as it was experienced by the player, and he recognized fun as the essence of play, its “primordial

quality” (p. 3). In play, he says, the most important thing is the experience of “tremendous fun and enjoyment” (p. 1). My own experience of play as something that brings joy is what drew me to study play, and contemporary play research emphasizes that fun and joy are fundamental aspects of adults’ definitions of play (e.g. Cosco, 2017; Yarnal et al., 2008). Huizinga summarizes play as:

A free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious”, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner. It promotes the formation of social groupings which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means (p. 13)

For the purpose of this project, play is defined as a voluntary activity that actively involves the player; is undertaken strictly for the enjoyment of the activity itself (it is not motivated by extrinsic rewards or goals); is highly absorbing; and has a strong, positive affective component. My definition is similar to Huizinga’s in that we both specify that the activity is voluntary (free), highly absorbing, and free of extrinsic motivation (no material interest, no profit can be gained). Most definitions coming from psychology agree that play is voluntary and intrinsically motivated (see for example Gray, 2013, or Brown, 2009). Brown explicitly states that play is also fun and highly absorbing. It is noteworthy that both Gray and Brown promote play as an activity that is beneficial for adults as well as children.

Some of the elements of Huizinga’s definition are not included in the definition used for this project, including that play is separate from ordinary life and that play has its own rules.

While I believe that play frequently occurs outside the space and time of “ordinary” life, it can also happen right in the middle of an ordinary day, such as a spontaneous moment of play during the workday. Similarly, although I do believe that play has rules, most areas of life involve rules. Whether we are engaged in play, work, or a form of leisure that is not play, there are many rules (both spoken and unspoken) guiding our behavior. Specifying that play has rules doesn’t help us differentiate play from other activities.

Modern play scholars sometimes disagree about whether play exists on a continuum or whether it is a binary condition (either play or not-play). For instance, Gray (2015) defines play on a continuum from “more like play” to “less like play” while Burghardt (2010) argues that an activity is either play or not. One reason for this difference may be that Burghardt studies play in animals, where intention and enjoyment are difficult if not impossible to measure. Regardless, I see play as existing on a continuum.

Finally, some play scholars contend that games with rules are not play because they involve an external goal (to win the game) and because they are governed by pre-existing rules (Smith, 2009). However, Smith acknowledges that there is not a clear boundary between play and games. Consistent with the idea that play exists on a continuum, I am allowing for the possibility that games with rules can be play for adults.

**Play theory.** Just as there are many definitions of play, there are many theories to explain why we play. However, just as most play research has focused on children’s play, most play theories attempt to explain why children play. One exception is the Signal Theory of Adult Playfulness, which takes an anthropological perspective, suggesting that play and playfulness serve as signals to members of the opposite sex that one is a good long-term mate (Chick et al., 2012). This theory further speculates that play and playfulness signal different things to men and

women: To women, playfulness signals that a man is “tame” – in other words, he does not pose a physical threat to her or their potential offspring. To men, playfulness signals that a woman is young and fertile. Chick et al. found support for Signal Theory in a study involving college students. Participants rated playfulness and sense of humor as highly desirable traits in a potential mate (2012). However, we do not yet know whether this leads to actually choosing playful mates or whether the theory is supported in other populations.

Although Signal Theory is currently the only theory that specifically addresses play in adulthood, there are general theories of motivation that are relevant to play, such as Self Determination Theory. This theory is discussed in the Motivation section of the literature review.

**Types of play in adulthood.** Adult play is often assumed to be more sophisticated than children’s play. Yarnal and colleagues (2008), citing Sutton-Smith, say that adult play “tends to be rule bound or structured in contrast to children’s play, which often is not” (p. 235). Chick et al. (2012) agree that games with rules (which begin in childhood) may continue into late adulthood, and that adult play frequently extends childhood play. The examples Chick et al. give are largely illustrations of “simple” play evolving into something more sophisticated, such as Old Maid becoming poker; cops and robbers becoming paintball; or humor becoming cognitively more sophisticated. “Horseplay” is one of the few examples that doesn’t fit the stereotype of adult play being more sophisticated than its childhood counterpart. Much of the empirical research on play in adulthood is focused on games and sports, perhaps because of the assumption that adults prefer these more structured and sophisticated forms of play, or perhaps because they are easier to observe, being distinctly separate from our normal daily lives. Nevertheless, there is some research on less structured forms of play.

**Structured play.** As noted above, many of the studies on adult play have centered around structured games, including card games (e.g. Scott & Godbey, 1992; Outley & McKenzie, 2007) and sports (e.g. Heuser, 2005; Berlin & Klenosky, 2014). In addition, there is a wealth of research on computer and video games. The Entertainment Software Association tells us that 155 million Americans play video games (nearly half of all Americans); 42% of Americans play video games regularly; that the average gamer is 35 years old; and that 74% of gamers are over the age of 18 (2015).

Research on structured games and sports may be cited as play studies in the sense that they are examples of adults playing something – for example, playing bridge or playing video games. However, “play” and “playing something” may not be the same, and most research on structured games and sports doesn’t address whether the activity meets the criteria for play or if the participants themselves would describe these activities as play.

**Less structured forms of play.** If adult play is an extension of children’s play, we might expect to see adults engaged in the following forms of play, which are typical in childhood (adapted from Smith, 2009):

- Social play – play with others
- Pretend or make-believe play – including dressing up
- Language play – including jokes, rhymes, and other forms of humor
- Motor or physical activity play – including running, jumping, skipping, climbing, and wrestling
- Object play – play with objects such as balls, blocks, action figures, etc.

Following is a review of the research on these forms of play among adults. It should be noted that these categories can and often do overlap.

*Social play.* Social play is, simply, play with others. The Red Hat Society (RHS) is an example of social play among older women. The RHS was founded to encourage women over the age of 50 to play, have fun, be silly, and build relationships with other women (Cooper, 2004). Each chapter is ruled by a “Queen” and according to Yarnal et al.,

members over 50 are encouraged to attend events wearing “Full Regalia,” which includes at minimum red hats and purple outfits. Other adornments may include red and purple shoes, garish jewelry, gaudy hatpins, showy scarves, fluffy feather boas, and Rhine-stoned red and purple handbags (2008, p. 240).

Although each chapter offers different activities, a few of the “playful activities” mentioned were “a chapter spitting contest, eating dessert first at a restaurant, riding in a stretch limousine, a pajama breakfast in a local park” (Yarnal et al., 2008, p. 243). In addition to social play, we also see examples of pretend play (dressing up) and generally being silly in this group.

Unsurprisingly, the Red Hatters in this study spoke about fun, the playful behavior that went with dressing up, and the positive attention that often came from dressing up and being silly in public. Yarnal et al. also present evidence that play fosters friendships (which is not surprising given the organization’s mission). In a different study, Mitas et al. (2011) argue that play in the RHS supports the Broaden-and-Build Theory (Fredrickson, 2001) because of the strong, positive emotions Red Hatters described in conjunction with their participation (joy, enjoyment, love, bliss, for example). However, the nature of that study does not allow us to determine whether positive emotions led to play (as Broaden-and-Build would suggest) or vice versa.

In another study of social play among older adults, a group of second-generation Japanese Americans living in Hawaii gathered regularly at a local restaurant to laugh and have

fun (Cheang, 2002). The group was a place for these adults to express and affirm a part of themselves – the kid in them – that would not be considered appropriate in other areas of their lives. Cheang made the following observation:

Stated simply, these older adults came to the restaurant to “play” and for the most part, they came to the restaurant to be with their playmates. Of particular interest is the notion that these older Japanese American adults would not be able to play at home given the rigid roles that adults assume in the Japanese culture (p. 314).

The play described in this study involved joking, teasing, telling stories, and being silly. In contrast to the experiences of some Red Hatters, Cheang’s subjects avoided cultivating serious relationships with one another, preferring instead to keep their interactions light and casual. Although the group provided little in the way of functional social support, group members may have benefitted from the acceptance and positive appraisal of their “playmates.”

Cheang also noted that this group preferred meeting at the restaurant (compared to a senior center) because senior centers were seen to be overly structured; at the restaurant they could come and go as they pleased and participate as much or as little as they wanted to. This theme was also present in Yarnal et al. (2008), where some of the Red Hatters surveyed said they appreciated the lack of rules, structure, expectations, and demands. However, it is difficult to determine whether this was a common feeling among Red Hatters because participants answered an open-ended question about meaningful experiences with RHS rather than a specific question about their preferences. About 8% of the sample cited the lack of rules and responsibilities. Interestingly, both Yarnal et al. (2008) and Cheang (2002) provide support for the notion that adults enjoy being silly sometimes and that many enjoy being able to play without rules, boundaries, or restrictions (JWT, 2012, p. 44).

*Pretend play.* Pretend play is also referred to as imaginary or make-believe play. It is a prominent form of play in childhood but not discussed much with respect to adults. Perone and Göncü (2014) found preliminary evidence that adults engage in pretend play. Their study, which included participants ranging in age from 21 to 48, found that almost all participants reported engaging in pretend play during each of the major development phases of their lives, including adolescence and adulthood. The participants reported a number of perceived benefits including helping them to learn new information, improve self-confidence, and improve interpersonal skills.

There is also evidence that pretend play is a common part of some relationships. Baxter (1992) interviewed college students about play with close friends and romantic partners; role playing was reported in 88% of friendships and 78% of romantic couples. Role playing accounted for 20% of the play episodes reported in personal relationships.

Other activities that may be evidence of pretend play in adulthood include live action role-playing games (LARP), in which participants act out their character's actions (see for example Jonsson, Montola, Waern, & Ericsson, 2006) and costume play or "cosplay," in which people dress up and act like characters from comic books, cartoons, movies, games, and music groups (see for example Rahman, Wing-Sun, & Cheung, 2012).

*Language play.* Humor and other forms of language play can happen anywhere and at any time. Mannell and McMahon (1982) studied how humor related to mood in college students. They found that humorous incidents most frequently resulted from social situations (nearly 88%) and that the frequency of humorous incidents was positively correlated with positive mood (surge and elation) and negatively correlated with negative mood (hostility, anxiety, and fatigue). Interestingly, they also found that greater number of humor incidents were

correlated with a decrease in concentration. In this study, however, most of the humorous incidents recorded were in social situations and so we can't say if mood changes were related to the humor itself or to the social context. There appears to be little recent research explicitly on humor as play; it seems likely some researchers are studying humor but not calling it play (see Gray (2015) for his take on studying play without calling it that).

*Physical activity play.* This type of play is characterized by moderate to vigorous physical activity. Examples of physical activity play include running, jumping, climbing, and play fighting (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). Baxter (1992) reported on physical activity play in the personal relationships of college students and split physical play activity into two categories, prosocial and antisocial. Prosocial physical play was described as “nonverbal in nature and involved the transformation of a conventionally prosocial act into playfulness” (p. 346). 80% of respondents reported engaging in this type of play with romantic partners and nearly 63% of respondents reported engaging in it with good friends. Prosocial physical play accounted for 15% of the reported play activity. Antisocial physical play involved actions that are typically antisocial (such as hitting or wrestling) but in this case are carried out playfully. 84% of respondents reported engaging in this type of play with romantic partners and 63% of respondents reported engaging in it with good friends. Antisocial physical play accounted for 12% of the reported play activity. It should be noted that both of these play forms are a combination of social play and physical activity play.

*Object play.* Object play is the playful use of objects such as balls, blocks, cars, or action figures. Adult object play has received little scholarly attention (Heljakka, 2017). Perhaps, as with other forms of play, this is because we call it something else. In an exploration of how adults use contemporary toys, Heljakka (2013) reports that words such as “hobbying” or

“collecting” are often used to describe adults’ engagement with toys; she notes that even adults who “express an enthusiasm for toys still rarely admit to playing with them” (p. 454). Although they may be reluctant to admit playing with toys, a 2010 radio poll which asked “What kind of toys are you, an adult individual, playing with?” received responses such as Barbie dolls, Star Wars figures, Legos, laser swords, paper dolls, and stuffed animals (Heljakka, 2013, p. 225). Concerned that toy play is viewed strictly as an activity of childhood, she urges more research on how our understanding of play is developed through language (2013, p. 469)

**Attitudes and beliefs about play in adulthood.** Although there is evidence that adults engage in many different types of play (including those that might be deemed “children’s play”), adults’ attitudes and beliefs about play likely influence if they play, how they play, and their experiences of play. In a case study of women enrolled in a class on the history and theories of play, Nicholson and Shimpi (2015) found that their participants viewed play as an activity of childhood. They reported that:

a narrative that we hear regularly from adult women in our early childhood courses, although play is a part of their lives that they experienced to various degrees as children, they often experience a gradual and invisible disappearance of play throughout their adult years (p. 1612).

In other words, Nicholson and Shimpi’s participants reported that they no longer played. The course required student participants to engage in weekly play activities of their own choosing and to reflect on their experiences, including any challenges they encountered and any benefits they received. Participants reported obstacles such as feeling the need for permission to play and a fear of being judged for playing, particularly when engaging in activities perceived as silly or

traditionally associated with childhood. Play facilitators included making time for play and spending time with others who want to play.

In a study of play across the lifespan that included participants ranging from 20 to 70 years old and coming from five different countries, Cosco (2017) noted that during adolescence many of her participants had distanced themselves from childhood play activities in an effort to seem cooler and more grown-up, with one noting specifically that “play is for children” (p. 75). However, she noted a difference between her “highly playful” and “moderately playful” participants:

if moderately playful individuals felt they would receive a negative response for their play behaviours they would cease them... 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 (p. 77).

In short, stigma led some participants to stop playing during adolescence or to modify their play to be socially acceptable, while it had a negligible effect on others. Similar to Nicholson and Shimpi, Cosco reported that making time for play was a facilitator for her participants, as was being open to spontaneous opportunities for play. One of the limitations of this study is that 44% of the participants were recruited from a play listserv or from the US Play Coalition, so they were likely to be play practitioners or play scholars. As such, they may have had different attitudes about play compared to non-scholars.

## **Leisure Constraints, Negotiation, and Facilitators**

**Leisure constraints.** The leisure constraints model as we know it began with Crawford and Godbey's (1987) paper on barriers to family leisure. Crawford and Godbey noted that prior research was based on an (implicit) assumption that leisure barriers intervened between a preference for and participation in an activity. In other words, leisure barriers had one effect: blocking participation in desired activities. They suggested instead that this type of barrier (which they called a structural barrier, e.g. a lack of disposable income, time, or facilities) was just one of three types and proposed two additional types which could affect preferences as well as participation. Intrapersonal barriers are individual psychological attributes and states (e.g. stress, anxiety, depression, one's religion, skill, and perceived abilities) and they influence leisure *preferences*. Interpersonal barriers arise out of our relationships with others (e.g. one's spouse's attitude about an activity or the lack of a partner to engage in certain activities with) and they may affect leisure preferences and/or participation. This paper has been described as the most important conceptual contribution to leisure constraints in the 1980s (Jackson, 2005).

Building on Crawford and Godbey's work, Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey proposed the hierarchical model of leisure constraints in 1991. Notably, the hierarchical model suggests that we encounter constraints sequentially, in the following order: Intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. In other words, intrapersonal constraints (such as lack of skills or perceived lack of competence) present themselves before interpersonal and structural constraints and must be overcome before interpersonal constraints become relevant. Similarly, interpersonal constraints must be dealt with before one encounters structural constraints. The hierarchical model also proposes that proximal constraints (intrapersonal) have a stronger influence on participation than distal constraints (structural).

It was around this same time that researchers began to notice that barriers or constraints did not always prevent people from participating in leisure activities. In a qualitative study, Scott (1991) found that contract bridge players used a variety of methods to deal with the obstacles they faced and were sometimes successful in overcoming them. Similarly, Shaw, Bonen, and McCabe (1991) used survey data to examine the relationship between constraints and participation in physically active leisure among Canadian adults and found that not all constraints were associated with lower participation. Consistent with the thinking of the time, certain demographic factors (age, gender, lifestyle, occupation, and income) were associated with lower levels of leisure participation, but most other types of constraints (lack of time, cost, etc.) had no relationship to participation or were associated with *higher* levels of participation. And in a study of British adults, Kay and Jackson (1991) found that constraints precluded participation in only a relatively small proportion of cases, and individuals frequently perceived constraints even when those constraints had little or no impact on participation. They concluded that “constraints are likely to be reported not only by non-participants in an activity, but also by participants; constraints may even be reported more frequently by the latter than by the former” (p. 301).

**Negotiation.** In 1993, Jackson, Crawford, and Godbey formally introduced the idea of negotiation to the leisure constraints model. Specifically, they suggested that participation is dependent on constraint negotiation, not a lack of constraints (although the latter could also lead to participation). However, participation might be different as a result of constraint negotiation (for example, one may participate less frequently or at a different time). They further proposed that interpersonal or structural constraints that are perceived to be difficult or impossible to overcome may take away the desire to participate (in effect, the anticipation of such constraints

becomes an intrapersonal constraint). Finally, in what Jackson et al. (1993) refer to as the balance proposition, they added motivation to the constraints model, suggesting that “the initiation and outcome of the negotiation process are dependent on the relative strength of, and interactions between, constraints on participating in an activity and motivations for such participation” (p. 9).

Early tests of constraint negotiation were conducted by Jackson and Rucks (1995) and Little (2002). A questionnaire administered to junior high and high school students confirmed that some people are able to negotiate leisure constraints to either continue or begin a new leisure activity (Jackson & Rucks). Jackson and Rucks also found that the constraints reported by the teens in their study were similar to those reported by adults in other studies and that the types of negotiation strategies used were generally *but not always* consistent with the constraint (e.g. being constrained by lack of skills was negotiated by developing skills). A qualitative study of adult women (mostly Australian) who were participating in or who had previously participated in adventure sports found that the women did experience constraints, that their constraints were similar to those described in other studies, and that these constraints did not prevent them from participating (Little, 2002). Negotiation strategies included altering the frequency or intensity of activity, changing to a different activity, reducing the amount of time spent on work or household chores, and staying in touch with adventure (“finding adventure in different activities,” p. 169) through planning roles (e.g. being a club planner/planning for others; planning future adventures) and framing of other activities as adventures (building a home, raising children, etc.).

There is some evidence that constraint negotiation strategies differ by culture. Ito, Kono, and Walker (2018) used both inductive and deductive methods to analyze constraints and

negotiation strategies in a cross-cultural study of physically active leisure activities. Comparisons of Euro-Canadian and Japanese adults showed that there were differences in perceived constraints and the types of negotiation strategies utilized. Specifically, Euro-Canadians used financial and time negotiation strategies significantly more than Japanese participants, while Japanese participants used activity-specific negotiation strategies (such as listening to music while exercising) more than Euro-Canadians.

