

HOW ADULTS PLAY AT WORK

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my loving husband Dan, my two wonderful children Danny and Tommy, my parents who always encouraged me and the friends and family who have supported me throughout this process.

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ABSTRACT

HOW ADULTS PLAY AT WORK

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This thesis investigates adult perceptions of play and playfulness. Though it reflects participant experiences in general, the research focuses primarily on how these are understood within the context of work. As attention to play at work from both business and academia increases, how adults understand, instigate, and appreciate play becomes more important. This thesis improves understanding of how adults play as it connects these perceptions with scholarly thought. The research was completed using a literature review and information provided by fourteen participants in survey and interview form.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

NBC's mockumentary "The Office" ran 13 years, garnering 186 nominations and 48 awards in the process (IMDb 2020). Its cast of characters is tracked as they tackle the dull daily life in an industry that is slowly becoming obsolete.

During the third episode in season two, Michael, the regional manager, and Dwight, the assistant to the regional manager, are off taking care of personal business. Salesman Jim, led fellow employees for a day of office Olympics using work supplies and naughty playfulness. The day of play is so important that, in the show's final episode, characters reveal that they kept the medals that they won that day because they were so important to them.

In the traditional separation of play from work, these shenanigans would have been frowned upon. In a follow up 'interview' with the now defunct Chicago Tribune section "At Play", Dwight confirms this by saying that there is no such thing as play at work. In fact, he discusses playing paintball in one's spare time in order to hone the cutthroat instincts necessary in the world of competitive salesmanship. For his part, Jim denies organizing anything; he claims to have simply asked a question about spare time and off the day went (Schodolski and Pang, 2006).

Contrary to Dwight's belief, industries have begun to move away from the traditional work/play dichotomy. Instead, many have sought to include elements of play

into the office itself. This shift is accomplished organically, as Jim did it, or in the very architecture of the workspace, as Google has. Making room for fun is a tempting path for employers to follow, since play is seen as an easily accessed wellspring of innovation and creativity (Brown and Vaughan 2009, 135).

However, play is risky. Its results are unpredictable, and fortunes can change in an instant. How, then, do workers balance the desire to play at work with the very real possibility of losing a paycheck? Questions like this are part of a larger discussion of how humans engage with institutional norms such as those found at work. This thesis will examine how employees engage with their work within the blurry and understudied context of adult play.

1.1 Purpose of Research and Thesis Questions

Play is a lifelong process. Long branded as a child's job, adult play at work has recently come back into favor. Industry leaders such as Microsoft, Starbucks and Zoom win awards for their corporate culture, work-life balance and happy employees win again with positive media attention (Comparably 2020). For example, Google's 2017 win for Comparably's Best Company Culture was followed up with an article in Forbes justifying the victory with comments about the creative, fun, and flexible atmosphere (Forbes 2018). However, not all companies build putting greens and nap-spaces for their employees. Neither does their presence guarantee an employee will play or play in the way that is expected by management. So how do adults play at work when management is watching?

This thesis will examine how a small group of adult employees have experienced play in their work life. It asked 14 adults for their definitions of play and playfulness. The definitions are complemented by interviews to investigate how choices are made about playing and how work responds to the potential of play. In doing so, it will address two gaps in the play research.

The first gap refers to the relative lack of research into adult play (Earl 2015, 18). Though recent interest in adult play has drawn attention from a wide range of researchers, most work centers on children (Proyer 2017, 241). Even the play studies that have looked at adulthood have examined only small sections of this age group. Adults under the age of 25 have received much of that attention. Research has also focused on the other end of adult life, old age. By comparison, working adults over 25 have received significantly less attention (Earl 2015, 18). This thesis will help to address the dearth of ethnographic information related to play in the four decades of middle life. It will do so with the use of participant-generated definitions of play, ethnographic research about their play at work, and academic research into the areas of play, playfulness and work.

In developing a foundation of knowledge, this research will address a second gap in the literature - the frequent disconnect between academic research and the perspectives of the players when it comes to defining play itself. This gap is noted in the introduction of Brian Sutton-Smith's seminal text, *The Ambiguity of Play*. Sutton-Smith cites three general ways play scholars attempt to construct definitions of play: a) participant definitions; b) academic considerations of players' personal motives; and c) academic considerations of play's external rewards. Sutton-Smith noted that little time has been

taken to investigate player definitions. As a result, there is “very little relationship between the players’ own play definitions and those of the theorists” (Sutton-Smith 1997, 16). Consequently, “[i]t is quite possible, for example, for players to have one rhetoric while the “experts” have another.” (Sutton-Smith 1997, 17) This thesis will begin to bridge that gap by comparing participants’ definitions and descriptions with each other to find common threads in perceptions, expectations, and experiences. It will then compare those threads with definitions used by certain scholars.

