

REFLECTIONS FOR PLAY: IS PLAY IMPORTANT THROUGH THE LIFESPAN

Glee Bertram, Ph.D., CFLE
University of Central
Oklahoma

Brandon Burr, Ph.D., CFLE
University of Central
Oklahoma

LaDonna Atkins, Ed.D
University of Central
Oklahoma

Kaye Sears, Ed.D.,
CFLE University of
Central Oklahoma

Andreae N. McGinnis
Graduate Student
University of Central Oklahoma

Overview

Play has been widely recognized as a catalyst for children’s learning and development. Numerous reports show play has positive social, emotional, physical, and cognitive impacts on children (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005; Ginsburg, 2007). However, very little information is available connecting play to the lived experiences of older adulthoods. Investigating play memories and reflections allows for a broader view of how early play experiences maintain relevance throughout life (Sandberg, 2001). This project incorporates ideas from Erik Erikson’s psychosocial theory, gerotranscendence, and play theories. These theoretical frameworks help provide a context for how play experiences ripple through the lifespan, especially since Psychosocial theory is one of the few conceptual frameworks which encompasses the life course.



Procedure

Purposeful sampling was utilized to locate older adults who were comfortable with the research topic. The purpose and scope of the study were explained to each participant before informed consent was obtained. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to collect personal memories, perspectives, and their lived experiences. From the qualitative paradigm we used phenomenology to develop our open-ended questions and allow for an emergent design and theme development. The questioning structure allowed for a flexible and responsive approach. The interviews were recorded, and field notes were taken. Participants were asked a series of open questions pertaining to memories of childhood play experiences, favorite toys, play outside and inside, organized play activities, household rule importance of play s for play, perspectives on what ages children play, if people should ever stop playing, and the importance of play in general, as well as the for different age groups. Questions included:

- What childhood memories do older adults have of play?
- What perceptions do older adults have about the importance of play?
- How do older adults believe play has changed over time?

Participants were given the opportunity to clarify and add additional thoughts after the interview discussions.



Sample

<i>Characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender		
Males	8	53.3
Female	7	46.7
Current Marital Status		
Married	8	53.3
Divorced	1	6.7
Remarried	1	6.7
Widowed/widower	5	33.3
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	13	86.7
Missing	2	13.3
Income		
\$30,001-40,000	2	13.3
\$40,001-50,000	2	13.3
\$50,001-60,000	2	13.3
\$60,001-70,000	1	6.7
\$70,001-80,000	2	13.3
\$80,001-90,000	3	20
\$90,001-100,000	2	13.3
Level of Education		
High School Graduate/GED	3	20
Completed Trade School	1	6.7
Some College	1	6.7
Bachelor's Degree	2	13.3
Some Post-Graduate	3	20
Completed Post-Graduate	5	33.3



Method/Analysis

In addition to interview field notes collected during and after the interviews, interviews were transcribed verbatim. A team of five researchers reviewed the data and coded ideas that emerged from the transcripts and notes. During the process, the researchers independently identified themes in the transcriptions (Daly, 2007). Comparisons of individual coding showed strong agreement, and thus these initial themes developed into main research themes. The identified themes were then clustered into major themes and minor themes by the research team. Through repeated reviews of the interview data and comparison strategies, six major themes and one minor theme related to the research questions were created.

Results/Discussion

Through the participants’ stories and descriptions, six major themes found were:

- *Risky/physical play, Structure and schedule of play,*
- *Play is important,*
- *Play changes throughout the lifespan,*
- *State of play is at risk*
- *Play is impacted by societal times and contexts.*

The minor theme found was *Unclear definition of play*. A major finding was that many of the participants mentioned that play is important, and gave reasons for the importance of play and how it had benefitted their lives. Some mentioned that play should never have an end over the life course.

Implications for Practice

These results highlight the opportunity for sharing and learning across generations. Connecting again to Erikson, “generativity”, or the practice of mentoring and guiding those younger, is an important task of development in adulthood. Different generations are not as connected as they once were, and intergenerational programs have been recognized as a way to enable generations to share information and skills to improve intergenerational relationships (Bullock & Osborne, 1999). Following the results of this study, intergenerational programming can be an important context for the sharing of stories and engaging in different play experiences (e.g., exchange of play activities and ideas; those more popular then and those more popular now) to better create an understanding of how those at different ages can learn new information, relate to one another, and build relationships.