**Models of constraints, negotiation, motivation, and participation.** Hubbard and Mannell (2001) tested the relationship between leisure constraints, negotiation, motivation, and participation in a survey of workplace physical activity/recreation. They found the best fit to be a model in which constraints had two different effects on participation: Constraints had a direct effect on participation, with a greater number of constraints associated with reduced participation, but constraints also increased negotiation, which in turn was associated with increased participation. Motivation did not have a direct effect on participation, but greater motivation was associated with increased negotiation, which led to increased participation. This model was called the “constraint-effects-mitigation model.” Three subsequent studies have tested this model, with two confirming that constraints increased negotiation (Loucks-Atkinson & Mannell, 2007; Wilhelm Stanis, Schneider, & Russell, 2009), and one (Son, Mowen, & Kerstetter, 2008) finding no relationship between constraints and negotiation. This led Son et al. to propose a slightly different model (“constraint negotiation dual channel model”) which removes the path from constraints to negotiation but is otherwise the same as Hubbard and Mannell’s model.

Loucks-Atkinson and Mannell (2007) added a measure of self-efficacy to the constraint-effects-mitigation model, theorizing that negotiation efficacy (one’s sense that they are capable

of negotiating leisure constraints) would increase negotiation efforts. As predicted, Loucks-Atkinson and Mannell found that higher negotiation efficacy was associated with greater negotiation efforts and increased motivation in a study of physically active recreation among individuals with fibromyalgia syndrome. In a study of outdoor recreation among Arizona residents, White (2008) observed similar relationships between negotiation efficacy and negotiation and negotiation efficacy and motivation.

In short, negotiation efficacy appears to increase negotiation, and negotiation appears to increase participation. However, the relationship between constraints and negotiation remains unclear. Hubbard and Mannell (2001) and Loucks-Atkinson and Mannell (2007) found a positive relationship between the two, Son et al. (2008) found no significant relationship, and Jun and Kyle (2011) found a negative relationship. Qualitative methods could provide insight on these contradictory results.

**Hierarchy of constraints and newer models.** Since Crawford, Jackson, and Godbey (1991) first proposed the hierarchical constraints model, a number of studies have tested its underlying tenets and provided additional insight. Raymore, Godbey, Crawford, and von Eye (1993) found empirical support for the hierarchical model in a study of perceived constraints to undertaking a new leisure activity among 12<sup>th</sup> graders in Canada. They found that intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural constraints represented three different classes of constraints, and that they did exist in a hierarchy. Since then, some studies have supported the hierarchical nature of constraints, (Schneider, 2016), while others indicate that constraints may occur simultaneously and they may interact (e.g. Henderson & Bialeschki, 1993).

In the most comprehensive leisure constraints model proposed to date, Walker (2007) combined models proposed by Schneider and Wilhelm Stanis (2007) and Walker and Virden

(2005) to create the “integrated leisure constraints model.” This model builds upon the hierarchical constraint model and it adds micro-level (personal) and macro-level factors (culture, race/ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status) as antecedents to leisure preferences; it explicitly adds the decision to participate between preferences and participation; and it adds a post-participation evaluation of the experience, which in turn influences motivation, constraint perception, negotiation, and personal factors.

**Leisure facilitators.** An implicit assumption of constraints theory is that the removal of leisure constraints will lead to increased participation, but research indicates that this is not necessarily true (Raymore, 2002). Raymore proposed a framework for understanding what factors *promote* leisure participation (facilitators) in addition to those that constrain it. She argues that constraints and facilitators are distinct concepts and that they both have an influence on whether someone participates in a leisure activity (or not). She says that “individuals exist in environments that enable participation and hinder participation at the same time” (p. 42-43), hence the need to consider both facilitators and constraints.

In a deliberate effort to mirror the definition of constraints, Raymore defines leisure facilitators as “factors that are assumed by researchers and perceived or experienced by individuals to enable or promote the formation of leisure preferences and to encourage or enhance participation” (p. 39). Similarly, she groups facilitators into three categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. She asserts that leisure facilitators are not simply the opposite of leisure constraints, and that structural facilitators are most likely to be the opposite, or absence, of structural constraints.

Although research in this area is limited, a few studies have investigated leisure facilitators. For instance, Scott and Mowen (2010) conducted an analysis of Ohio residents who

were infrequent users of public parks to find out if changes in parks/park services (such as providing childcare, providing transportation, making parks safer, etc.) might lead them to use parks more often. 84% of infrequent users were categorized as either time constrained or relatively unconstrained, and both groups indicated that the proposed changes were unlikely to produce great increases in participation. In other words, there appeared to be little the agency could do to entice these people to visit more frequently. Those who seemed most likely to respond to agency facilitation strategies were the 10% classified as transportation constrained, with more than 80% of this group reporting they might visit more often if they had more information about parks and if parks were made safer. Curiously, these participants indicated that these particular facilitators were more likely to increase visits than transportation facilitators.

A recent study of regular fitness club users in Turkey found a significant positive relationship between constraints and facilitators (Kocak, 2017). In other words, those who had more constraints also had more facilitators. This is consistent with Raymore's (2002) contention that constraints and facilitators are distinct but related constructs. Kocak also found that the use of facilitators varied with gender and relationship status: Males reported using intrapersonal facilitators more than females, while females reported using interpersonal facilitators more than males. Singles reported using all types of facilitators more than married participants and younger participants reported using all types of facilitators more than older participants.

## **Motivation**

**Cognitive Evaluation Theory.** Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET) is one of six mini-theories that comprise Self Determination Theory (SDT). SDT is primarily concerned with the social conditions that help or hinder human flourishing (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2017). Central to SDT is the idea that all humans have at least three basic psychological needs,

the needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to the feeling that one is acting of their own volition. In this context, autonomy is *not* the same as independence.

Competence refers to the feeling that one is effective and capable. Relatedness has to do with social connection: feeling cared for, significant, and having a sense of belonging.

CET was developed to explain the impact of external factors on intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2012). CET says that intrinsic motivation depends on one's perception of autonomy and competence. External events (e.g. threats, rewards, feedback) which are perceived to have a negative effect on autonomy and/or competence decrease intrinsic motivation, while events perceived to increase autonomy/competence have the opposite effect (Ryan & Deci, 2017). This relationship may not always be simple, as autonomy and competence can have opposing effects (for example, when a reward is contingent upon one's performance, it may be perceived as controlling, which reduces autonomy, but it may also provide positive feedback about one's abilities, which increases competence). The overall effect of any external event on intrinsic motivation depends on the relative strength of each factor (Deci & Ryan, 2012). In general, CET research shows that positive feedback and choice tend to increase intrinsic motivation, while tangible rewards and competition tend to reduce it (Deci & Ryan, 2012). CET has been tested in more than 100 studies. A meta-analysis of 128 studies supports the ideas outlined above (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

**How CET informs this study.** CET has been tested in numerous contexts, including leisure activities such as sports and video games. It can help us understand what makes play fun, and it has been used in multiple studies to explain the enjoyment of video games. For example, Tamborini, Bowman, Eden, Grizzard, and Organ (2010) argued that enjoyment can be conceptualized as need satisfaction, an idea that they see as implicit in the first study to apply

SDT to video gaming (Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006). In an experimental design that manipulated need satisfaction by varying the game controls and the social context, Tamborini et al. (2010) found that 51% of the variance in enjoyment of a bowling video game was due to the satisfaction of competence, autonomy, and relatedness needs. Building on these results, Peng, Lin, Pfeiffer, and Winn (2012) showed that need satisfaction mediated the relationship between game design and enjoyment in an exergame. Features that satisfied autonomy needs were associated with greater enjoyment, as were those that satisfied competence needs.

CET can also help us understand how competition may influence intrinsic motivation and enjoyment, which is useful in the study of competitive games or sports as play. CET could also explain why unstructured play might be more enjoyable than structured, competitive play. Ryan and Deci (2017) assert that direct competition (defined as a contest where when one person or team wins, the other necessarily loses) can make an activity more fun *or* more painful (p. 488). Research shows that winning a direct competition can have a positive effect on intrinsic motivation, as it conveys positive feedback about one's competence. Losing, however, tends to decrease intrinsic motivation because it conveys negative feedback about competence (p. 489). Even winning can decrease intrinsic motivation if the players feel a strong pressure to win, as this extrinsic pressure decreases one's sense of autonomy (p. 489). This suggests that competitive games are likely to reduce intrinsic motivation and enjoyment for many participants. However, the theory suggests that competition and intrinsic motivation can coexist if participants receive positive competence feedback and the outcome is de-emphasized. Or, as Ryan and Deci summarize: "It seems that environments that truly support the adage 'It's not winning or losing, but how you play the game' are the most likely to support athletes' intrinsic motivation" (p. 490).

Knowledge of CET could help leisure professionals and play practitioners create more enjoyable experiences for adults.

### **Emerging Adulthood**

Emerging adulthood (EA) is a distinct developmental period proposed by Arnett (2000) to fall between adolescence and young adulthood and by definition applies to young people aged 18-25. It is thought to occur primarily in industrialized societies, which provide an extended period of time for young people to try different things before making the long-term commitments typical of adulthood (e.g. starting a career, settling into a long-term romantic relationship, having children). Emerging adulthood is characterized by a high degree of freedom and relatively low levels of responsibility.

Arnett (2004) proposed five features that are common to emerging adulthood: Identity exploration, instability, self-focus, feeling in-between, and an “age of possibilities.” Identity exploration occurs primarily in the realms of jobs, relationships, and one’s worldview. In this stage of life, work experiences become more focused on preparation for long-term careers and relationships are a testing ground for exploring what qualities one wants in a long-term partner. A college setting is particularly conducive to exploring one’s worldviews, as it provides opportunities to learn about different worldviews and, in the process, reflect on the beliefs learned in one’s childhood and adolescence. As it pertains to emerging adulthood, instability refers to transience in jobs, housing, and romantic relationships. Self-focus is not selfishness but an acknowledgement that these young adults do not have to be responsible for anyone but themselves. Young people in this stage have a subjective sense that they are no longer adolescents but not yet adults, hence the label “feeling in-between.” Finally, because emerging adults have made few long-term commitments, the possibilities for the future seem almost

unlimited. It should be noted that these five qualities are more common in emerging adulthood, but they are not universal (Arnett, 2000).

As noted in this chapter, there are many gaps in the literature on play in adulthood. These include limited research on young adults' attitudes and beliefs about play in adulthood; if and how attitudes and beliefs affect young adults' play; limited research on unstructured play in adulthood, including pretend play, physical activity play, and object play; and limited research on constraints and facilitators to play in adulthood. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to further our understanding of play in young adulthood through a play-based discussion group, in which participants were asked to engage in weekly cycles of play, documentation, and reflection.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODS

### Case Study

This study adopted a case study approach. Case studies are flexible and allow for in-depth investigation of an issue in its natural context and from the perspective of the participants (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017, Section 3.3). In this project, “case study” is used to indicate that this is an in-depth description and analysis of the individuals participating in a play-based discussion group.

The design was chosen to be consistent with Nicholson and Shimpi’s (2015) research on women in a History and Theories of Play course, a case study design that used grounded theory methods (specifically constant comparative methods) to code data and identify themes.

Nicholson and Shimpi’s study described

how two women, enrolled in an undergraduate course on play, were guided to examine play across their lifespan, critique the barriers that led to a decline in their play from childhood to young adulthood, and engage in cycles of documentation, dialogue, and analysis of their adult play experiences in order to discover pathways to reclaim play in their adult lives (p. 1601).

Similar to Nicholson and Shimpi’s research, the current project studied the play experiences of a group of college students using weekly cycles of play, documentation, and reflection.

### Sample

**Population.** Participants included eight students in the Recreation, Sport, and Tourism (RST) program at the University of Illinois. Six of the participants were undergraduates and the remainder were Master’s students. Three of the eight participants were male. Five of the six undergraduates were part of the James Scholar Honors program (“James Scholars”). The

undergraduate who was not a James Scholar received extra credit in a required course for participating in this study. It is noteworthy that seven of the eight participants were high achievers, as evident by their status as James Scholars and Master’s students. See Table 1, below, for a summary of participants.

Table 1: Participant summary

<b>Name*</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Class standing</b>	<b>James Scholar?</b>
Adam	M	Undergraduate	Yes
Amy	F	Undergraduate	Yes
Becca	F	Undergraduate	Yes
Brad	M	Undergraduate	Yes
Crista	F	Master’s student	N/A
Curt	M	Undergraduate	Yes
Dani	F	Master’s student	N/A
Ellen	F	Undergraduate	No

\* All names are pseudonyms

**Recruitment.** Participants were recruited primarily through announcements made in undergraduate RST classes in the spring of 2019. The Master’s students were recruited through word of mouth and a recruitment email sent to students who expressed interest. Participation in this study was offered to James Scholars in lieu of completing a special project during the spring semester of the 2018-2019 school year. (James Scholars are required to complete one special project every semester; a typical project would be a research paper with a subject determined by the student and the instructor in one of their classes.)

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data was collected through a program that included weekly, play-based group discussions. This program is referred to as the Meaning and Experience of Play Program (MEPP). Originally the data collection procedure was conceived as a leisure education program modeled on the class (History and Theories of Play) that was the basis for Nicholson and

Shimpi's study. History and Theories of Play was a 14-week class which met once a week for 2.5 hours (J. Nicholson, personal communication, October 19, 2018). The MEPP, as it was originally designed, was a shortened version of History and Theories of Play, and it included weekly educational elements as well as group discussions and "out-of-class" assignments for participants to write about their play experiences (or, if they didn't play, the experience that was most like play that week). However, after participants submitted their answers to the pre-program questions (PPQ), which were designed to assess their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs about play, it was apparent that their views about play were different than the views of Nicholson and Shimpi's participants. As a result, the weekly in-person meetings were re-structured somewhat to include less education and more discussion about the participants' play experiences and their views on play in adulthood.

In summary, the MEPP was an eight-week program which included group discussions; homework assignments to document their weekly play or the activity that was most like play for them (play journals); and a final written assignment to reflect on their definitions of play, their play experiences during the program, and facilitators and constraints to play (final play reflection or FPR).

The data for this study came from participants' written assignments (pre-program questions, weekly play journals, and final play reflections) and weekly group discussions, which were audio recorded and transcribed starting in week two. A limited amount of data was also collected from in-group exercises. For example, during the fifth group meeting, participants were asked to write down examples of how they and other adults they knew played and then to rate how appropriate they felt each activity was for adults. These lists were collected and included in the analysis. Brief descriptions of the MEPP, play journal, and FPR are given below. For

complete descriptions, please see Appendix A (MEPP), Appendix B (play journal instructions), and Appendix C (FPR instructions).

**Meaning and Experience of Play Program (MEPP).** The purpose of this program was to answer the following questions:

RQ1. How do young adults view play in adulthood?

RQ2. How do young adults experience play and how does that play compare to childhood play?

RQ3. What factors (if any) constrain play in adulthood?

RQ4. What factors (if any) facilitate play in adulthood?

As discussed above, the MEPP was inspired by Nicholson and Shimpi's (2015) work on the experience of women in a History and Theories of Play course. Similar to History and Theories of Play, the MEPP involved weekly group meetings with homework assignments to document how participants played, or, if they didn't play, the experience that was most like play. There were seven weekly meetings, each lasting for 50-60 minutes, and one writing assignment prior to the first session. The pre-program writing assignment was intended to provide data for RQ1 (how do young adults view play in adulthood?) as well as provide insight for the first group meeting. There was no meeting over Spring Break, but participants were asked to make a play journal entry for that week. The major topics and homework assignments for each weekly meeting are listed in Table 2, below.

Table 2: MEPP topics and homework assignments

<b>Week</b>	<b>Major topic(s)</b>	<b>Homework</b>
1	Introduction to “Play Program” Share childhood play memories	Write down one significant memory of childhood play in your play journal
2	Overview of play types Examples of play types from childhood and now? Differences between childhood play and current play?	Document how you played this week in your play journal
3	Who is play for? “Appropriate” play	Document how you played this week in your play journal
4	Spring break – no group meeting	Document how you played this week in your play journal
5	Examples of how you and other adults you know play Rate examples (appropriate to inappropriate)	Document how you played this week in your play journal
6	What makes something “weird”?	Document how you played this week in your play journal
7	Play facilitators	Document how you played this week in your play journal
8	Play constraints	Final Play Reflection

**Weekly Play Journal.** Every week participants were asked to document their play in an online journal housed on Compass2g (a secure Blackboard-based online website used in most of their University courses). Journals were in a space created specifically for this project, separate from the participants’ courses, and play journals were only visible to the researcher and the participant who created them.

In their weekly play journals, participants were asked to include a description of what they did, where they were, who they were with, any feeling or emotions that they experienced, and whether or not the experience was play for them. If they played multiple times, they were asked to document their favorite experience. They were encouraged to include multiple play episodes, if they had them, but were only required to write about one. They were also

encouraged to include pictures, videos, drawings, etc., although these elements were not required.

**Final Play Reflection (FPR).** At the end of the program, participants were asked to submit a written reflection on the following: Their own personal definitions of play; the contexts that made it easier to play and more difficult to play over the course of the program; what they learned about the activities that were definitely play for them and the activities that were not-quite-play for them; and how they felt about the amount and quality in their present lives. As with other written assignments, participants submitted their FPRs on Compass 2g. Please refer to Appendix C for complete FPR instructions.

**Meeting transcripts.** Audio recordings of meetings two through eight were made using the researcher's phone. After the final meeting, the audio recordings were transcribed by the researcher. All recordings were transcribed verbatim, with the intention of documenting what was said as accurately as possible. This meant that all filler words (e.g. um, like, so), repeated words, and incomplete thoughts were included. Tone of voice, laughter, pauses, and other clues to the speaker's meaning were noted as much as possible. Meetings two and three were transcribed entirely by the researcher, and the remainder were processed through Amazon Transcribe and then edited by the researcher as necessary.

## **Data Analysis**

A constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2014) was used to analyze data, and included line-by-line open coding and memo-writing (memoing). Coding of all written assignments (pre-program questions, play journals, final play reflections) and meeting transcripts was done on a line-by-line basis using open coding (in other words, codes or descriptions came from the data itself). Coding began as soon as participants submitted their first play journals, and

continued each week as participants submitted new journal entries and their final play reflections. After the initial coding was completed, focused coding began. In this stage, all codes were reviewed and sorted into groups of similar codes. Beyond coding, most of the data analysis was done through memo-writing (memoing). Memos were used to record my thoughts and questions about the data. Memoing began after the pre-program questions were submitted and continued for the duration of the study. Memos were kept as separate Microsoft Word files on the researcher's computer and utilized a naming convention that included the date and title of the memo to aid in later retrieval.