To that end, this thesis draws upon the results of original research by the author to answer two questions: a) how adults play at work; and b) how do play and the workplace interact. The next section will outline how these gaps and questions were approached during this research process.

1.2 Initial Point of Interest

The initial point of interest for this research came during research for George Mason University’s ENGH 591: Folk Drama seminar with Dr. Joy Fraser. As part of a project to find how folk drama is found in everyday experiences, I asked the question of whether classroom skits were examples of contemporary folk drama. As is often the case in classroom exercises, skits are clock driven, goal bounded, and group performed. Unlike scan-trons and textbooks, they are difficult to justify in terms of quantifiable data. Should so much time and effort be put into one form of demonstrating knowledge - especially when there are easier, more direct and predictable means of testing knowledge?

I interviewed fellow educators at both the teaching and administrative levels, in both elementary and secondary schools, in New Jersey and Virginia. Like me, they clearly enjoy their work and find special excitement in yearly productions. To a person, these educators enjoyed the skits and found them a highlight to their year for the very reasons that they are difficult: the excited interaction of the students in their roles as players and audiences, the creativity and adaptation that the groups introduced each year; the practice and problem solving that occurred as they prepared for their big day; the pride in the student's accomplishments that made their performance possible; participation in a class tradition. However, like Jim, the admission of actively creating something fun was buried. It came last in their descriptions of why they choose such a difficult activity each year. Only after this playful activity was justified in terms of skills and knowledge already met and state testing accounted for was the admission of having fun allowed to peek through.

Two earlier research assignments provided the opportunity to ask early and middle-aged adults about play at work. Semi-structured interviews were used to quiz members of the business and teaching professions about professional expectations, playfulness at work, and changes in attitudes towards play at work over time. Aside from one teacher who stated that they did not play at work, the other participants easily talked about work-related play in several forms. Be it props and games, the creative process, or social connections amongst participants, these adults described workplaces that seem to accept and often encourage play. As a whole, the work and play relationship was not based on a dichotomy, but of a combination of blurred lines and firm expectations.

1.3 Academic Approach

Academic research for this project was rooted in play studies, an interdisciplinary area that generally includes the social sciences, the humanities, and some hard sciences. Roger Caillois, in his seminal work *Man, Play and Games*, claims that to study play from the perspective of just one academic sphere misses a key point: play is not able to be divided into disciplines. Solutions that theorists propose using only one lens will be limited at best (Caillois 2001, 175). This research addresses Caillois's concern by drawing from a number of the areas that make up play studies. Books, journals, interviews, archival material and news articles provide the foundation of these sources.

Despite Caillois's concern, a study of a subject as broad as play requires some starting point. This research uses the frames of two cultural constants - age and work - in order to gauge how adults play in a specific type of setting. Questions concerning a person's lived experiences within established roles and institutions fit firmly within anthropology's modern focus (Ortner 2010, 516). Institutional systems such as work, education, and social roles stabilize society, even as they compete with each other for influence and resources. Play supports these systems; its role as a cultural conduit is but one example. Items such as toys, songs, and games are obvious ways in which adults teach, relearn and reinforce norms and values (Lancy 2015, 214).

At the same time, play jabs at the ways cultures use to generate stability and predictability. Like the child climbing up the slope of a slide, play challenges norms when people play in unexpected ways or for non-institutional reasons (Walsh 2019, 1). Its indeterminate nature puts one's status at risk and spotlights the group's tolerance of risk, failure and change (Geertz 2005). For Johan Huizinga (1950) and Roger Caillois (2001), play puts cultural institutions in its crosshairs making it the seedbed for altered or new. Victor Turner's argument for an anthropology of experience is useful when examining the informal challenges to formal structures. It allows anthropology's attention to widen from cultural institutions to something that will "prehend experiential structures in the actual processes of social life" (Turner 1982, 64).

Anthropology's examination of play's indeterminate is well-informed by Turner's understanding of liminality. Liminality exists in those moments before a decision, act or choice. Drawing on earlier discussions of change and rites of passage, Turner broadened the original concept in two ways. First, he divided liminality into the liminal and the liminoid. Liminal experiences change the individual (Turner 1987, 25) in a situation that temporarily separates them from the group. The liminal generally reinforces society, which shifts only to make room for the newly changed person. The liminoid, a development of the modern age, is created in space that is appropriated by the individual for the individual (Turner 1987, 29). Liminoid experiences are irregular, unofficial, and can be found in the 'in between' spaces of official society. (Peirson-Smith 2019, 66). Liminality is found in daily life when the local convention is somehow challenged. Turner argues that people involved in these dramas must address and find their way back

to a sense of order. These choices are unscripted engagements in which can reinforce or dissolve what was originally there (Turner 1987, 74-75).

Turner's concept of *communitas* also informs play. *Communitas* is "an implicit feeling of wholeness arising out of the relations of totalities. But *communitas* is intrinsically dynamic, "never quite being realized" (Turner 1987, 84). *Communitas* and play are related in that play can create the feeling of *communitas* and playful people will use play to create these bonding, if temporary experiences.

Other disciplines offer insight and research that will help to bolster this research. Leisure sciences, for example, offers much to consider. Its theories concerning adulthood, open-ended experiences, and the emotional investment of the participant mirror play theory (Bramham and Wagg 2014, loc. 1663). Its discussion of culture, economics and choice is helpful when considering modern adulthood. However, leisure's focus on non-institutional settings limits its contributions to our discussion of play within the context of work.

Folklore and its subcategory of folk drama are helpful, too. Their focus on informal ways in which a group's norms are communicated (McNeill 2013, 6) can be seen in work-friendly play forms such as repartee, joking, and tradition. Like the other social sciences, its understanding of how these communications may reference issues of power and equality made it a potential point of reference if those issues were introduced by participants (Bronner 2017, 132). That said, though both play and folklore study transient, subversive and informal expressions, the participants' descriptions of how play maintained their position at work allows folklore to aid but not anchor this thesis.

Other academic areas have been helpful in researching adult play. Here they are divided into two approaches. The first approach considers play broadly, discussing play and work in terms of one's experiences and interactions with the group. History, for instance, establishes an understanding of how work, time and adulthood have evolved to create the context that we play in today. Scholars like Howard P. Chudacoff (Chudacoff 2007) and Jon-Paul C. Dyson (Dyson 2015) help trace how authoritative voices have (re)purposed play. They have also helped identify trends which allow contemporary adults better construct the terms of their play.

Sociology's study of the individual, the group, and their interaction with the environment (Masters 2009, 1-3) is particularly relevant. Within a series of interactions, a person's ability to frame, or contextualize a situation, is of interest (Goffman 1959, 238). We may turn to Erving Goffman's discussions of the methods that groups take to fame and manage public, private, and in between spaces in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Proper framing allows participants to smoothly communicate and participate in social interactions (Goffman 1959, 238). Proper framing requires a type of social literacy from both the initiator and respondent; without recognition of playful cues such as smiling or verbal engagement (Glenn and Knapp 1987, 54) play fails. Goffman uses the theater as a metaphor for the ways in which we try to establish frames. Scripts, settings, and contingency plans help workers and players demonstrate their abilities and intentions. In the realm of adult play, the frames and presentation strategies that Goffman has described are a helpful introduction to understanding how adults mitigate the risks associated with unsuccessful play, as well (Deterding 2018).

Psychology's contributions to play studies are also insightful. Much of modern play study comes from psychological consideration of player experiences (Sutton-Smith 1997, 174). Importantly, the participants' emphasis on the types of people who play renders Brown and Vaughan's (2009) description of play personalities particularly relevant to this research. This influences how the next family of disciplines addresses playful adults.

The common bond in the second family of approaches is its emphasis on the application of play. Biology, for instance, views child's play as a means of skill development for adulthood (Chick, Yarnell and Purrington 2012, 413). Adults, on the other hand, seem to play as a means of finding a mate (Chick, Yarnell and Purrington 2012, 433; Bateson 2015). Human survival, it seems, is at the mercy of play.