### **Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness was adopted as the measure of quality for this study, as it is commonly used to evaluate the quality of constructivist inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). As described by Lincoln and Guba (1985), trustworthiness relates to how a researcher can “persuade his or her audiences (including self) that the findings of an inquiry are worth paying attention to” (p. 290). In order to be consistent with Creswell's (2013) recommendation that researchers use at least two strategies to enhance the rigor of qualitative research, I utilized five strategies to improve the trustworthiness of the findings: prolonged engagement with participants; triangulation; member checks; the use of thick description in the final report; and reflexive journaling.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

The findings from this study are presented in three sections: How participants said they played during the course of the project (“Play Experiences”); their attitudes and perceptions about play, including how they defined play in their present lives and differences between their childhood play and their present play (“Attitudes and Perceptions”); and facilitators and constraints to play in their present lives (“Facilitators and Constraints”). All quotes are presented exactly as written or spoken by the participant.

### **Play Experiences**

This section presents participants’ play experiences as documented and described by them. It includes a breakdown by the types of play, frequency of play, and when and where they played. Unless otherwise noted, when an activity or experience is described as play, it is because the participant categorized it as such. See the Attitudes and Perceptions section for more information about how participants defined play and the Discussion section for how their definitions compare with academic definitions.

**Types of play.** Participants documented a total of 60 experiences in their play journals that they characterized as play. Overall, their play was highly social with an emphasis on sports, physical activity, and games. Fifty-four of these play experiences (90%) involved other people and 29 of them (48%) involved physical activity. In their Final Play Reflections (FPRs), submitted after the last group meeting, participants were asked to describe their favorite play experience from the project and their favorite type(s) of play. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3: Favorite play experience and favorite type(s) of play

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Favorite Play Experience</b>	<b>Favorite Type(s) of Play</b>
Adam	“going to the Bucks vs Lakers game over spring break” in Milwaukee with a close friend	"My favorite form of play usually revolves around sports"
Amy	“relax and do some of my favorite activities [mini-golf, laying out on the beach, kayaking] with some of my favorite people [parents, boyfriend]” in the Gulf of Mexico over Spring Break	"My favorite forms of play would be a sport or physical activity and relaxing outside”
Becca	“I participated in Relay for Life ... with some of my friends” in town during the last week of the project	"Overall, my favorite forms of play involve friends or family”
Brad	“golfing... with my dad” in town over “Mom’s weekend”	"Many of my favorite forms of play involve physical activity, and social interaction"
Crista	“when I traveled to St. Louis for one of my best friends Bachelorette Party. I was able to part-take in a variety of activities including an Escape Room, Wine & Paint” over Spring Break	"my favorite forms of play would be social or cooperative play"
Curt	“playing basketball with my little brother” at family home over Spring Break	Not specified
Dani	“playing catch with my boyfriend and his family while on vacation in Florida”	"A common theme that rose from my play reflections was competition and physical activity"
Ellen	“I didn’t have a specific play experience that was my favorite... My favorite experience was being with my roommates, and the ability to spontaneously engage in play”	"My favorite forms of play are those that are spontaneous"

***Social play.*** As noted above, 90% of the play documented by participants was social.

When asked to name their favorite play experience, every participant cited an example of playing

with others, as shown in Table 3. Three out of the seven who listed a favorite type of play said playing with other people was their favorite type of play. For others, their favorite types of play – games, sports, competition – were social by their very nature. In some cases, the play activity didn't seem to matter much; rather, the activity appeared to be a vehicle for spending time with friends or family. For example, in the following play journal entry, Brad said he played by playing video games. However, he went on to say that playing Xbox (online) allowed him to hang out and talk with friends who go to different schools:

This week ,an example of me playing would be me playing video games. I have an Xbox, but I don't really play it that much anymore, but a lot of my friends from home that go to other schools do. I like to get on when I know they are on and just hang out and talk with them to see how they are doing at their schools and how life is going. Sometimes, we won't even really be playing the game we will just be talking about sports or news or something like that. (Brad, PJ4)

In a group discussion, some participants agreed that they need other people for some activities. They also suggested that it's "a lot more fun" to play with other people:

Curt: I think like having other people also kind of elevates play like, in a way, cause you can't play Frisbee by yourself.... You can play basketball by yourself. But it's a lot more fun, I would say, with other people.

...

Dani: Agree. I think it amplifies the happiness kind of, kind of making that social connection. And then just having that shared happiness experience with someone, or a group of people, I think that's very special. I think it's amplified when you're all together. (Group meeting, 4/11)

Others made similar statements in their written assignments, highlighting the importance of the social interaction:

For me my favorite forms of play would be social or cooperative play... I get more joy, excitement, energy, etc. when being with and around others that for me really heightens the play experience. I feel these forms of play can bring more sides my personality out because I am being able to be expressive and have others there to showcase it to... I do really feed off of others I have noticed and want to make sure others are having fun and a good time. (Crista, FPR)

I went to the ARC [campus recreation facility] with three of my friends. We went into a racquetball court and did a workout together. Usually, I would include working out alone play as well, so I definitely considered this play when I was working out with my friends. This experience was fun and entertaining. There was definitely a social aspect that made the play/workout more fun for me. (Amy, PJ3)

Participants were asked to write in their play journals once a week, but their instructions allowed for the possibility that they might not play every week. If they did play, they were asked to write about that experience; if they didn't play, they were asked to document the activity or experience that was most like play for them. Most participants documented at least one week without play, and in some cases, they deemed activities to be play or almost-play because they were socializing with friends while they were doing it – even though they did not normally consider the activity to be play. For instance, Becca explained that although TV-viewing wasn't normally play for her, watching with her friends made it play:

This week I watched a movie with some of my friends. ... We had some extra free time, so we decided to hang out and put a movie on. For most of the film, we were just talking,

catching up, and hanging out. I usually would not consider watching tv as a form of play, but we were socializing and watching the movie in the background, so I think that can be considered play. (Becca, PJ4)

Similarly, Amy said that attending a hockey game was “close to play” because she was watching with her friends:

The activity that I participated in this week that was most like play for me was attending and cheering on the Blackhawks on Monday night... Why I think this activity was close to play was because I was socializing with other people during the game. As well as watching the game with my friends. (Amy, PJ1)

However, playing with others didn't mean playing with just anyone; most participants preferred to play with close family members, best friends, and roommates. For example, Dani commented “I noticed that my play does have a lot to do with the type of people I am with, usually my boyfriend or family” (FPR). Similarly, Amy explained that the people she spent time with influenced her play behavior. “Depends a lot on like the people I'm around. It seems like whenever I'm around my closest friends, that's when I seem to always be playing” (Group meeting, 4/18).

A conversation about sports suggested that who one plays with may be more important to those who are less competitive and/or have weaker skills. For instance, Adam initially claimed that when he was playing sports, it didn't matter who he was with; in essence, he felt he could play and have fun with anyone. However, after hearing about Brad's experience playing with “random people” who play too hard or take the game too seriously, he agreed that it did make a difference who he was playing with:

Brad: I feel like I kind of had Adam's mindset when I was a little younger and more serious about sports. Like I would play with anybody, and it would be fun because it was super competitive. But I don't get competitive about sports anymore... So, it's definitely more fun for- like I don't like playing basketball with random people, it's just not fun to me, especially if they're like, going hard. ... I would ... prefer to be with people that I know, people that I could joke around with while we're playing. Have a conversation with.

Adam: Maybe I have to take that back, because like you were saying ... there's been times where I've actually been there and some people that I don't really know just wanna argue or they're calling a foul every time. ...So, yeah... It kind of does impact, I would say ... sometimes there's people that you don't know, but you know, usually if you get along with them it's because they're a little similar to the people that you do like doing that stuff with consistently. (Group meeting, 4/18)

Curt shared a similar sentiment, saying that he prefers to play basketball with his friends because other people take the game too seriously:

Like I'm not good basketball, but I like playing it. And I go with my friends, like, a couple times a week and ...when we do go, mostly courts are taken, so we either have to join a game or wait for people. And if we join, everyone just kind of takes it way too seriously. (Group meeting, 4/18)

Brad summarized the discussion by observing that the people one played with could make a big difference in the experience; they could make someone want to keep participating or want to stop: "if you're playing [basketball] with the wrong group of people...You're not saying, like

‘Oh, I want more of this.’ You’re ‘get me off of this, let me find a different court’” (Group meeting, 4/18).

***Physical activity play.*** As noted above, the vast majority of play documented by participants was social. When play was analyzed according to the activity they were engaged in, physical activity play was the most common type of play, with nearly 48% of play activities being physically active. As seen in Table 3, four out of seven participants explicitly named sports or physical activity as their favorite form of play. Participants played sports formally (e.g. basketball, golf) and informally (e.g. football, soccer), and they enjoyed playing with others or alone. Basketball was an example of physical activity play that came up frequently:

Both Monday and Wednesday I had intramural basketball games with my co-rec team. I enjoy this because basketball is my favorite sport/pastime. While I am perfectly fine practicing on my own, I love competing on offense and defense with other people trying to achieve the same goal. (Adam, PJ1)

This week I experienced play when I went to the ARC [campus recreation facility] and played basketball. I had not planned on playing basketball after my workout, but thought it might be fun since I have not shot baskets by myself in a while. After shooting baskets and chasing to get my own rebound, I was physically tired, but mentally I wanted to keep going because I was enjoying this activity. This activity had me leaving the gym happy, and reminiscing on my past as a basketball player. I consider this play, because it was something that I enjoy doing, and I feel energized after shooting hoops. (Amy, PJ3)

Other types of physical activity play included active games such as bags (a lawn game in which players take turns throwing beanbags at a target), mini golf, water basketball, and P.I.G. (a basketball game often played by children wherein the players take turns attempting shots –

sometimes goofy or trick shots – from around the court); working out and lifting weights; throwing a Frisbee, “throwing a tennis ball off the wall,” and kicking a soccer ball; playing keep away with a dog; dancing; swimming; learning to rollerblade and skateboard; riding a moped; and getting pulled behind a moped on skates or a skateboard.

Although participants frequently engaged in conventional sports and activities, some described spontaneous, improvised physical activity play. For instance, Dani’s favorite play experience of the project was a Frisbee game she and her boyfriend made up on the beach while they were on vacation in Florida:

While at the beach, my boyfriend [R], his brother, his sister in law, and I played catch with a Frisbee in the sand and eventually in the water. ... His sister in law ended up going back to sit in the beach chairs, and we created a game where R's brother would throw the Frisbee towards R and me in the water to see who could catch it first... We were getting pretty competitive with one another with smack talk and wrestling each other out of the way. However, the entire time we just kept laughing and smiling. Afterward, R and I kept talking about how much fun we had just goofing around with each other and joked about how we can make any activity fun by creating a competition out of it. I definitely would categorize this as play. (Dani, PJ1)

See also the Other play activities section (below) for another example of spontaneous play.

**Games.** Non-physical games were the second most common form of play, representing 20% of play activities. This category included video games, card games (Euchre, UNO), Truth or Dare, Name That Tune, and games unique to the participants.

[O]ne of the things me and some friends did was play jeopardy on our friend’s phone. His android has a feature that lets you play from the games that were played on TV from that

week. This is something we've kind of started doing recently as a way for all of us to take a break and have a little fun. And it was fun, but also interesting. We had to try to outsmart each other and think a little quicker in a competition style. (Curt, PJ4)

After dinner, we played the card game "What Do You Meme" while enjoying some wine. We played for about an hour and a half and went through the entire deck of meme cards. It was an absolute blast! We were laughing so hard and the stupid/crazy/funny sayings when paired with the most ridiculous graphic. (Dani, PJ4)

On Friday, I went to my church's devotional... There we played live Mario Kart, where attached two balloons and a knife to our toy truck. The object was to pop your opponent's balloons before they pop yours. Naturally, a sound I remember from that fun experience is balloons popping but also our loud reactions to people winning or losing. (Adam, PJ1)

***Other play activities.*** The remaining activities (32%) fell into a variety of other categories. Eating accounted for 8% of all activities classified as play, although these examples could easily be re-categorized as "hanging out" or "socializing." For example:

[W]e decided to take a little break during the week to go get ice cream... We wound up staying at the ice cream place for a while just talking and hanging out. (Becca, PJ1)

Other activities categorized as play included watching TV, watching movies, playing with a dog, shopping, laying on the beach, doing arts and crafts projects, painting one's nails, and attending a professional basketball game. For example:

I painted with some friends on Tuesday night. We got pieces from Walmart and I chose an airplane to paint. I went into this painting activity without a set idea of how I wanted to paint the plane, because I wanted to see what I would come up with naturally. As a kid,

I didn't think about how I wanted to play I just did it, so I wanted to see how that worked out. It turned out great! (Adam, PJ6)

It should be noted that although all participants agreed that playing sports and games were play, they were not in agreement about whether watching TV/movies/sports should be considered play. See Attitudes and Perceptions for further discussion.

In contrast with the activities most frequently documented by the other participants, Ellen's play seemed more childlike. Ellen preferred spontaneous play, and she routinely documented play that seemed less structured and more improvised than that of her peers. For instance:

[E]very day my roommates and I have played outside. On Monday, we spontaneously decided to crack eggs on each other and then also dump buckets of water on each other, something I've never done before... We're not sure why these are the actions we choose but every time we do things like this is sore from laughing so hard... On Wednesday afternoon, it was another beautiful day. My roommates have been trying to teach me how to rollerblade so we did more of that. One of them has a mo-ped as well as another friend of ours. We invited her to come to play outside and rode the scooters up and down the block, and also pulled me on the back while wearing the skates. We then had a dance party on our picnic bench outside our house. (Ellen, PJ4)

In the same play journal entry, she contrasted this type of play with what she described as more adult forms of play like having dinner with friends and discussing one's future:

[W]e cooked dinner and ate it on our picnic bench. After that, we made a campfire from scratch... we then made s'mores, told each other stories and talked about our futures. This, in my opinion, seems like a more adult version of the play. It was ... something I

can see other adults doing more than some of the other versions of play I partake in.

(Ellen, PJ4)

See Attitudes and Perceptions section for a further discussion of adult play and children's play.

**Frequency of play.** Because participants didn't always label their play journal entries as "play" or "not play," it wasn't always clear whether they considered those experiences to be play. As a result, it is difficult to say how frequently they played. However, they tended to be more clear in saying when they didn't play or when an activity wasn't quite play for them. As a result, I can say more confidently how many times (i.e., how many weeks) they reported that they *did not play*. Table 4 summarizes this information.

Half of the participants indicated that they did not have *any play* during one of the six weeks in which they were asked to journal on their play; two said there were two weeks in which they did not play; and two said they played at least once for every week in which they submitted a play journal (note that both of these participants, Brad and Ellen, missed at least one play journal entry). The two who played the most said that play was a regular, if not daily, occurrence:

I honestly cannot remember a week where I have not played in some way. Whether it has been playing video games, getting to the ARC [campus recreation facility] to play basketball, or just messing around with my roommates for an hour, I think I have played every week, if not everyday for as long as I can remember. (Brad, FPR)

I was thinking about everything I've done for the last eight weeks and realized how much I try to incorporate play into my daily life. (Ellen, FPR)

These numbers change slightly if we classify their experiences according to how the participant viewed them at the end of the project as opposed to how they labeled them originally.

In their final written reflections, Crista re-classified two experiences (from play to not-play) and Curt re-classified one experience (from not-play to play). See Attitudes and Perceptions for more on how their ideas about play changed over the course of the project.

Table 4: Frequency of play and not-play experiences

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Weeks without Play</b>	<b>Weeks with Play</b>	<b>Unclear</b>	<b>Total Number of Weeks Documented</b>
Adam	1	3	2	6
Amy	2	4	0	6
Becca	1	5	0	6
Brad	0	5	0	5
Crista*	2 (4)	4 (2)	0	6
Curt*	1 (0)	5 (6)	0	6
Dani	1	5	0	6
Ellen	0	3	0	3

\* In their final play reflections, these participants re-characterized at least one experience (from play to not-play or vice versa). The numbers in parentheses reflect how they viewed their experiences at the end of the project. All other figures reflect how participants described the experience in their original play journal entries.

**When and where play happens.** Slightly more than half of participants' favorite play experiences occurred while they were out of town on vacation / Spring Break. Two happened in town during weeks when school was in session and one participant declined to name a favorite play experience. These experiences are listed in Table 3.

Participants differed in their ability to play in their campus homes. Two said they had no problem playing in their apartments / dorm rooms, while two others found it difficult to play at home:

Dani: I've been noticing ... that when I have the opportunity to play within a space that I also associate work or homework or and then like the other responsibilities it's harder for

me to intentionally play.

KS: Does anybody else have that?

Amy: Yeah, I can see that. Like in my apartment, my friends live right down the hall in the same apartment building. And if I need to like play, or you know, just forget about like homework, I'll just go down there and I'll like be in a completely different state of mind, I feel like. But if I'm in my apartment it's hard for me to like... let loose. (Group meeting, 4/11)

In contrast to those who found it hard to play at home, Brad sometimes had the opposite problem: He found it difficult to work at home. He described his apartment as more of a play space than a work space:

Brad: My roommate and I know that if we have something like a big project to do, a big thing to do, like, we gotta get out of there, because if we're just sitting there like, that's not gonna happen. But then, I found it interesting what Amy said, like, we have friends who live right below us, and if they're not there like one of us will go down there and use their apartment as, like, a workspace. Rather than like a play space, like you said, right?

Amy: Yeah.

Brad: So it's just kind of the opposite. But I just thought it's kind of interesting how I view my apartment as more of a play space, and not a very serious space. Whereas Dani and Amy were kind of the other way, right? (Group meeting, 4/11)

Other places where play occurred were in the homes of friends and family, campus recreation centers, outdoor sports fields, open spaces on campus, at the beach, at the mall, in restaurants/bars, at church, and at commercial venues (e.g. Escape Room, Wine and Paint). See the Facilitators and Constraints section for additional information about how the physical

environment affected their play.

### **Attitudes and Perceptions**

This section presents participants' perceptions and attitudes about play. It includes their perceptions of what play is, including their own personal definitions of play; how others view play; how adult play is different from children's play; play activities and behaviors appropriate for adults; and how they feel about the amount and quality of play in their lives. Participants expressed their attitudes and perceptions about play in group discussions, play journal entries, the pre-program questions, and in their final play reflections.

**What is play to adults?** This section discusses how participants defined play at the end of the project. Because many participants reported that their views changed over the course of the project, this section also covers how they felt their definitions changed. Unless otherwise noted, play definitions are the ones they gave at the end of the project.