A number of industries are also turning to play as the qualities of creativity and collaboration contribute to a happier workforce and a (slight but) increased level of productivity (West, Hoff and Carlson 2016, 81). Play improves employee bonding, allows fatigued workers a fresh start, and aids in creativity and mastery in the workplace (Brown and Vaughan 2009). Businesses are not only including room for play in the workplace, they are gaining ground as companies that cater to adult play both outside (Bramham and Wagg 2014, loc. 2,954) and inside of work (Energize Leadership 2020). As a result, ideas about play from the business world are included, as well.

Education is one such industry. Pedagogy encourages play as a way to promote creativity and engagement for both the student (Lancy 2015, 333) and, more recently, the teacher (Selkreig and Keamy 2017, 328). School districts such as Fairfax County and

Loudoun County Public Schools in northern Virginia have demonstrated support for encouraging teachers to be happy and playful. For instance, both districts encourage playful teachers by hiring motivational speakers who encourage them to “Do a good job and have a good time. Do it well and make it fun.” (Ron Culbertson 2020)

This focus on playfulness is true at all levels of education, including the collegiate where topics ranging from ethnography to personal budgeting are taught using games (Loebenberg, Mack and Bongiorno 2020).

The choice to use play at work has its benefits, as it serves as an invitation for practice, innovation, and bonding. That said, research confirming it as an elixir has yet to come in. Its success remains highly contextualized and somewhat anecdotal (Tews, Michel and Stafford 2013; Pretelczyc, Capezio, Wang, Restubog and Aquino 2018). Anthropologists and play scholars are not surprised. Using play taints it with expectations (Malaby 2009) and puts trust in something that, by its nature, includes the potential for unpredictability and subversion (Sutton-Smith 1997).

1.4 Practical Approach: The Breakdown of Play

Play scholars adapt to the infinite perspectives that disciplines offer by taking another tack: breaking play down into components. Less about seeing how play fits into a field, it examines universal patterns found in any play experience. Play is choice-driven, bound but free, and directed but evolving. The size, shape, and motion of play events are shaped by its elements, function and context. The characteristics with which the player plays are the final aspect, dictating how the cube is regarded and used. This almost-

formulaic view of play is helpful when comparing and contrasting player's definitions and expectations with each other as well as with the experts.

Function

One practical approach is to examine play's function. How can something that can seem so frivolous be justified in terms of the time, energy, and attention it requires? Scholars seem to have concluded that there is an interplay of psychological, cultural and biological reasons. This thesis will focus on the contributions of social scientists for understanding.

Anthropologists such as David F. Lancy describe how play is used to reinforce the lessons of culture. In particular he focuses on play as a means of teaching culture to the young even as it keeps them from getting underfoot of busy adults (Lancy 2015, 213). However, seminal play scholars such as Huizinga see cultural transmission as just the beginning. More than just a way to teach norms and skills, Huizinga viewed play as no less than the engine of civilization's evolution. Play creates meaning, something that functions like biology do not account for (Huizinga 1950). The innovation and inspiration that result from play create ideas that, repeated and institutionalized, create culture itself. However, even as what was once inspired play becomes institutionalized and rigid, the seeds of change remain in play. These germs are evident in the language of how we expect cultures to conduct themselves.

Civilization will, in a sense, always be played according to certain rules, and true civilization will always demand fair play. Fair play is nothing less than good faith expressed in play terms. (Huizinga 1950, 211)

Roger Caillois builds upon Huizinga's thesis. In his book *Man, Play and Games*, Caillois seeks to describe how the evolution of a culture can be seen in its shift from primarily effervescent play to games that are more structured, controlled, and goal oriented. This evolution of culture through play is a loop. Caillois argues that play shapes how culture is expressed (Henricks 2012, 172) even as the emphasis on some cultural expressions relegate others to less important places. However, play is part of a culture's cycle of creation and re-creation. Games and toys pick up what has been left behind and reinvents how important ideas and values are expressed. From this reinvention comes the seeds of (re)invention, as what has been devalued is brought forward again through play (Caillois 2001, 54).

Others see play as a primarily biological imperative. At its most basic, play has been shown to increase intimacy (Newman 2016, 34:49) and the likelihood of getting a mate (Chick, Yarnell and Purrington 2012, 433). Particularly for youth (DeKoven 2015, 144) play is the only way that a variety of skills are sharpened in a non-lethal format (Newman 2016, 11:14).