***How did participants define play?*** In their final written reflection, participants were asked to provide their own personal definitions of play. The one and only thing that all eight participants agreed upon was that play was enjoyable. Most specifically used the words enjoy or enjoyment, but a few said play resulted in positive feelings such as happiness or joy, as reflected in the following examples:

[M]y definition of play would be something one chooses to do for pure enjoyment. In my perspective, it usually is something that is recreational, and it is something people make the time to participate in. (Becca, FPR)

Play to me means partaking in an activity that brings pure happiness to someone's life while they are doing that activity. (Amy, FPR)

Beyond agreeing that play was something they enjoyed, there was a general lack of

agreement on other characteristics of play, including freedom of choice, active engagement, and motivation. With respect to choice, three participants specified that play was freely chosen, while three others indicated that play could happen even while doing something that was required. For example, in her play journal, Crista shared an example of play that happened during a mandatory class outing:

My play experience this past week was actually brought about by a class requirement. I got to choose when I went but the decision was made for me. I had to go to the Tech Hub in the Armory. This ended up being a really great and fun experience. I got to be in virtual reality and travel/fly over the world, specifically Poland. (Crista, PJ5)

The vast majority of participants did not address active engagement in their play definitions. In their play journals, most gave examples of play that were relatively passive and they ultimately came to define such activities as laying out and watching TV/movies as play (see further discussion below, “How their definitions changed”). In contrast with the majority, two participants specified that play was interactive or required active engagement. Ellen was one of these two, saying: “Since the project I look at play as a personal freedom... Play is light, interactive, and meant to bring joy” (Ellen, FPR).

Most participants did not address motivation in their play definitions, however, in discussions and play journal entries, they gave examples of play activities that might be motivated (at least in part) by external goals. For example, multiple participants referred to exercising as play, and in a group discussion Adam admitted that it was easier to justify working out because you are supposed to exercise every day (Group discussion, 4/18). The two participants who did address motivation in their play definitions said that play is something that is done strictly for its own sake. For example:

My personal definition of play is that of a time where you are able to mentally and physically participate in an activity purely for enjoyment with no other set agenda towards the activity. (Dani, FPR)

However, in this very same assignment, Dani also admitted that she went “back and forth” about what play is, and she sometimes categorized her workouts as play.

A sense of immersion or absorption was mentioned by half of the participants. Three said that in play, they are fully immersed and not thinking or worrying about anything else. For example: “For me total 100% play is being consumed or entranced in a state of total carefreeness or serenity where I am not worrying about anything” (Crista, FPR). The fourth person said that play could take her mind off of other things and allow her to be in the moment, but implied that this might not always happen:

The experience of playing with my family and friends always has the ability to let me live in the moment. I think the best forms of play is when you are having so much fun that it is able to take your mind off everything else you have going on for a while. (Becca, FPR)

Overall, their definitions of play were fairly simplistic and vague. Although some said they had a better understanding of what play was after participating in this project, there was little in their definitions to differentiate play from leisure or recreation. For example, Curt defined play as an activity that could happen at any time for any reason, so long as it was enjoyable:

Play, to me, is doing something that someone either enjoys to begin with, or ends up enjoying and goes even slightly out of their way to do. It is an activity of almost any kind that can be used as a way to relieve stress, or at any time for any reason. (Curt, FPR)

Becca was slightly more specific in her definition, saying that play was voluntary and strictly for

enjoyment (implying that there is no extrinsic motivation), but she didn't differentiate play from recreation:

[M]y definition of play would be something one chooses to do for pure enjoyment. In my perspective, it usually is something that is recreational, and it is something people make the time to participate in. (Becca, FPR)

Refer to Discussion section for a discussion of how participants' play definitions compare with academic definitions.

***How their definitions changed.*** Although this project was not intended to change participants' views about play, most participants reported that their definition of play did change over the course of the project. There were three ways in which play definitions changed: First, participants came to see enjoyment as a key characteristic of play. Enjoyment as a defining quality of play is discussed above. Second, many broadened their definitions of play to include sedentary activities. Half of the participants noted that they initially viewed play as something that involved physical activity (or, in one case, physical or mental activity), but they came to believe that play could also be passive or sedentary. For example, Amy said that she changed her mind because she realized sedentary activities could evoke the same feelings as playing sports, therefore play didn't require physical activity:

This definition has changed for me since the beginning of the research project. In the beginning, I would have included play as only being something that requires you to be physically active. Although after the 8 weeks, I have realized that I have found play more and more in activities that are sedentary, like watching a TV show with friends... I changed my idea on this because I realized I was experiencing the same emotions doing those activities as I did playing sports. (Amy, FPR)

In short, by the end of the program most participants came to think of play as doing nearly any activity that they enjoy.

The third way in which play definitions changed is that most participants came to see play as subjective, based on the player's experience rather than the activity. As a result, they also recognized that others could find play in activities that they themselves didn't enjoy or see as play. For example:

Play is completely subjective to the person that is playing. What I may call play can be the exact opposite for someone else, and vice versa... Even watching a movie can be play if the person watching feels that it is. (Curt, FPR)

This study taught me about the difference in people, especially their ways of playing. I never considered sleeping, playing video games and watching TV to truly be play, but for some of the kids in the study that was their highest form of play they partake in. I believe that if a person engages in something that will make them intrinsically happy, it is play for them. (Ellen, FPR)

**Who plays?** In their pre-program questions, every participant said that both adults and children play, but over the course of the program they made some important distinctions: Adults don't call it play; most people outside the RST major see play as something children do; and adult play is different from children's play. Some participants also said that adults play but they don't realize they are playing, which may logically follow from the idea that adults don't call their play "play."

*Adults don't call it "play" / play is for children.* Participants felt that adults didn't use the word "play" in the same way that children did. For example, participants suggested that a child might say "Do you want to come over and *play*?" or "Let's go outside and *play*," but an

adult would say “Do you want to come over and *play Frisbee?*” or “Let’s go outside and *play basketball,*” specifying what/how they intended to play. Participants noted the loss of the word “play” in their pre-program questions: “I think we continue to play all our lives but we do not associate the word play to the action” (Dani, PPQ); “When we are older the title ‘play’ tends goes away” (Becca, PPQ). Further, they felt that most people viewed play as something for children: “I think play in general is considered something children do by society” (Crista, PPQ). One participant recalled how she herself had once thought play was only for children, and how she came to believe that adults play, too:

Before taking multiple college courses and specifically talking about play in individuals other than children, I used to only associate the term play with children. Now, I think that we continue to play throughout our lives because we all have certain activities that we like to “play” and that bring us joy and happiness. The classes mostly in the RST department have offered many great examples of individuals who aren’t children that play in their lives. (Amy, PPQ)

Amy’s comments provide some insight into how and why these participants – all RST students – have different perspectives on play compared to those from other backgrounds. In a group discussion, Dani described realizing that the terms “play” and “adult play” held different meanings for her engineer boyfriend, who was particularly uncomfortable with the latter term, associating it with sexual behavior:

Dani: I was describing to my boyfriend kind of like what I was doing and I was talking about how I was in this research group that was talking about adult play and he’s like “what?” (laughing). So there’s... somehow, when you say “adult” and “play” together there’s some like sexual, sexuality that goes with it... but we were just ... I don’t know,

he was just like “Please stop. Please stop saying you’re doing this research” (multiple people laughing). So, I don’t know. There’s something with just saying adult play that for some reason just seems a little bit – not unnatural but more it’s like (pausing) I don’t want to say like raunchy is the word, that’s a little bit too much but it’s just ... there’s something with it.

KS: There’s something with it ... Something doesn’t go together, it’s not quite right?

Dani: Yeah, but then like we were talking like there’s nothing weird about child’s play, why is it weird when you literally just put adult play or when you’re categorizing it?

(Group meeting, 3/14)

During the course of this discussion, other participants suddenly realized that as RST students, they had a common understanding of what play was *and that other people didn’t necessarily share it*. One seemed to conclude that her use of the word was correct and that other (non-RST) people were misinterpreting it:

Crista: Maybe there’s a different kind of like meaning that goes with it, like you said.

...

Becca: I agree. Like I didn’t think about it until now. But I could see how it’s like misinterpreted. (Group meeting, 3/14)

The disconnect between how these RST majors view play in adulthood and how other people view it may explain why two participants said that adults play but they don’t *realize* they are playing:

I think adults play by spending time with their friends and by participating in leisure activities. I think most adults play but don’t seem to realize they are actually playing.

(Becca, PPQ)

I feel that we continue to play throughout our lives, we just do not realize it ... We all find time to do things outside of our work that we enjoy, some people just may not categorize it as “play.” (Adam, PPQ)

This raises some interesting questions about whether those who study play have a different definition of play than the general public and how this may help or hinder us from understanding and communicating with others outside our field. See Discussion section for further discussion.

*Adult play is different from children’s play.* Regardless of how others might label it, there were two ways in which participants felt adult play differed from childhood play: First, most felt they had lost the imagination they had as children. Second, many said that adults tend to play by engaging in games and activities that had already been invented rather than making things up. Their play journals show that imaginary play was relatively rare and play most often meant engaging in a known activity.

*Creative and imaginary play.* In a group discussion, all participants could recall instances of creative and imaginary play as children, but most felt that imaginary play had disappeared from their adult lives. For instance, Amy remembered playing make-believe with her sister when she was a child, but felt she had lost that capacity:

I remember as a kid I never liked drawing, I’d rather be active and play and stuff and that’s still today, but like my sister and I would always do make-believe stuff and like more imagination which I think is odd because right now I have no imagination, I feel like. (Group meeting, 3/7)

Some participants still felt they were creative (see below), but only one (Ellen) said she still engaged in imaginary play. In a group discussion, she admitted that she had a “costume box” and that she and her roommates liked to dress up and act out different scenarios:

I don't know, this might just be a little immature but my roommates and I, like just last week we kind of like put on scarves and sunglasses and we just sat in our hallway and like improvised just a bunch of random settings like we literally were just kind of like playing like imaginary play. (Ellen, Group meeting, 3/7)

Note, however, that her disclaimer (“this might just be a little immature”) seems to indicate that she knows others might find her play age-inappropriate. See What’s appropriate for adults? (below) for further discussion.

The group was split regarding perceptions of creativity in their present lives, with the majority indicating that they still felt creative. Creativity was most often associated with arts and crafts projects, but two participants displayed creativity in the play they improvised with their roommates. For example, Brad described making up games with his roommate:

I think it is cool that I am still able to be really creative in my play. For example, my roommate and I will always play little games in our apartment, like throwing around a tennis ball, or putting golf balls, or having rap battles. This shows that we still use creativity and have fun in our play. (Brad, FPR)

The loss of imagination (and for some, creativity) may have some influence on self-reported preferences for structured play, as discussed in the next section.

*Structured, known activities versus unstructured, improvised activities.* Numerous participants expressed the opinion that adults don't create their own activities; instead, they choose from games and activities that have already been created. In his pre-program questions, Brad asserted that creativity was a fundamental difference between how children and adults play:

[T]he difference in play between children and adults is the creative side. Yes, as a kid we played sports that had already been invented, but we also had a lot of fun playing sports

we created or games we created in someone's basement. We got to pick the rules and how it was played, and this would set the standard for playing in the future. When you're older, I think that you don't really have the option to create a game to play most times, you just follow the rules of something that has already been created. (Brad, PPQ)

In a group discussion, other participants supported the idea that play in adulthood means engaging in a specific game or activity rather than the free play often attributed to childhood:

People just ascribe "child's play" to play. Um, I wrote also about how with adulthood you kind of categorize and specify what that play actually is... You give it a name. I'm playing golf, I'm playing basketball, I'm playing cards, I'm doing this activity over "oh, I'm just gonna go out and play." (Dani, Group meeting, 3/14)

Unlike Brad, Dani wasn't just making a point about creativity, but her examples illustrated how adults tend to choose games or activities that have already been invented (e.g. golf, basketball, cards) rather than making up something new. Related to this, Amy said that she wasn't very creative at this point in her life, so she preferred to play known games rather than making them up. Most participants agreed that when they played now, play meant choosing a known activity, and frequently these activities were agreed to in advance. Two specifically said they preferred to know what they were getting into ahead of time, implying that they didn't want to waste precious free time on something they might not enjoy:

Becca: When you're adult, you just like want to know what you're getting yourself into, like, okay, what do you want to do? You want to have a plan beforehand for you like agree to do something.

...

Adam: When it comes to just uh hanging out with people you know, you want to know like what exactly is on the agenda before deciding: Do you want to give your time to it? Whereas you could be in middle school, someone could just say, “Hey, meet me by the swings” or something, [and you would respond] “Alright, cool.” (Group meeting, 3/14)

Although nearly all of the participants reported more pre-defined, rule bound, structured play, some participants documented spontaneous, improvised, child-like play. Ellen provided numerous examples of spontaneous, improvised play, which she summarized in her final reflection:

My favorite forms of play are those that are spontaneous. When we decide we want to throw buckets of water on each other or crack eggs on our heads. When we decide that it’s time to dress up in our happiest clothes. When we teach each other how to skateboard and rollerblade, and that turns into being pulled behind a moped. (Ellen, FPR)

A more mundane example – and one that was more typical of the other participants – is Dani’s description of making up a game while on vacation with her boyfriend (R) and his family:

I played catch with a Frisbee in the sand and eventually in the water... and we created a game where R’s brother would throw the Frisbee towards R and me in the water to see who could catch it first. (Dani, PJ3)

**What’s appropriate for adults?** Without exception, participants said that play was appropriate for everyone, including adults, but from the beginning, participants clearly communicated that there are some things adults shouldn’t do. In some cases, their statements were vague, such as this example from Adam’s pre-program questions: “I feel like play is appropriate for everyone, it just depends on what we do and the proportion of our time we spend doing it” (PPQ). In other cases, participants were more specific, giving examples of

inappropriate activities as well as the repercussions for doing them, as in this example from Ellen:

When I think of play like a kid, I think of kids creating imaginary settings and seeing in a world of make believe. Or kids screaming out of joy at the playground. These things are not common in the adult world. If you do it people will probably think you're crazy.

(PPQ)

Often they conveyed the understanding that something was inappropriate with the disclaimers they added to their descriptions of play. For example, in a group discussion, Crista shared a childhood memory of having a funeral for a bird, repeatedly stressing that this is something she would never do now:

[When I was] younger, and *obviously I wouldn't do this now*, ... one time, we were bored, me and my cousins at my grandma's, *this is going to sound so weird*, we found a dead bird, so we gave it a funeral... *I would never do that now*, but like maybe when you're seven... (emphasis added; Group meeting, 3/7)

Similarly, there was an element of admitting to something shameful when Curt acknowledged that he sometimes played video games: "*I'm not gonna lie – I play, we have a game cube in my dorm room. It's like, if I have nothing else to do, it's good. Good time waster*" (emphasis added; Group meeting, 3/28). Another participant felt that adults were not even supposed to *like* certain things, and that you would be judged if you did them. In this case, he was referring to the teacup ride at Disneyland, and he said that people would question his motives if he were to ride it without a child:

Adam: I feel like, I was to go there on my own now it would definitely turn some heads, just like "Why isn't he on, like, a really fast roller coaster? He's not with, like, his little

cousin.” ... *I just feel like a lot of people like to make this premature judgment about, like, people's motives of things like that. Like, you can't like this, just cause you're older.*

You know, it's kind of hard to say, but, uh, I feel like when you're younger, you know, you're expected to do those things of that nature. But when you're older and people see you doing it, if you're not with a kid or even - even with a group of friends, it might be a little better. Cause then it's like...

KS: Just you, by yourself would really be...

Adam: Yeah. Kind of weird. (emphasis added; Group meeting, 3/28)

As Adam noted, there are age limits on some things. It's okay for kids to do them, but adults are not supposed to like them, much less do them, unless they are with a child.

***Activities and behaviors appropriate for adults.*** In a group discussion about how they and adults they know play, participants were asked to write down as many real-life examples as possible and then rate the appropriateness of each activity on a scale from one to five, with one being “most people would say this is totally appropriate for adults” and five being “most people would say this is totally inappropriate for adults.” Collectively they came up with 100 examples, rating the majority (57 examples) as “totally appropriate for adults.” The play activities they rated as appropriate for adults fell into five categories: Physical activity (including playing sports, working out, riding bikes, walking, running, swimming); watching TV, movies, Netflix, and sports; doing arts and crafts (painting, etc.); non-physical games (cards, board games, and drinking games); and miscellaneous (travel, gardening, fishing, and shopping). With one exception (card and board games, which are discussed below), all participants agreed that the above activities were appropriate for adults.

Card and board games showed up on many lists, but ratings varied significantly from participant to participant. Most participants attached a single rating to each of these broad categories (e.g. Amy and Dani gave “card games” a rating of one, while Brad gave “card games” a rating of four), however, Curt was more specific, listing and rating individual games. He rated poker as a one (“totally appropriate”) and Uno as a five (“totally inappropriate”). If all participants had been as specific as Curt, it’s possible that there would have been less variability in the ratings. In total, they deemed 64 of the 100 examples appropriate for adults (rating them a one or two).

*Activities and behaviors less appropriate for adults.* Overall, video games were felt to be less appropriate for adults; participants who listed them gave them ratings of three to five. As with card games, Curt made distinctions between different video games: NHL, NBA, and Madden were felt to be more appropriate (rated at three) than Mario Cart and Super Smash (rated at five or “totally inappropriate”).

Consistent with the play they documented in their play journals, the examples most participants gave in the course of this discussion involved structured activities. However, one (Ellen) gave examples of unstructured, improvised play. In her written assignments she indicated that she got a great deal of enjoyment out of this type of play, but she also showed an awareness (particularly in group discussions) that it was perceived to be less appropriate for someone her age. After hearing some of her peers say that playing UNO was inappropriate for adults, she conveyed a certain defensiveness in describing her own play:

For my first three my roommates and I we - so I own a costume box, like I literally have, like, a bunch of stuff that I really, literally put it on. And we like, make improv videos and we kind of just like, walk around the house like that all the time, which I put as a

three... *I put it as a three because it's fun, and I like doing it and like I don't care. But like, you know, if if if you guys think that [playing UNO] was like a four then this might be a five...* (emphasis added; Ellen, Group meeting, 3/28)

Other activities they deemed less appropriate for adults included rollerblading, playing musical instruments, and watching anime. In total, they deemed 26 of the 100 examples less appropriate for adults (rating them a three).

***Activities and behaviors not appropriate for adults.*** As mentioned previously, participants' lists were dominated by examples of "appropriate" play. However, there were a few examples of play that was generally perceived to be inappropriate for adults. As noted above, some card / board games and video games were felt to be inappropriate for adults. Ellen also placed some of the "spontaneous acts" she does with her roommates in this category, describing them more in terms of behavior than any specific activity:

And then I just had one five and it's I didn't have any, like, specific examples. Really. It's just kind of like spontaneous acts that we do when we're together. It's just like a lot of, like, jumping and like, screaming and like, yelling and, you know, just like a lot of laughter, just kind of like whatever is happening in the moment, which I could absolutely see as being inappropriate at some points. (Ellen, Group meeting, 3/28)

Being loud or rowdy was perceived to be inappropriate by other participants, too. They described how behavior that would be tolerated or even embraced if kids were doing it would be frowned upon if adults were doing it. For example, Dani described how a group of adults were told to quit playing a game because they were being too noisy, whereas that same noise would be interpreted as a sign that kids were having fun:

Dani: People say “Oh, they’re being so rowdy” but they’re just playing a game. And so that compared to kids doing the exact same game it's not as tolerated. From just kind of past experiences where a group of guys were playing King of the Hill on this one thing, everyone's like, “Stop, you guys are making too much noise. Knock it off.”

KS: But if kids were doing the exact ...

Dani: They’d be like “Oh, they’re having so much fun.” Yeah... And the same thing with kind of ice skating or sledding. If there's like a group of kind of older adults or young adults, 18 year olds going around an ice rink really fast, they’re told to stop. But if it's little kids like, they might not be. (Group meeting, 3/28)

To this point, Adam shared how he used to “zip in and out between people” while skating at Navy Pier as a kid. He agreed that he would probably be criticized if he tried to do it now, saying “I feel like now people would say ‘Oh, let the kids have fun’ or ‘Who’s the show off?’” (Group meeting, 3/28). In total, they rated nine of the 100 examples inappropriate for adults (rating them a four or five).

In the end, the group was unable to reach a consensus about what was appropriate for adults and what was not, but Ellen observed that they seemed to legitimately enjoy some of the things they perceived to be inappropriate. Further, she questioned the age limits placed on certain play activities:

One thing I keep noticing is like when you're talking about UNO or you're talking about like these games, it's like the thing that you say is like, “Well, other people may think it's weird, but like I had a lot of fun when I did it.” Like you really liked it. But like it's it's how everyone else is gonna ... perceive it... It's kind of like bringing like a negative effect, like I don't see anything wrong with playing UNO, like hanging out with your

friends like it's fine. It's something social. You know, it's like I feel like age limits are put on things. But I don't always understand why. (Group meeting, 3/28)

Other participants didn't necessarily know why there were age limits on certain activities, either, but they were aware of them. This awareness didn't always stop them from engaging in "inappropriate" play, but, as Ellen suggests, it might have a negative effect on their overall experience even when they did participate.

***How much play is appropriate?*** Even forms of play that participants generally perceived to be acceptable for adults (such as playing sports) could be inappropriate if done too often. For example, Adam explained how his friends and family would react if he played sports too often, asking questions that sent subtle messages about his priorities:

[N]ow, if I was just go to the ARC and play basketball every day, or be on the turf playing football every day, I feel like my peers or my parents would have a problem with that just, well not necessarily have a problem with that. Just say "You don't have homework to be doing?" "You don't have meetings to be at?" whereas when you're a kid, you know, no one really questions you. (Adam, Group meeting, 3/28)

Adam seemed to be getting two messages: First, play should be done in moderation. Second, your grown-up responsibilities (homework, meetings, job, etc.) should be prioritized over play. Even for the two participants who played the most and for whom play was a priority, these messages seemed clear. For example, in his final written reflection, Brad seemed to understand that he was supposed to put his work first, saying that he knew that others might react negatively to his tendency to prioritize play:

I honestly cannot remember a week where I have not played in some way. I am a person that loves to have fun, and *as bad as it sounds* will frequently put something fun over

something that needs to get done... I love having fun and *although in theory it may not sound great*, the fact that I can prioritize play over work during busy times is something that makes me successful. (emphasis added; Brad, FPR)

**How they feel about the amount and quality of play in their lives.** Participants were split in their feelings about the amount of play they currently had in their lives. Four said they played frequently and they felt good about it. For example:

I was thinking about everything I've done for the last eight weeks and realized how much I try to incorporate play into my daily life... I think the amount and the quality of play in my life right now is perfect. (Ellen, FPR)

When I think about how much play I have in my life, I am pretty happy. I realize that while things can be busy from time to time, I still am able to play a lot. I get to do things I love almost every single day, and that has really made my life better. (Curt, FPR)

Two participants said they wanted to play more. For instance, Becca said "After reflecting on my past, and how some of my happiest memories are of me playing with my family and friends, I want to make a more conscious effort to play more" (FPR).

Finally, two participants gave mixed messages. Amy said she needed more play but that she was "happy with the amount of time I play currently" (FPR). Similarly, in his final written reflection, Adam said he felt "pretty good about the amount of play in my life right now," but in the last group discussion he indicated that he wished he could play basketball more often, a spontaneous statement that came after Curt said he played a few times a week:

Curt: I'm not good [at] basketball, but I like playing it. And I go with my friends, like, a couple times a week and like, well...

Adam: I wish I could go that often. (Group meeting, 4/18)

In his first play journal, Adam described basketball as his favorite sport/pastime. However, as noted in the previous section (“How much play is appropriate?”), he felt that his family and friends would question him if he played basketball every day. This might explain the contradictory nature of his two statements.

### **Facilitators and Constraints**

This section presents the facilitators and constraints identified during the course of this project, which included time, obligations, people, state of mind, and the physical environment. In the last two group meetings, participants discussed specific play experiences and what they felt made it easier and harder for them to have them. In their final written reflections, they were asked to describe the contexts that made it easiest for them to play and most difficult to play. I also reviewed their play journals, comparing weeks when they played with weeks when they didn't play, to find supporting evidence and identify any additional facilitators and constraints.

Consistent with leisure constraints theory, it is important to note that constraints can operate at multiple levels, including blocking a desired activity, affecting the quality of the experience, and influencing preferences. All of these effects were apparent in this study.

**Time / freedom from obligations.** The most common constraint cited by participants was a lack of free time, and the most common facilitator was freedom from obligations. Time and obligations affected play in a number of ways. In some cases, participants felt that a lack of time kept them from playing at all. Some said that they were unable or unwilling to make time for play when there was work to be done:

Personally, I put a significant amount of pressure on myself to get a certain amount of things done each day and if I don't accomplish what I'd like to get done I feel like I can't and shouldn't make time for play. (Dani, FPR)

One big constraint for me would be time. I know when I have a busy week ahead, I try and plan out when I am going to get everything I need to get done, and sometimes I am not able to incorporate play into my schedule. (Becca, FPR)

On the surface this makes sense. However, having a full schedule did not preclude them from engaging in some amount of leisure activity every week. As noted previously, participants were asked to write in their play journals once a week, even if they didn't play. If they didn't play, they were asked to document the activity or experience that was most like play for them. The week after Spring Break was a good example, as it was a busy time for many participants, but they all still found time for leisure, engaging in such activities as watching a movie or going for a walk:

Since getting back to school from spring break, I have been extremely busy. With exams, papers, and lost of homework, its been hard to find free time. I don't recall playing at any point this week, however the closest to playing that I would say I got was watching a movie with some friends. (Curt, PJ3)

Since I got back from break, I have been trying to prepare for exams and get a head start on other assignments that I have to complete. I don't think I participated in play a whole lot this week. One thing that came to mind was two days ago, when it was really nice out

I went for a walk... it is not exactly what I would consider play. (Becca, PJ3)

In other words, they felt they didn't have time for play, but their journals showed that they did have time for leisure. Why leisure and not play? In her final written reflection, Crista described how her obligations had two effects on play: First, they led her to de-prioritize play, and second, they weighed "heavily on the mind" so that she had a hard time enjoying her play:

[I] probably have not been in the right state of mind to once again enjoy the experience because other pressing matters and/or responsibilities were prioritized and weighted heavily on the mind. Overall, having time and right state of mind makes it the easiest for me to play. (Crista, FPR)

Many other participants indicated that the *experience* of play could be impacted by the sense that they had other (presumably more important) things to do. Specifically, while participants might make/find the time to play during busy times, feelings of stress and guilt reduced their enjoyment of play. For instance, Adam described how he couldn't enjoy play as much when he knew he still had homework to finish:

The context that makes it most difficult for me to play is when I don't manage my time well when I have a lot of homework to do. This creates a situation for me where I am stressed out until I am completely done with my work, so even when I take a break and do something else it isn't as fulfilling as when I am completely immersed in my play. (Adam, FPR).

To the extent that unfinished obligations and a lack of time led to negative feelings (worry, stress, guilt, etc.), it might be more accurate to say that one's state of mind was the constraint as these feelings were counterproductive to play. In an illustration of how unfinished work could influence her experience of play, Ellen explained how negative thoughts would keep popping up and interrupting her fun in spite of her efforts to put them out of her mind while she played:

I feel like for me, like the best way I can sum it up is, like I'll do something really fun, really fun and then I'll feel like "I really have to do this" [the task that needed to be finished]. And then I'll be like "Damn." And then I'll keep going and I'll have fun. And

then I'll be like, "Oh, my God, what am I doing?" So it's like, I'll do it and, then like I'll just kind of snap back into it, and then I'll ignore it. And then I'll snap back into it, kind of like that. (Group meeting, 4/18)

While nearly all of the participants indicated that having a lot to do affected their ability to fully enjoy play, Brad said that stress did not affect his ability to play, and that he could usually forget about his worries while playing:

[F]or me, it doesn't matter as much if I am stressed out or not. If I am stressed, I usually am able to forget about it while experiencing my favorite forms of play, like basketball. If I am not stressed, I am able to still have fun and enjoy play without restrictions. (Brad, FPR)

His assertion is supported by his play journal entries and group discussions. Even during very busy weeks, such as the week after Spring Break, he did not let his obligations, a lack of time, or stress about getting things done get in the way of playing and *enjoying* his play. It's not clear why Brad was able to enjoy playing in spite of his many obligations when others couldn't. See Discussion section for further discussion.

**People.** Another common facilitator mentioned by participants was other people. Half of the participants explicitly mentioned this in their final written reflections, and most of the others mentioned it during group meetings. When asked about the context that makes it easier for them to play, Amy said "Depends a lot on like the people I'm around. It seems like whenever I'm around my closest friends, that's when I seem to always be playing" (Group meeting, 4/18). In her final written reflection, Ellen noted that her roommates were instrumental in facilitating play:

My roommates, above all else, made these experiences possible for me. They are the people that lift you up and make any activity a joyful one... They make play easy, and they help make it apart of our routine. (Ellen, FPR)

On the flip side, Adam noted that he was less likely to play when he was alone:

Most of my experiences of play that I have stated here have included other people. I do spend time on my own, but I find myself playing with others a lot of the time. When I am on my own, I find myself tending to my responsibilities more often. (Adam, PJ1)

As discussed in the Play Experiences section, most participants didn't want to play with just anyone; it was the availability of *specific* people (e.g. friends, family, and/or roommates) that facilitated play. Although participants couldn't always articulate why certain people facilitated play, the term "like" came up frequently when they described the people they enjoyed playing with (e.g. "like-minded," "people like me," and "people I like"). Female participants, in particular, mentioned how being with their friends made them feel comfortable or safe, which facilitated play. Some stated this explicitly in their final written reflections. For example, Amy said "What makes play easier for me starts with the people I am with because I want to be comfortable and surrounded by people with similarities as myself." (FPR). These feelings also came up in a group discussion, when two said that although they might be reluctant to do out-of-the-ordinary activities alone, they would do almost anything if they were with their friends:

Dani: I think having a friend doing it, it would catapult me to want to do it.

KS: Is that right?

Dani: Yeah, I'm like "yeah, that would be fun!" Anything weird like that, but when it's like with a group of friends that you really trust and you feel comfortable around... At

least just personally for me, I don't care. Cause I'm with the people that I care about.

(Group discussion, 4/4)

In an example of how being among trusted friends affected her willingness to play, Ellen described playing with her roommates (by talking in a British accent) but declined to do so with her fellow research participants:

Ellen: And then we kind of like picked up on this thing where we just talk in an accent all the time. British accent is what we're best at. So we do that during the day.

...

KS: Do you guys just talk to each other or do you talk to other people in British accents?

Ellen: Both.

Adam: Can we hear the accent?

Ellen: I can't. I'm too shy. Honestly, at this point. (Group meeting, 3/28)

Playmates had multiple effects on play. Clearly, some types of play, including team sports and social play, simply weren't possible without other people. For example, Becca (who preferred social play) noted that when her friends weren't available, she might choose to watch TV:

I think a lot of it is like like when my free time matches up with, like, my friends ... then I'd rather be doing something with them. But if it's just like me then I'll go watch, like something on Netflix. (Becca, Group meeting 4/11)

The effect that one's playmates had on the type of play participants engaged in was particularly apparent over Spring Break, when all of the participants left town to spend time with family and friends. While many documented their favorite play experiences during this time, Ellen had a somewhat different experience. She spent the time with her grandmother in Florida, and the play

she described was much more subdued in the absence of her roommates. She described feeling relaxed and content after playing in this way:

I did spend one afternoon at the beach by myself which I would describe as play. I went swimming, listened to my music, I packed a lunch, I sunbathed. It was a nice day of ease and relaxation where I could clear my head. When I left at the end, I felt relaxed and content with the day I had for myself. (Ellen, PJ2)

In contrast, the following week she was back to playing with her roommates, something that made her feel joyful and happy:

Together I would describe us as very playful people. We are active, like to laugh, dance, sing, and act in what could be described as a crazy manner... The feeling I had after my time of play was “what can we do next” and “what else can be this fun”. I felt joyful and happy. (Ellen, PJ3)

**State of mind.** As discussed above, being around people who made them feel safe and comfortable was a play facilitator (especially for female participants), and the stress and guilt brought on by unfinished obligations was a play constraint. Other moods or feelings could block play altogether. In her final written reflection, Ellen revealed that she suffers from anxiety and depression, and the resultant feelings made it difficult for her to play:

I try to play as much as possible, but there are days when feelings of sadness and pain overtake everything. These are things I did not document in my journals. They come and they go. These feelings I get are the context that made it difficult for me to play over the last eight weeks. (Ellen, FPR)

She went on to say that when she was feeling this way, she did things like sleeping, reading, and watching Netflix. Similarly, during a group meeting, Curt also said that certain feelings made it very hard for him to play:

I think if something's, like, really bugging me, or stressing me out. I can't like- I can't play until I either figure it out or... Forget about it. But... if something's really bad and like, there's not- there's nothing I can do at that point, I just take a nap or watch, like Netflix or something, but yeah, that makes it really hard to play. (Curt, Group meeting, 4/18)

Dani agreed that negative emotions could keep her from wanting to play, but that she had learned to force herself to play or to do something else (like exercise) to improve her mood. Note, however, that at the end of this passage, she admitted that she had to begin from a “state of happiness” to really play:

I think your emotion can be a constraint towards participation in play. I do, 100%. You kind of have to learn to understand that if you're in a bad mood, what do I need to do? I'll go exercise. Then you do feel better from it. So like understanding that aspect is a learned process, I think... If you, if it's absolutely play, you should- I think you need to be in a state of happiness. But to get there, it's- emotion is a constraint, I think. (Dani, Group meeting, 4/11)

Despite her coping skills, however, Dani was unable to fully enjoy her play after her uncle passed away unexpectedly near the end of the project:

[E]ven when I was participating in play (my workouts), I didn't feel as connected to the activity as usual. Again, I think this was to do with my mental state at the time and being overwhelmed with the gravity of losing my uncle. (Dani, FPR)

In short, most participants conceded that negative emotions could block their desire to play and even if they forced themselves to play while in a negative mind-state, they wouldn't enjoy the experience as much. As discussed in a previous section, Brad alone claimed that he was able to play no matter what was going on and that stress didn't affect his experience of play. See Discussion section for further discussion.

**Attitudes and beliefs.** As discussed in previous sections, participants' beliefs influenced how they chose to play. It seems likely to have influenced how much they played, as well. For instance, Amy's belief that she lacked the imagination to make up games influenced her preference for structured games and activities. When other participants played, they committed to specific activities ahead of time rather than leaving things open ended because they didn't want to waste time on things they might not enjoy. In both of these situations, their beliefs led them to engage in structured, organized play rather than spontaneous, improvised play.

A weak commitment to or belief in the importance of play may have been a constraint to play. For instance, Becca admitted that she had a tendency to de-prioritize play:

Through this experience, I have learned that sometimes I neglect playing if I feel like I do not have enough time to accomplish all that I wish to have done. After reflecting on my past, and how some of my happiest memories are of me playing with my family and friends, I want to make a more conscious effort to play more.... As I got busier, I started to make play less of a priority, and I want that to change. (Becca, FPR)

In contrast, some participants such as Brad demonstrated a strong commitment to play, even when he had a lot going on:

I am a person that loves to have fun, and as bad as it sounds will frequently put something fun over something that needs to get done. I do not want to miss out on

anything, and I have recently become really big on making an effort to enjoy myself especially when I have a lot on my plate. Whether it has been playing video games, getting to the ARC to play basketball, or just messing around with my roommates for an hour, I think I have played every week, if not everyday for as long as I can remember. I think a lot of this [c]omes from my mindset at this point in my life and my want to enjoy my days. I like to find the fun in the things I do, and find ways to enjoy it because that makes it a better situation for me. (Brad, FPR)

**Physical environment.** Although participants were split on this topic, some found it difficult or nearly impossible to play in the spaces they associated with work. This included the places where they typically studied (e.g. their apartments) and their work places. Participants described how the physical environment affected their desire to play as well as their experience of play. For example, Dani described how thoughts of work kept creeping in when she exercised in the same place where she worked, making it less enjoyable for her. (Note: She acknowledged that exercise did not entirely meet her definition of play, but said it was “on the spectrum of play”):

One of my most favorite daily things to do, especially for stress relief, is exercise and movement... However, last semester I would work out at the ARC [campus recreation facility, where she also worked] and felt as if I was not getting the same mental benefits. I felt my mind kept shifting back and forth from play to work where I'd think about work or things I needed to get done that day or the next. I ended up joining the local YMCA about 15 minutes away from my apartment and felt a world of difference. I needed to be able to turn my brain off from work and concentrate on just the activity, and avoid any shifting in my brain. The difference between my stress levels this semester and last is day

and night, partly because I was able to recognize I needed a different environment to maximize my play. (Dani, FPR)

Similarly, Amy said it was hard to play in her own apartment, but being in a friends' apartment put her in a different state of mind, one more conducive to play:

Like in my apartment, my friends live right down the hall in the same apartment building. And if I need to like play, or you know, just forget about like homework, I'll just go down there and I'll like be in a completely different state of mind, I feel like. But if I'm in my apartment it's hard for me to like... let loose. (Amy, Group meeting, 4/11)

As described in the Play Experiences section, Brad associated his apartment with play, and if he really needed to focus on his work, he would sometimes go to a friend's apartment. A minority of the participants reported that they were relatively unaffected by the place and could play anywhere. As with many of the other facilitators and constraints identified by participants, the physical environment seemed to influence their state of mind.

**Weather.** Finally, the weather came up frequently at the end of the project, and most participants felt that "nice" weather made it easier for them to play. The strongest and most obvious effect of the weather on play was that "nice weather" made it easier and more enjoyable to do certain outdoor activities. For example, in early April, a few sunny, 70 degree days allowed them to play golf and Frisbee:

I talked about I got the golf with my dad over the weekend because he was here with my mom for Mom's weekend. So that's awesome and it was on Saturday, which was another beautiful day, so that played a lot into it. (Brad, Group meeting, 4/11)

Yeah, I think most of like things I do, and have done like the past couple weeks with friends since it's been nicer out. I've been able to like play Frisbee, which I love doing.

But like I haven't been able to for a while. (Curt, Group meeting, 4/11)

In her final written reflection, Amy said simply that she preferred playing outside, and that “it makes it hard when the weather is cold to be able to do my favorite activities” (FPR). In mid-April, she shared an experience where the weather was a constraint, describing how she and her boyfriend had made plans to go to Topgolf (a commercial facility that offers competitive golf-inspired games such as one that is scored based on one's ability to hit a variety of targets) but had to cancel due to a late spring snowstorm:

So we have planned on Sunday to go to Top Golf. But we woke up and it was snowing and visibility was really bad so we decided not to go since we wouldn't be able to see the ball land. So that was kind of, like, disappointing to me. Cause I was looking forward to having fun there. (Amy, Group meeting, 4/18)

In addition to influencing the feasibility of outdoor activities, the weather seems to have had other, subtler ways of affecting play. For instance, many participants described how the mild spring weather motivated them to get outside. When asked what made recent play experiences possible, Becca said “mostly the weather, just like one day when it was really nice. I just wanted to be outside... And enjoy the nice weather” (Group meeting, 4/11). Brad went so far as to say that it felt like an obligation to be outside when the weather was nice:

You know, just kind of recently getting nicer, and then, like, personally, when it's nice out, I feel like an obligation to be outside. So I feel like a lot of people kind of [feel like that] and want to get outside, even if they are just sitting there for a little bit. (Brad, Group meeting, 4/18)

As is obvious from the two previous quotes, the good weather did not necessarily cause them to play, but it did nudge participants to get outside. Some simply took their studies outdoors, but most used the outdoor time as a break from their obligations. In drawing them away from the places where they normally studied or worked, the weather may have indirectly put them more in a mindset to play. This could be particularly relevant for those who found it difficult to play in the places where they normally worked, as discussed above (see the Physical Environment section). The weather may also have facilitated play by improving peoples' moods: In a group discussion, Adam stated that "when it's cold people are just depressed" (Group meeting, 4/11).

It should be noted that while participants attributed the above effects to having "nice weather," it may be that these effects were caused or amplified by the *change* in weather (from a long, cold Midwestern winter to the first days of spring).

In summary, a lack of time or unfinished obligations was the most frequently cited play constraint. Although most of the participants in this study sometimes felt they didn't have time to play, their play journals demonstrated that did have time for leisure. When they did find time for play, mild negative feelings (e.g. stress, worry, and guilt) often made play less enjoyable and strong negative feelings (e.g. being depressed or highly stressed) could result in a complete loss of desire to play. Finally, having close friends, family, and roommates available facilitated their favorite forms of play and could generally make play more enjoyable.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

As described in the previous chapter, the play documented and described by the young adults in this study was predominantly social and consisted largely of sports, games, and other structured activities. When asked for their own personal definitions of play, the one characteristic they all agreed upon was that play was something one enjoys, does for enjoyment, or derives other positive feelings (e.g. happiness, joy) from. All participants stated that play was appropriate for adults and that adults do play, but they qualified these statements by saying that adults don't use the word "play" to describe their own activities except in the sense of playing something (e.g. playing basketball). Most participants reported that they no longer engaged in imaginative or make-believe play, and that their play tended to involve games and activities that had already been created rather than making up something new. Facilitators and constraints to play included time, obligations, other people, state of mind, the physical surroundings, and the weather.

### **What is Play and Who Plays?**

**What is play to these young adults?** The social nature of play noted in this study is consistent with Cosco (2017), whose participants reported that play in adulthood was mostly social. The finding that a great deal of their play consisted of planned, structured activities is also consistent with Cosco (2017) and the common notion that adult play involves structured or rule-bound activities (e.g. Yarnal et al., 2008). The finding that pretend play was common in childhood but relatively rare in adulthood is in contrast with Perone and Göncü's (2014) research, in which the vast majority of participants reported that they engaged in pretend play during every stage of their lives, including adulthood. This difference may reflect the play preferences of the participants in the respective studies, but it could also be due to the fact that Perone and Göncü's participants (adults who practiced improvisational performance and

graduate students, mostly in early childhood and elementary education) were more attuned to the nature of pretend play and how it might show up in their adult lives.

When participants were asked to define play as it related to them, the one and only thing they all agreed on was that play involved positive feelings or emotions. The majority said simply that play was something one enjoys, and although this is consistent with most play definitions, “enjoyment” is a weak term compared to the strong positive affect that characterizes my own definition of play and the “tremendous fun and enjoyment” Huizinga (1950, p. 1) associated with play. The results of this study are also at odds with two studies that sought to understand how adults view play. In Cosco’s (2017) study of play across the lifespan, participants equated play with fun; enjoyment alone was *not* sufficient to call something play (p. 38-39). Similarly, McInnes and Birdsey (2014) found that children, adolescents, parents, and teachers all thought of play as enjoyable *and* fun. (Podilchak (1991) argues that while enjoyment is a part of fun, fun is a *higher level* of enjoyment, a view with which I agree.) It seems likely that the participants in the present study chose the word enjoy because the activities they thought of as play were always enjoyable, but not always fun or joyful. A minority of participants in the current study defined play in stronger, more specific terms (e.g. “pure happiness” or “joy”), which is more consistent with my definition and the studies cited above.

Participants did not agree upon any of the other characteristics commonly cited in academic definitions of human play (e.g. Brown, 2009; Gray, 2015; Huizinga, 1950), including freedom of choice, intrinsic motivation, and a high level of absorption. Intrinsic motivation, or a focus on the process rather than a desired end result (“means over ends”) is often said to be one of the most important criteria distinguishing play from other activities (e.g. Pellegrini, 2009). However, Henricks (2015a) proposed that there are four types of “ideal behaviors” (play, work,

communitas, and ritual) and that most real-life activities are a mixture of these four behaviors (p. 64). Similar to Henricks, Gray (2009) also suggested that adults tend to combine play with other responsibilities. Their views seem to indicate that intrinsic motivation may not be a defining quality for *adult play*, which is consistent with how participants in this study defined play.

In contrast with the present study, Cosco's (2017) participants associated a high level of absorption with play. However, 44% of Cosco's participants were recruited through play forums (a play listserv and a play conference), so they may have been influenced by scholarly definitions of play and/or had stricter views of what was and wasn't play. Consistent with this explanation, two of the participants in the present study said that 100% play or "the best forms of play" allowed them to be fully in the moment and forget about everything else that was going on. It seems likely that they did not always experience a sense of full absorption when they played, and this could be because what some of what they categorized as play was not 100% play.

Given the scholarly debate – and lack of consensus – about how to define play, it's not surprising that these participants didn't agree on a singular definition of play. What is curious, though, is the relative vagueness of their definitions; on average, their play definitions only had two criteria. My own definition has five criteria and other academic definitions often include five or more criteria (e.g. Gray, 2013). If we view play as existing on a continuum, as I do, then activities that meet more of the play criteria can be said to be "more like play" and activities that meet less of them are "less like play." Accordingly, many of the activities that fulfill participants' definitions of play would be considered "less like play" by my definition.

This seems to suggest that the participants in the present study have a relatively low standard for adult play, and they may not differentiate it from recreation or leisure. This is not surprising when we realize that even play scholars may (inadvertently) be promoting the idea

that adult play is a weaker version of childhood play. An example of this occurs in Brown's (2009) book Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul. In a chapter on play in adulthood, he says that "watching sports, sitcoms, Oprah, or an excellent drama on TV is usually a type of play" (p. 61), a statement that appears to be justified by the fact that watching such programs is enjoyable, seemingly purposeless, and highly absorbing. In contrast, a discussion of "screens" (i.e. TV and video/computer games) includes a scenario in which Brown says "play stops" when the TV goes on:

The intense visual stimuli that screens provide, along with a captivating narrative, can be very seductive playmates. I've seen kids who are happily playing with blocks on the floor, interacting with each other, negotiating, inventing new story lines, being energetic and talkative. *And then the television screen comes on and play stops. Interaction is no more.* The story line is set by the box, and the kids are now merely along for the ride, motionless and mute. (emphasis added; p. 184)

Brown seems to be saying that watching TV, movies, and/or sports *is* play for adults but not for children, implying perhaps that children's play should be interactive but that adult play need not be. But why?

Maybe this is just the natural result of defining play on a continuum, as scholars of human play frequently do. For example, Gray (2009) sees human play on a continuum, and he observed that pure play is seen less frequently in adulthood, as adults often combine play with other things (p. 480). (Gray does not define "pure play," but I interpret the term to mean an activity that meets *all* of his play criteria.) Gray's observation is consistent with a comment made by one of Nicholson and Shimpi's (2015) participants: "How seldom we see adults *really play*" (emphasis in original; p. 1613). Participants' definitions of play and the play they documented

seems to suggest that Gray was correct – *pure play* is less common in adulthood. This raises a number of questions: Is the experience of pure play different from the experience of other activities that are less like play (in other words, more like recreation, leisure, or work)? What are the benefits of pure play as compared to activities that are less like play? Nicholson and Shimpi's participants came to see that some types of play were more meaningful and beneficial than others. Should we be doing more to promote and facilitate pure play rather than accepting the common notion that adult play is a weaker version of the play we knew as children?

At this point it's worth remembering that all of the participants in this study were Recreation, Sport, and Tourism (RST) majors, and in their required courses they were taught that adults play. Nearly all of them were also high academic achievers. As good RST students, it is possible that they identified some of their leisure and recreation activities as play in an effort to show that they still played. If this was the case, it could explain why many of them categorized passive or sedentary activities as play. It could also explain why most defined play in terms of enjoyment rather than fun (enjoyment being something play, leisure, and recreation have in common).

**Who plays?** In contrast with Nicholson and Shimpi's (2015) participants, who associated play with childhood and said that they no longer played, every participant in the present study emphatically stated that adults play and that they themselves still played. However, they qualified this by saying that 1) in mainstream society (i.e. non-RST majors), adults don't call it play, and 2) adults play differently than children. This first point – that adults play but most don't call it play - may explain why Nicholson and Shimpi's participants said they didn't play: They were students in a different major (childhood education), and unlike these RST students, they had not been *taught* that adults play. Participants in the present study likely learned, in their RST

classes, that adults play (recall that one participant said precisely this in her pre-program questions). The limited research in this area suggests that, like the participants in Nicholson and Shimpi's study, most adults consider play to be something children do, not something they themselves do (McInnes & Birdsey, 2014; Cosco, 2017).

The finding that adults play differently than children is consistent with the thinking that adult play is structured and organized while children's play is more unstructured (Yarnal et al., 2008). As discussed above, much of what these young adults called play was different than the play of young children. This raises some questions: First, why do we, as adults, not call it play? I suggest that mainstream adults use the terms recreation and leisure instead of play because the "play" we engage in as adults is frequently more like recreation or leisure than the play of our youth. Most adults have had extensive play experience in their childhoods, and they recognize intuitively that their childhood play and their adult leisure-time activities are not the same. The second and perhaps more important question is *why* do adults play differently? Maybe adults simply outgrow some types of play, but it also seems likely that adults' play is influenced by some of the constraints noted in the findings.

### **Facilitators and Constraints**

When asked to describe what made play easiest for them, participants widely recognized the importance of having people to play with and being free from obligations and/or having plenty of free time. Other play facilitators were a positive state of mind and good weather. Stigma is also discussed in this section, although it was not explicitly identified as a constraint by these participants.

**People.** People were an important play facilitator, and many participants said they preferred to play with others. This is consistent with Nicholson and Shimpi (2015), who reported that associating with “people who want to play” (p. 1608) was a play facilitator.

Some participants observed that playing with others improved their experience. This may be simply because other people enabled them to play the activities they enjoyed the most. However, research by Boothby, Clark, and Bargh (2014) suggests that playing with someone else might be more fun than doing the same thing alone. Boothby et al. found that sharing an experience with someone else intensified that experience even in the absence of any communication between them. In other words, a pleasant experience was perceived to be more pleasant (and an unpleasant one more unpleasant) when it was shared with someone else. Interestingly, the authors use the term “amplification” in their hypothesis, which is the same term Dani used to describe her experience of playing with other people (“amplifies the happiness”).

**Time and obligations.** All but two participants said it was easier to play when they had plenty of free time and/or were free from obligations. However, as has been previously noted, they always found *some* time for leisure. Therefore, it seems too simplistic to say that a lack of time prohibited them from playing (Godbey et al., 2010). This is not to discount the facts that 1) participants seemed to genuinely believe they couldn’t play because they had too much to do and not enough time to do it, and 2) they often experienced guilt, worry, and stress when they chose to play despite knowing they had work to finish. It seems more accurate to say that a perceived lack of time affected play by leading them to postpone their play and by creating a state of mind that negatively impacted their play experience. State of mind is discussed in more detail below. Interestingly, the two participants who reported playing every week (if not more often) *did not* identify time as a constraint, suggesting perhaps that individually reported constraints were not

just indicators of external barriers but also a reflection of their priorities and motivation to negotiate their constraints (Liechty & Genoe, 2013).

Unlike the present study, a lack of time and/or other obligations were not ultimately found to be obstacles to play in Nicholson and Shimpi's study, although *making time* for play was a facilitator in their study. Cosco (2017) also reported that making time for play was a facilitator. The difference between the findings of the present study and the findings of Nicholson and Shimpi's is most likely due to the design of the program/class in which participants were enrolled. Unlike the present study, which sought to understand participants' attitudes and beliefs about play but not to challenge them, Nicholson and Shimpi's study was a case study about a for-credit class taught by Nicholson. In this class, Nicholson guided her students to examine *and critically evaluate* their assumptions about play. The following quote suggests that the students in Nicholson's class began the semester thinking of time as an obstacle (similar to most of the participants in the present study), but that their views changed over time:

Midway through the semester, discourse in the class began to shift, the students no longer framed the context of their lives as *sine qua non* with the deprivation of play ('I can't play because I've got too much homework this week...') towards a discourse that became a dilemma worth consideration ('Given my constraints, how *can* I engage in adult play?'). (p. 1609)

In short, participants in both studies seem to have started out with the view that time and obligations were barriers over which they had little or no control, but with support from Nicholson, they came to see it differently. Had participants in the present study been challenged to consider the discrepancy between what they said (e.g. they didn't have time to play) and what they did (e.g. documenting that they did have some free time, no matter how busy they said they

were), they may have seen time and obligations more like Nicholson and Shimpi's participants did – as constraints that were *negotiable*. The difference in findings between the present study and Nicholson and Shimpi's has implications for teaching young adults about play. See Practical Applications, below, for recommendations.

**State of mind.** Although a lack of time and/or too many pressing obligations were commonly cited as play constraints and state of mind was only specifically identified by two participants, a perceived lack of time frequently discouraged play via its influence on participants' state of mind. Other factors such as the physical environment and the weather could also influence play by affecting their state of mind, which makes state of mind one of the most influential play facilitators/constraints identified in this study.

For nearly all of the participants, stress, worry, and guilt kept them from fully enjoying play. A notable exception was Brad, who claimed that he could enjoy playing even when he was under stress. His play journal entries seem to confirm this assertion. It's not clear why Brad's play was unaffected by stress, although it's possible that he was simply better at coping with his daily stressors than his peers. Magnuson and Barnett (2013) showed that playful individuals had lower levels of perceived stress and better coping methods than those who were less playful. Although the present study did not evaluate playfulness, it's plausible that Brad had a highly playful disposition and lower levels of perceived stress, which allowed him play in spite of his stressors.

Participants' reports that a negative state of mind could be a constraint to play is consistent with the thinking that play and stress don't go together. Those who study children and animals assert that play occurs only when the player is in a relaxed, low-stress setting (e.g. Pellegrini, 2009; Burghardt, 2010). Similarly, Gray (2015) proposed that play was conducted in a

“relatively nonstressed frame of mind” (p. 125), and although he appears to be referring to how one feels *while playing* (“the person at play is relatively free from pressure or stress,” p. 126) rather than an antecedent condition to play, it stands to reason that if the stressful events of life are weighing heavily on one’s mind, it may be difficult to become absorbed in – and therefore fully enjoy – play.

Related to this, stress reduction is a benefit sometimes attributed to play (see for example Helpguide.org, n.d.), although Van Vleet and Feeney (2015) note that this benefit hasn’t been tested empirically. At least one of Nicholson and Shimpi’s (2015) participants found play to be a stress reducer, which begs the question: How can play reduce stress if stress prevents us from playing? Perhaps some adults are better able to play under stress than others (see above). Further investigation is necessary to clarify the relationship between stress and play in adulthood.

**Weather.** Although nice weather was frequently mentioned as a play facilitator by the participants in the present study, it was not discussed in Nicholson and Shimpi’s (2015) or Cosco’s (2017) study. Weather may have been more important to the participants in the present study because of their specific play preferences. RST majors are often drawn to RST because of their love of sports and/or outdoor recreation, activities that may be difficult or impossible to do indoors. However, not everyone enjoys being outdoors, and those who prefer one of the many types of play that can be done indoors are less likely to be influenced by the weather. Also, the timing of the study may have influenced these findings; specifically, the sudden appearance of spring after a long, cold winter during the data collection period may have heightened the participants’ appreciation of “nice weather.”

**Stigma.** Participants in other studies (Nicholson & Shimpi, 2015; Cosco, 2017) observed that there was a stigma around play in adulthood, but participants in the present study did not

identify this as a constraint to their own play. They may not have perceived (adult) play to be stigmatized because most of the play they engaged in (sports, games, social play) is generally considered to be appropriate for adults or because their RST classes had taught them that play was appropriate for adults. Despite not naming stigma as a constraint, participants demonstrated an awareness that some types of play were inappropriate for adults. Perhaps the difference between the findings of the present study and the findings of Nicholson and Shimpi is that Nicholson and Shimpi's participants were required to try a wide range of play types, and the authors specifically noted that participants faced the judgment of their peers when they engaged in "forms of play traditionally bounded by childhood" (e.g. coloring; p. 1613). Further, Nicholson and Shimpi guided their participants to critically evaluate their play experiences. Had the participants in the current study engaged in a wider variety of play types and been challenged to question their beliefs, they might have also concluded that stigma was (or could be) a constraint to play. As Ellen observed, "I feel like age limits are put on things. But I don't always understand why" (Group meeting, 3/28).

**Putting it all together: Contexts that support play.** Unsurprisingly, most of the participants had their favorite play experiences during Spring Break, when they had more free time, fewer obligations, were surrounded by the people they liked, were physically removed from the campus, and were in a "vacation mindset." In some cases, they were also in places where the weather was good (e.g. Florida, Gulf of Mexico). For those of us who value regular play, this might be a discouraging finding, implying that we can really only expect to play on holidays and vacations. However, three participants had their favorite play experiences during the regular school term (in other words, not over Spring Break), and two of them (Brad and Ellen) reported playing every week, if not more frequently. These two also engaged in a variety

of play types, including play that was creative, spontaneous, and improvised. Should we hope to promote play as an activity that can coexist with our regular everyday lives, it may be useful to note some similarities between these two.

Brad and Ellen both seemed to embrace their fun/playful side as a valued part of their identity, and they both noted a specific, personally relevant benefit that they got from play. Benefits were not something I had asked them to address, but when other participants did bring them up, they were more likely to use general terms such as “it [play] is something very important” (Becca, FPR). Both Brad and Ellen also had roommates with whom they played on a regular basis. Ellen specifically noted that her roommates helped to make play part of her routine, and they also made play more fun than when she played alone.

In short, both Brad and Ellen embraced their playful/fun sides as valued parts of their identities; they felt play had specific, personally relevant benefits; and they had built-in playmates. It’s unclear whether they had purposely surrounded themselves with other people they could play with or whether this was just a coincidence, but based on their values, we can speculate that it was a purposeful choice. We can also speculate that being surrounded by others who liked to play in the same ways that they did had a strong influence on the frequency of their play and as well as the types of play they engaged in. Their home environment may have supported more spontaneous and improvised play, because their playmates were likely to be around when the mood struck them. Stigma was less likely to affect their play, as they were surrounded by others who were like them and physically separate from other people who might pass judgment on their play.

Note: There were some differences between Ellen and Brad. In addition to the gender difference, Brad was a James Scholar, but Ellen was not. Brad was a sophomore, while Ellen was a senior in her last semester on campus.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Although I originally anticipated using Cognitive Evaluation Theory (CET; Ryan & Deci, 2017) in this study, it became clear in the analysis stage that hierarchical leisure constraints theory (Crawford, Godbey, & Shen, 2010) was much more relevant to the data. Therefore, this discussion focuses on the latter theory. The findings of this study provide support for the hierarchical leisure constraints theory. Consistent with the theory, the participants in the present study identified a variety of constraints to play, including structural (e.g. time), intrapersonal (e.g. stress, perceived lack of imagination), and interpersonal constraints (e.g. friends not being available). This study also found that intrapersonal constraints (e.g. perceived lack of imagination) could influence play preferences (e.g. preferring to choose from existing activities rather than making up something new). The findings also supported research which suggests that leisure constraints may affect the quality of the experience rather than only participation itself (Frederick & Shaw, 1995; Liechty, Freeman, & Zabriskie, 2006). Also consistent with the theory, participants in the present study negotiated play constraints in a variety of ways, including participating in a favorite activity less frequently due to time constraints, choosing different activities when their friends weren't available, and engaging in stigmatized play only with those they trusted.

Finally, the findings of this study may be seen as evidence that constraints perceived to be difficult or impossible to overcome can remove our desire to participate. Specifically, although participants acknowledged that there was a stigma around certain types of play, they

didn't identify this as a constraint. I was left with the distinct impression that many of these young adults didn't have a desire to engage in play that was unstructured, improvisational, or otherwise childlike. This could be evidence that the stigma about "childlike" play was so strong that it removed their desire to engage in it. Another possibility is that they no longer enjoy this type of play, but at least one participant did still enjoy it, and the JWT (2012) report discussed in the Introduction showed that 85% of those in the 18-34 year old age group said they sometimes miss the experience of childhood play.

### **Practical Applications**

**For educators.** Nicholson and Shimpi (2015) argued that teachers who play are more effective advocates for children's play. Similarly, I believe leisure professionals who regularly engage in play that is meaningful and highly rewarding make better advocates for play because they can speak passionately about the subject from their own experience. However, most of the participants in the present study sometimes struggled to make time for play and had a fairly narrow conception of adult play. In order to prepare future leisure professionals to be effective play advocates and provide programming for people with diverse interests, it may be helpful to use some of the strategies employed in Nicholson's History and Theories of Play course. First, Nicholson required her students to try a wide range of play forms, including those more typical of childhood. Some of the play activities were done in class, and students had homework assignments to play outside of class and to journal on their experiences. Second, Nicholson engaged students to think about what experience(s) they wanted from their play (using Brannen's (2002) feelings of play) and what experiences they were actually having. Finally, given the difference in outcomes between the present study and Nicholson and Shimpi's (particularly in

students' learning to see certain constraints as negotiable), it appears that educators may need to actively challenge students to question their own beliefs about play.

**For practitioners.** The findings suggest that recreation and play practitioners should be cautious about using the word “play” when promoting play experiences to young adults, as these participants said that most adults think of play as something that’s for children. For example, offering a “Play Day” or “Play Class” may lead adults to think the activity is not meant for them, and even if they do understand it’s for them, they may still be confused about what to expect. Terms that evoke the play experience without using the word “play” may be better for marketing to adults. For instance, the terms “recess” and “adult recess” have been used successfully to promote childlike play experiences to adults (Montgomery, Oct. 22, 2019). I used “Recess for Adults” as the name of a weekly adult play program for the YMCA and the University of Illinois.

The findings also suggest that when promoting play programs, especially those that might be perceived as weird or childish, it may be helpful to encourage young adults to sign up with a group of friends. For the participants in the present study, play was highly social, and the female participants, in particular, said they would be more likely to try something “weird” if they could do it with their friends. For instance, promotional materials for an adult camp that features traditional children’s activities such as kickball and dressing up in costumes could encourage participants to bring a friend or offer a discount for those who sign up with a group of friends.

Recreation professionals could also utilize structured, organized activities as a springboard to less structured, more play-like experiences (remember that participants largely conceived of play as structured, organized activities, and didn’t necessarily think they were capable of more free-flowing play). For example, a program intended to facilitate creative play

could start with a more structured activity (e.g. a competition to see who can make the tallest stack of blocks) as a lead in to a less structured play activity, such as using blocks to build an elaborate castle of one's own design. Alternatively, conventional sports could begin with a "warm-up" period meant to be more like pure play. Specifically, during this warm-up period, facilitators could encourage participants to 1) not keep score, 2) focus on having fun, and 3) make modifications to the rules to make it more fun for the players. After the designated warm-up period is over, the activity can continue with traditional, competitive play. Based strictly on my own personal experiences, I would also recommend giving players a few minutes at the end of the session to reflect on and discuss what rules modification(s) made the activity more fun for them and anything else they would like to try next time.

Finally, I offer the following suggestions based on the results of CET research and my own experience as a play leader: Play practitioners can increase intrinsic motivation for recreation by providing some activities that are not competitive as well as some activities that are competitive but de-emphasize the outcome. For example, Four Square and Blob Tag are two games that de-emphasize the final outcome while still providing the structure and competition that many adults expect. In both of these games, there is no score and all players continue to play the game even if they aren't very good at it. Other suggestions include offering games traditionally played in childhood (e.g. kickball; by virtue of their association with childhood, adults tend to see these games as play rather than serious sports); modifying existing games or sports to create goofy variations (for example, a less serious form of Ultimate Frisbee uses a rubber pig in place of a Frisbee and could be marketed with a lighthearted name such as "Pass the Pig" or "Ultimate Bacon"; the name of the game and use of a non-traditional prop signal that this is not a serious sport); and emphasizing in all marketing materials that the objective of the

activity is simply to have fun. In addition, facilitators for these activities should maintain a lighthearted atmosphere and remind participants that the point is just to have fun.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

**Limitations.** All of the participants in this study were students at a large Midwestern university, and they all had the same major (one that teaches its students that play continues into adulthood). The findings may have been different if the research had been conducted in a different geographic area, if the participants were not university students, or if they were students in a different major. All but one participant showed evidence of being high academic achievers, and they may have had different values and constraints to play as compared with other students. Six were also students in a class that I was teaching at the time and although I repeatedly stressed that I wanted to understand their own experiences and beliefs, they may have been inclined to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear rather than their own personal truths. Finally, the results of this study are not generalizable due to the size and qualitative nature of the study.

**Future research.** Future research should investigate the play experiences, attitudes, beliefs, facilitators, and constraints of students in other majors. Because the participants in the present study and Nicholson and Shimpi's (2015) study learned about play as part of their required coursework, it would be particularly useful to understand the views of college students who have not learned about play in their classes. Future research should also explore these same topics with emerging adults who are not students. The findings of this study also bring up some questions that would benefit from future research, including the following:

What are the benefits and drawbacks of unstructured play (free play) for adults? How do they compare to the benefits of structured play? How do they compare to the benefits of leisure?

When and why do adults choose leisure over play? At some point in this study, almost all of the participant felt they didn't have time to play, but their play journals showed that they were able to find some time for leisure activities (e.g. going for a walk, watching Netflix). What led them to choose these activities instead of play?

What is the relationship between play and stress? Is stress reduction a benefit of adult play, and if it is, do all types of play provide the same benefit or does it vary according to the type of play (e.g. structured, unstructured, competitive, cooperative, solitary, social, physical, sedentary, imaginary, etc.)? Why do some people seem able to play under stress while others are unable to play and/or unable to enjoy play when they are stressed?

Is our enjoyment of play related to the extent that it is pure play? In other words, is pure play more enjoyable (or fun, joyful, etc.) than something that is less like play?

How does play change and evolve throughout our lives? In particular, how does play change from adolescence through older adulthood? What contributes to these changes?

## **General Conclusions**

To date there has been relatively little research on play in adulthood, and some of the gaps in the literature include conflicting views on whether or not adults play; limited information on how the general population views play in adulthood (in contrast with groups that are identified as playful, e.g. Cheang, 2002, or Yarnal et al., 2008); how adults experience play (if they play) and whether that experience is qualitatively different from childhood play; and facilitators and constraints to play in adulthood. The purpose of this study was to further our understanding of play in young adulthood through a play-based discussion group, in which participants were asked to engage in weekly cycles of play, documentation, and reflection. The unique contributions of this study include documenting and analyzing 1) the play experiences of

young adults over an extended period of time, including how they played while on vacation and during their everyday lives; 2) their attitudes and beliefs about play as demonstrated by their words and their actions; and 3) the elements they perceived to facilitate and constrain play. The play these participants documented was highly social and much of it consisted of planned, structured activities. Participants' definitions of play were less strict compared to scholarly definitions (particularly those used to define play in childhood), and participants didn't always seem to differentiate play from leisure. This is consistent with the notion raised by some play scholars that pure play is not very common in adulthood. Given evidence that some adults enjoy activities that are more like children's play than adult recreation, these findings raise questions about how we prepare future leisure professionals to create programming for a diverse population.

Finally, I am making my final edits during the COVID-19 pandemic. Play research (and play in general) may seem frivolous at a time like this, but I believe we need a little something to take our minds off of our worries now as much as we ever did. Maybe more. As Becca said, "the best forms of play ... take your mind off everything else you have going on for a while" (FPR). And play scholar Brian Sutton-Smith once said:

We study play because life is crap, and it's full of pain and suffering, and the only thing that makes it worth living – the only thing that makes it possible to get up in the morning and go on living – is play. (Fox, Mar. 14, 2015)

I doubt Dr. Sutton-Smith was entirely serious, but human lives will probably always come with pain and suffering, and play has the potential to bring a bit of light and joy to our most difficult times. This is one of the reasons I started studying play. However, these benefits are inconsequential if stress, a perceived lack of imagination, or the belief that it's "weird" for adults

to play prevents us from really playing. Play practitioners and researchers may not be able to heal the sick or prevent the next global (or personal) crisis, but if we can help more people to have pure play experiences, maybe it will be a little bit easier for us to cope with life's ups and downs. For me, that's a good enough reason to study play.

## REFERENCES

- Baxter, L. A. (1992). Forms and functions of intimate play in personal relationships. *Human Communication Research, 18*(3), 336–363.
- Berlin, K. L., & Klenosky, D. B. (2014). Let me play, not exercise! A laddering study of older women's motivations for continued engagement in sports-based versus exercise-based leisure time physical activities. *Journal of Leisure Research, 46*(2), 127-152.
- Brannen, B. (2002). *The gift of play: Why adult women stop playing and how to start again*. iUniverse.
- Boothby, E. J., Clark, M. S., & Bargh, J. A. (2014). Shared experiences are amplified. *Psychological Science, 25*(12), 2209-2216.
- Brown, S. L. (2009). *Play: How it shapes the brain, opens the imagination, and invigorates the soul*. Penguin.
- Burghardt, G. M. (2010). The comparative reach of play and brain: Perspective, evidence, and implications. *American Journal of Play, 2*(3), 338-356.
- Charmaz, K. (2014). *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Cheang, M. (2002). Older adults' frequent visits to a fast-food restaurant: Nonobligatory social interaction and the significance of play in a “third place”. *Journal of Aging Studies, 16*(3), 303-321.
- Chick, G., Yarnal, C., & Purrington, A. (2012). Play and mate preference: Testing the signal theory of adult playfulness. *American Journal of Play, 4*(4), 407.
- Cooper, S. E. (2004). *The Red Hat Society®: Fun and friendship after fifty*. New York: Warner Books.

- Cosco, S. L. (2017). *A study of play across the lifespan* [Master's thesis, University of Alberta]. Education & Research Archive.
- Crawford, D. W., & Godbey, G. (1987). Reconceptualizing barriers to family leisure. *Leisure Sciences, 9*(2), 119-127.
- Crawford, D. W., Jackson, E. L., & Godbey, G. (1991). A hierarchical model of leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences, 13*(4), 309-320.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage Publications.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. New York: Plenum.
- Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (2012). Self-determination theory. In P. A. M. Van Lange, A. W. Kruglanski, & E. T. Higgins (Eds.), *Handbook of theories of social psychology* (Vol. 1, pp. 416-433). Sage Publications.
- Fox, M. (Mar. 14, 2015). Brian Sutton-Smith, scholar of what's fun, dies at 90. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/15/science/brian-sutton-smith-scholar-of-whats-fun-dies-at-90.html>
- Frederick, C. J., & Shaw, S. M. (1995). Body image as a leisure constraint: Examining the experience of aerobic exercise classes for young women. *Leisure Sciences, 17*(2), 57-73.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American Psychologist, 56*(3), 218.
- Gordon, G. (2008). What is play? In search of a universal definition. *Play and Culture Studies, 8*, 1-21.

- Gray, P. (2009). Play as a foundation for hunter-gatherer social existence. *American Journal of Play*, 1(4), 476-522.
- Gray, P. (2013). Definitions of play. In *Scholarpedia*, 8(7), 30578. Retrieved from [www.scholarpedia.org/article/Definitions\\_of\\_Play](http://www.scholarpedia.org/article/Definitions_of_Play).
- Gray, P. (2015). Studying play without calling it that: Humanistic and positive psychology. In J. E. Johnson, S. G. Eberle, T. S. Henricks, & D. Kushner (Eds.), *The Handbook of the Study of Play* (Vol. 1, pp. 121-138). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Harrison, H., Birks, M., Franklin, R., & Mills, J. (2017, January). Case study research: Foundations and methodological orientations. In *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research* (Vol. 18, No. 1).
- Heljakka, K. (2013). *Principles of adult play(fulness) in contemporary toy cultures: From wow to flow to glow* [Doctoral dissertation, Aalto University]. Retrieved from Researchgate.
- Heljakka, K. (2017). Toy fandom, adulthood, and the ludic age. In J. Gray, C. Sandvoss, & C. L. Harrington (Eds.), *Fandom: Identities and communities in a mediated world* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 91 – 105). NYU Press.
- HelpGuide.org. (n.d.). The benefits of play for adults: How play can improve your health, work, and family relationships. Retrieved from <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/emotional-health/benefits-of-play-for-adults.htm>
- Henderson, K. A., & Bialeschki, M. D. (1993). Exploring an expanded model of women's leisure constraints. *Journal of Applied Recreation Research*, 18(4), 229-252.
- Henricks, T. S. (2015a). *Play and the human condition*. University of Illinois Press.

- Henricks, T. S. (2015b). Where are we now? Challenges for the study of play. In J. E. Johnson, S. G. Eberle, T. S. Henricks, & D. Kuschner (Eds.), *The handbook of the study of play* (Vol. 2, pp. 381-392). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Heuser, L. (2005). We're not too old to play sports: the career of women lawn bowlers. *Leisure Studies*, 24(1), 45-60.
- Hubbard, J., & Mannell, R. C. (2001). Testing competing models of the leisure constraint negotiation process in a corporate employee recreation setting. *Leisure Sciences*, 23(3), 145-163.
- Hughes, B. (2006). *A playworker's taxonomy of play types* (2nd ed.). London: Playlink.
- Huizinga, J. (1950). *Homo ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. New York: Roy Publishers.
- Ito, E., Kono, S., & Walker, G. J. (2018). Development of cross-culturally informed leisure-time physical activity constraint and constraint negotiation typologies: The case of Japanese and Euro-Canadian adults. *Leisure Sciences*, 1-19.
- Jackson, E. L. (2005). Leisure constraints research: Overview of a developing theme in leisure studies. In E. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Constraints to leisure* (pp. 3-15). State College, PA: Venture Publishing.
- Jackson, E. L., & Rucks, V. C. (1995). Negotiation of leisure constraints by junior-high and high-school students: An exploratory study. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 27(1), 85.
- Jackson, E. L., Crawford, D. W., & Godbey, G. (1993). Negotiation of leisure constraints. *Leisure Sciences*, 15(1), 1-11.

- Jonsson, S., Montola, M., Waern, A., & Ericsson, M. (2006, June). Prosopopeia: experiences from a pervasive Larp. *Proceedings of the 2006 ACM SIGCHI International Conference on Advances in Computer Entertainment Technology* (p. 23). ACM.
- Jun, J., & Kyle, G. T. (2011). The effect of identity conflict/facilitation on the experience of constraints to leisure and constraint negotiation. *Journal of Leisure Research, 43*(2), 176-204.
- JWT. (2012, July). Play as a competitive advantage. Retrieved from <http://www.slideshare.net/jwtintelligence/play-as-a-competitive-advantage-july-2012-13618718>
- Kay, T., & Jackson, G. (1991). Leisure despite constraint: The impact of leisure constraints on leisure participation. *Journal of Leisure Research, 23*(4), 301-313.
- Koçak, F. (2017). Leisure constraints and facilitators: Perspectives from Turkey. *European Journal of Physical Education and Sport Science*.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry* (Vol. 75). Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 163-188). Sage Publications.
- Little, D. E. (2002). Women and adventure recreation: Reconstructing leisure constraints and adventure experiences to negotiate continuing participation. *Journal of Leisure Research, 34*(2), 157-177.
- Liechty, T., Freeman, P. A., & Zabriskie, R. B. (2006). Body image and beliefs about appearance: Constraints on the leisure of college-age and middle-age women. *Leisure Sciences, 28*(4), 311-330.

- Liechty, T., & Genoe, M. R. (2013). Older men's perceptions of leisure and aging. *Leisure Sciences, 35*(5), 438-454.
- Loucks-Atkinson, A., & Mannell, R. C. (2007). Role of self-efficacy in the constraints negotiation process: The case of individuals with fibromyalgia syndrome. *Leisure Sciences, 29*(1), 19-36.
- Mannell, R. C., & McMahon, L. (1982). Humor as play: Its relationship to psychological well-being during the course of a day. *Leisure Sciences, 5*(2), 143-155.
- McInnes, K., & Birdsey, N. (2014). Understanding play: The perceptions of children, adolescents, parents and teachers. In L.A. Barnett (Ed.), *Play of individuals and societies*. Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford.
- Mitas, O., Qian, X. L., Yarnal, C., & Kerstetter, D. (2011). "The fun begins now!": Broadening and building processes in Red Hat Society® participation. *Journal of Leisure Research, 43*(1), 30-55.
- Montgomery, M. (Oct. 22, 2019). Grown-ups need to play more. Adult Recess can help. Retrieved from <https://www.outsideonline.com/2404063/adult-recess-free-play>
- Nicholson, J., & Shimpi, P. M. (2015). Guiding future early childhood educators to reclaim their own play as a foundation for becoming effective advocates for children's play. *Early Child Development and Care, 185*(10), 1601-1616.
- Outley, C. W., & McKenzie, S. (2007). Older African American women: An examination of the intersections of an adult play group and life satisfaction. *Activities, Adaptation & Aging, 31*(2), 19-36.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (2009). *The role of play in human development*. Oxford University Press, USA.

- Pellegrini, A. D., & Smith, P. K. (1998). Physical activity play: The nature and function of a neglected aspect of play. *Child Development, 69*(3), 577-598.
- Peng, W., Lin, J. H., Pfeiffer, K. A., & Winn, B. (2012). Need satisfaction supportive game features as motivational determinants: An experimental study of a self-determination theory guided exergame. *Media Psychology, 15*(2), 175-196.
- Perone, A., & Göncü, A. (2014). Life-span pretend play in two communities. *Mind, Culture, and Activity, 21*(3), 200-220.
- Podilchak, W. (1991). Distinctions of fun, enjoyment and leisure. *Leisure Studies, 10*(2), 133-148.
- Rahman, O., Wing-Sun, L., & Cheung, B. H. M. (2012). "Cosplay": Imaginative self and performing identity. *Fashion Theory, 16*(3), 317-341.
- Raymore, L. A. (2002). Facilitators to leisure. *Journal of Leisure Research, 34*(1), 37-51.
- Raymore, L., Godbey, G., Crawford, D., & Von Eye, A. (1993). Nature and process of leisure constraints: An empirical test. *Leisure Sciences, 15*(2), 99-113.
- Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017). *Self-determination theory*. New York, NY: The Guilford.
- Ryan, R. M., Rigby, C. S., & Przybylski, A. (2006). The motivational pull of video games: A self-determination theory approach. *Motivation and Emotion, 30*(4), 344-360.
- Schneider, I. E. (2016). Leisure constraints and negotiation: Highlights from the journey past, present, and future. In G. J. Walker, D. Scott, & M. Stodolska (Eds.), *Leisure matters: The state and future of leisure studies* (pp. 151-161). State College, PA: Venture Publishing.
- Schneider, I. E., & Wilhelm Stanis, S. A. (2007). Coping: An alternative conceptualization for constraint negotiation and accommodation. *Leisure Sciences, 29*(4), 391-401.

- Scott, D. (1991). The problematic nature of participation in contract bridge: A qualitative study of group-related constraints. *Leisure Sciences, 13*(4), 321-336.
- Scott, D., & Godbey, G. C. (1992). An analysis of adult play groups: Social versus serious participation in contract bridge. *Leisure Sciences, 14*(1), 47-67.
- Scott, D., & Mowen, A. J. (2010). Alleviating park visitation constraints through agency facilitation strategies. *Journal of Leisure Research, 42*(4), 535-550.
- Shaw, S. M., Bonen, A., & McCabe, J. F. (1991). Do more constraints mean less leisure? Examining the relationship between constraints and participation. *Journal of Leisure Research, 23*(4), 286-300.
- Smith, P. K. (2009). *Children and play: Understanding children's worlds* (Vol. 12). John Wiley & Sons.
- Son, J. S., Mowen, A. J., & Kerstetter, D. L. (2008). Testing alternative leisure constraint negotiation models: An extension of Hubbard and Mannell's study. *Leisure Sciences, 30*(3), 198-216.
- Sutton-Smith, B. (1997). *The ambiguity of play*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Tamborini, R., Bowman, N. D., Eden, A., Grizzard, M., & Organ, A. (2010). Defining media enjoyment as the satisfaction of intrinsic needs. *Journal of Communication, 60*(4), 758-777.
- The Entertainment Software Association. (2015). The 2015 essential facts about the computer and video game industry [PDF]. Retrieved from <http://www.theesa.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/ESA-Essential-Facts-2015.pdf>
- Van Vleet, M., & Feeney, B. C. (2015). Play behavior and playfulness in adulthood. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 9*(11), 630-643.

- Walker, G. J. (2007). Response to coping as an alternative conceptualization for constraint negotiation and accommodation. *Leisure Sciences, 29*(4), 415-418.
- Walker, G. J., & Virden, R. J. (2005). Constraints on outdoor recreation. In E. L. Jackson (Ed.), *Constraints to leisure* (pp. 201-219). State College, PA: Venture Publishing.
- White, D. D. (2008). A structural model of leisure constraints negotiation in outdoor recreation. *Leisure Sciences, 30*(4), 342-359.
- Wilhelm Stanis, S. A., Schneider, I. E., & Russell, K. C. (2009). Leisure time physical activity of park visitors: Retesting constraint models in adoption and maintenance stages. *Leisure Sciences, 31*(3), 287-304.
- Yarnal, C. M., Chick, G., & Kerstetter, D. L. (2008). "I did not have time to play growing up... so this is my play time. It's the best thing I have ever done for myself": What is play to older women? *Leisure Sciences, 30*(3), 235-252.
- Yarnal, C., Kerstetter, D., Chick, G., & Hutchinson, S. (2009). The Red Hat Society®: An exploration of play and masking in older women's lives. In D. Kushner (Ed.), *From children to Red Hatters: Diverse images and issues of play* (pp. 144-165). University Press of America.

## APPENDIX A: MEANING AND EXPERIENCE OF PLAY PROGRAM DESIGN

### Pre-Program Questions (PPQ):

Objective:

- Learn about participants' pre-existing views of play. Specifically, how do young adults view play in adulthood?

Participants will be asked to answer the following questions in their play journals:

- What does the word “play” mean to you? What images, thoughts, sights, sounds, smells, feelings, or memories does this word evoke? Please note that we want to know what play means to *you*, not what experts or scholars think.
- Some people think that play is something that children do, while others believe that we continue to play throughout our lives. What do you think and why?
- Some people think play is only appropriate for children, while others believe play is appropriate for everyone. What do you think and why?
- What does the phrase “play like a kid” mean to you? Is it an activity? A state of mind? A feeling? Something else?

### Meeting agendas:

#### Meeting #1 (2/28/19):

- Introduction to project
- Get to know each other. Have each person say their name and one of their favorite things to do
- Creating a safe space / ground rules

- Asks them what ground rules they would like to set in order to create an atmosphere where everyone is comfortable to share. If the following items are not raised by the participants, bring them up specifically:
  - What's said here stays here
  - Be open to new ideas
  - Treat others with respect
  - Cell phones? (Yes or no?)
  - Have fun!
- Discussion of childhood play. Pair up with a partner. Did you play as a child (up to age 18), and if so, how did you play?
- Ask for volunteers to share a childhood play memory
- Play in your life now:
  - Start by giving each person three post-it notes and asking them to write down something they did in their free time recently (one thing on each post-it).
  - After everyone is done writing, draw a line on the board as follows:  
 Completely play ←-----→not at all play
  - Have them place their post-its on the line where they think it's appropriate.
  - Read post-its one by one. Ask them why they put it where they did. What makes it more/less like play?
- Homework: In your play journal, describe one significant memory of your childhood play in as much detail as possible. Feel free to tell a story; if possible, help me imagine what it was like to be there.

## Meeting #2 (3/7/14)

- Discussion of play journal
  - Is anyone willing to share?
  - What stood out for you in thinking about your childhood play?
- Brief overview of play types (adapted from Hughes (2006)). Note that when we play, we can and often do combine multiple play types
- Distribute handout (play types, as covered above) and ask them to see how many examples they can think of from their childhood. Note that they shouldn't stress about putting things in the "right" categories, just see how many different types of play you can remember doing.
- Discussion of childhood play
  - Looking back on your childhood play, how what do you notice? Were there lots of different types? Is there a type of play that stands out for you?
- Take a few minutes to think about what you do now:
  - What type(s) of play do you currently engage in? Do you have a favorite type?
- Discussion of current play:
  - How do you play now? Differences between childhood play and current play?
- Homework: Write in your play journal about how you played (at least one thing) this week, or the thing that was most like play for you. Complete instructions are listed on Compass 2g.

## Meeting #3 (3/14/19)

- Prevailing societal view of play

Remind them that all of them said that they think we play throughout our lives, and that play is appropriate for everyone. Some also said that society says play is for children.

- How does society as a whole see play? Does society say that play is for children?
- Being re-educated about play
  - Can you ever remember a time in your life when you, when you thought that play was just for kids? If so, when did your view change?
- Feelings/experience of play. Give them handout with feelings of play (derived from Brannen and from words they have used in their play journals). Give them a few minutes to review and then discuss as a group.
- Homework: Document how they play during the next two weeks (two journal entries, one for Spring Break, and one for the week after).

**Meeting #4:** Spring break. No meeting.

**Meeting #5 (3/28/19):**

- Brainstorming how adults play

Q: How do you play? How do your adult friends and family members play? Write down as many examples as you can in 5 minutes. Try to think of at least 10.

After making the list, have them rate how appropriate each type is for adults on a scale of

1-5:

1 <-----> 5

1 = Most people would say this is totally appropriate

5 = Most people would say this is totally inappropriate

3 = Mixed; some would say it is appropriate, some would say it's inappropriate

- Group discussion of their lists. Trends? Patterns?
- Homework: Document how they played this week.

**Meeting #6 (4/4/19):**

- Read this quote (written by one of the participants):
 

“When I think of play like a kid, I think of kids creating imaginary settings and seeing in a world of make believe. Or kids screaming out of joy at the playground. These are things that are not common in the adult world. If you do it people will probably think you’re crazy.”
- Ask for their thoughts. Some prompts:
  - Is it unusual for adults to do these things?
  - Are there specific parts that uncommon? If so, which ones? (Playing on the playground? Screaming out of joy?)
  - Will people think you are crazy if you do them? Why?
  - Would it be okay to play on playground if you weren’t screaming? How do you think this would affect your experience (if at all)? Are there other factors that might make it more or less okay? What are they? (Time of day? Who you’re with? Etc.)
- Read this quote (said by participant in a previous meeting) and ask for their thoughts:
 

“I went to a convention... it’s called cosplay, I guess it kind of just depends on how into it you are and *how much you care about what other people think*... I’m not gonna dress up as someone else and go to an event like that...”
- Homework: Document how they played this week. Ask them to notice what factors influence what they do when they take a break.

**Meeting #7 (4/11/19):**

- What facilitates play?
  - Give them a minute to think of a time (recently is better) when they did something that was definitely 100% play. Have them write it down.
  - Ask what factors helped them to have that particular experience? (e.g. people, state of mind, etc.). Write them down.
  - Discuss as a group.
- Homework: Document how you played this week.

**Meeting #8 (4/18/19):**

- Play this week:
  - Think about what you wrote about in your play journal for this week. If it was definitely 100% play, what were some factors that allowed you to play? If you didn't play this week, what were some of the things that kept you from playing?
  - Discuss as a group
- Homework: Complete the Final Play Reflection.

## APPENDIX B: WEEKLY PLAY JOURNAL INSTRUCTIONS

**Week 1: Childhood play memory. Please add your Play Journal entry by noon on**

**Thursday.**

Describe one significant memory of your childhood play in as much detail as possible. Feel free to tell a story; if possible, help me imagine what it was like to be there. Some details to include:

- How old were you?
- Where were you?
- What were you doing?
- Were you playing by yourself or with other people? If you were with other people, who were they?
- What sights, sounds, and smells do you recall?
- What feelings do you recall?

You are welcome to write as much as you want, and to add pictures, videos, drawings, etc.

**Week 2: How did you play this week? Please add your Play Journal entry by noon on**

**Thursday.**

If you played this week, describe how you played (if you played multiple times, please describe your favorite experience, although you are welcome to include them all!). If you didn't play, describe the one thing that was most like play for you. Feel free to tell a story; if possible, help me imagine what it was like to be there. Some details to include:

- What were you doing?
- Where were you? Describe the setting, including any sights, sounds, smells, or tastes you can recall.

- Were you playing by yourself or with other people? If you were with other people, who were they?
- How would you describe the experience? What feelings or emotions did you notice while you were playing? Overall, what feeling were you left with at the end?
- Was this play for you?

You are welcome to write as much as you want, and to add pictures, videos, drawings, etc.

**Week 3 (Spring Break): How did you play this week? Please add your Play Journal entry by midnight on Sunday 3/24.**

If you played this week, describe how you played (if you played multiple times, please describe your favorite experience, although you are welcome to include them all!). If you didn't play, describe the one thing that was most like play for you. Feel free to tell a story; if possible, help me imagine what it was like to be there. Some details to include:

- What were you doing?
- Where were you? Describe the setting, including any sights, sounds, smells, or tastes you can recall.
- Were you playing by yourself or with other people? If you were with other people, who were they?
- How would you describe the experience? What feelings or emotions did you notice while you were playing? Overall, what feeling were you left with at the end?
- *Physically, how did you feel afterward? What about mentally? How does this compare to the way you felt before playing?*
- Was this play for you?

You are welcome to write as much as you want, and to add pictures, videos, drawings, etc.

**Week 4 (Week of 3/25): How did you play this week? Please add your Play Journal entry by 5 pm on Thursday (3/28).**

If you played this week, describe how you played (describe your favorite experience if you played more than once). If you didn't play, describe the one thing that was most like play for you. Feel free to tell a story; if possible, help me imagine what it was like to be there. Some details to include:

- What were you doing?
- Where were you?
- Were you playing by yourself or with other people? If you were with other people, who were they?
- *Physically, how did you feel afterward? What about mentally? How does this compare to the way you felt before playing? Overall, what feeling were you left with at the end?*
- Was this play for you?

You are welcome to write as much as you want, and to add pictures, videos, drawings, etc.

**Week 5 (Week of 4/1): How did you play this week? Please add your Play Journal entry by 5 pm on Thursday (4/4).**

If you played this week, describe how you played (describe your favorite experience if you played more than once). If you didn't play, describe the one thing that was most like play for you. Feel free to tell a story; if possible, help me imagine what it was like to be there. Some details to include:

- What were you doing?
- Where were you?

- Were you playing by yourself or with other people? If you were with other people, who were they?
- *Physically, how did you feel afterward? What about mentally? How does this compare to the way you felt before playing? Overall, what feeling were you left with at the end?*
- Was this play for you?

You are welcome to write as much as you want, and to add pictures, videos, drawings, etc.

**Week 6 (Week of 4/7): How did you play this week? Please add your Play Journal entry by 5 pm on Thursday (4/11).**

If you played this week, describe how you played (describe your favorite experience if you played more than once). If you didn't play, describe the one thing that was most like play for you. Some details to include:

- What were you doing?
- Where were you?
- Were you playing by yourself or with other people? If you were with other people, who were they?
- Physically, how did you feel afterward? What about mentally? How does this compare to the way you felt before playing?
- Was this play for you?
- *How did you make the decision to do this (the activity you described) rather than something else? What factors went into your decision?*

You are welcome to write as much as you want, and to add pictures, videos, drawings, etc.

**Week 7 (our last week): How did you play this week? Please add your Play Journal entry by 5 pm on Thursday (4/18).**

If you played this week, describe how you played (describe your favorite experience if you played more than once). If you didn't play, describe the one thing that was most like play for you. Some details to include:

- What were you doing?
- Where were you?
- Were you playing by yourself or with other people? If you were with other people, who were they?
- Physically, how did you feel afterward? What about mentally? How does this compare to the way you felt before playing?
- Was this play for you?
- *If your experience was definitely play, what allowed you to have this experience? (e.g. people, environment, state of mind, time of day, etc.)*
- *If your experience was not play, what got in the way of you having a "definitely play" experience?*

You are welcome to write as much as you want, and to add pictures, videos, drawings, etc.

## APPENDIX C: FINAL PLAY REFLECTION INSTRUCTIONS

### Final Play Reflection

Unless otherwise noted, when the word play is used, it means something that is/was definitely 100% play for you. Feel free to use quotes from your play journal and your pre-project questions. If you choose to do this, please use quotation marks and reference it like this: “quote from play journal” (Play Journal, date of journal entry) or “quote from pre-project questions” (Pre-Project Questions). You do not need to include a reference list.

### Part 1. What is Play?

What is your own personal definition of play? Has it changed since you started this project? If so, how?

### Part 2. Play Experience(s).

Analyze your weekly play journal entries.

- What was your favorite play experience during this project? Please describe the experience and the context. What made it your favorite experience?
- What made it possible for you to have this specific experience (e.g. people, places, environment, mood, state of mind, etc.)?
- Thinking about all of your experiences over the last eight weeks, what is the context that makes it easy (or easier) for you to play? Please describe it.
- Overall, how would you describe your favorite form(s) of play? Please try to describe the experience of playing in this way. What feelings do you associate with this form of play?

### Part 3. Not-Play Experience(s).

- Over the last eight weeks, were there any weeks when you did not play? If so, please describe the not-quite-play or not-play activity you documented in your play journal that

week. (If there was more than one, please choose one that you think is typical.)

- What kept you from playing during this specific week?
- Thinking about all of your experiences over the last eight weeks, what is the context that makes it difficult (or more difficult) for you to play? Please describe it.

**Part 4. Final Analysis and Reflection.**

- What, if anything, did you learn about the leisure activities that are not-quite-play or not-play for you? How do they differ from the activities that are definitely play for you?
- How do you feel about the amount of play you have in your life now? What about the quality of play? Please explain.
- Have any of your ideas about play changed since you started this project? If so, what has changed? What do you think led to this change?