However, a greater number of scholars see play's function as a combination of the cultural, biological, and psychological. It helps us address obstacles and feel stronger (Brown & Vaughan 2009, 126). According to Stuart Brown, "... play fosters exploration of the possible in preparation of the unexpected." (Newman 2016, 35:06-35:14) and helps groups learn to trust each other (Masters 2009, 11). Playing allows people to explore their world without the constraint of others (Wright 2018, 4-5). Skills learned in early play are

transferable to later life, aiding the health and well-being of the person and their community. Eberle notes that the

skills the players learn will have nothing per se to do with maneuvering in space or at court and everything to do with learning fancy footwork, tolerance, and empathy, all necessary for moving with ease among playmates but also useful in later life no matter what they do.⁴ (Eberle 2014, 214).

Frustratingly for some (Earl 2015, 91; von Bohemen 2015, 18), having fun is not considered a legitimate function of play. Synonymous with joy, pleasure, amusement or happiness, fun is not extensively considered by the social sciences because it does not seem to have an outcome or a function (Masters 2009, 11 and 144). But Henricks notes that “Typically, people play - and keep playing - because something about the activity sustains them.” (Henricks 2015, 22) As we shall see, these emotional, sustaining qualities are part of the next practical breakdown of play: elements.

Elements

In his article “The Elements of Play: Toward a Philosophy and a Definition of Play”, Scott G. Eberle identifies six elements that make up any play experience: Anticipation, Surprise, Pleasure, Understanding, Strength, and Poise (2014). These elements are less of a checklist than a “process of unfolding in the direction of order” (Eberle 2014, 220) As a player integrates each of the elements, their play evolves in surprising, emotional ways towards the as-yet undetermined ending.

Each element has levels of personal investment that indicate the depth of the experience. For example, a person’s anticipation may range from basic interest to great

wonderment (Eberle 2014, 221). When each of the steps meet in a balanced fashion, the play event unfolds in its own way. Like a backstitch, each element loops back to include the other elements as it moves forward to the next element and the eventual conclusion.

When the elements have been met in a balanced way, successful play has occurred. Eberle argues that the most important of these is the third step, pleasure, as it serves as both a goal for the first few steps and as a reward for the final three. As both motive and purpose, Pleasure acts as an amplifier for the benefits that may come with playing. (Eberle 2014, 223)

The combination of balance and emotions can lead to what Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls flow. It is a sought-after experience in which happiness comes from recognizing that something challenging and important has been accomplished (Bramham and Wagg 2014, loc. 1898). Just as Eberle described play in terms of balancing six elements, Csikszentmihalyi laid out the four ‘elements’ which occur simultaneously in flow: player immersion in the activity; player receives feedback as they work towards a goal; player control of the event; and player perceptions of time shift (Masters 2009, 170-171). The feeling of being “in the zone” is a source of joy (Brown and Vaughan 2009, 17) and another way that the combination of progression and emotion are in the fabric of play. Recognizing flow and the six elements is helpful for two reasons. First, it recognizes the compelling forces which draw us into play. Joy, exuberance, and liberation are all feelings which indicate a satisfactory play experience. The desire to feel these emotions is as much a motive for play as it is a result.

The elements also allow us to recognize non-play. This is a topic of concern with thinkers who agree that, when the elements are out of balance, the action “flunks the test for play” (Eberle 2014, 228). Bullying is one example as Pleasure and Understanding are replaced by fear and intolerance, as is obsession (Caillois 2001, 44) when it replaces anticipation, and trickery (Goffman 1959, 60) when it overcomes Strength. Though it is not a primary focus of this research, it will be interesting to learn if work’s use of play taints the positive emotions of participants’ experiences.

Characteristics

The third breakdown of play is its characteristics. Characteristics can be summarized as the general conditions that keep play contained enough to create an event but broad enough to let it surprise and unfold. Despite the range of characteristics proposed in works reviewed for this thesis, a core group of qualities emerge. Several of these are used in Huizinga’s definition of play. Most important to Huizinga and later lay scholars is the voluntary nature of play. A player must be able to enter and leave the play event of their own accord (Huizinga 1950, 28) or the activity shifts to something else (Eberle 2014, 215). Play must be rooted in rules (Huizinga 1950, 11), but, like a plant in a pot, uses them to spill over the edge into something bigger and unpredictable. Play also creates discrete separateness in social groups as well as in a sense of time and place for them to play. (Henricks 2008, 159). Finally, repetition begets ritual, something helps to build culture (Huizinga 1950, 10). It is this final characteristic - repetition- that is least

endorsed in the other works reviewed here. As a result, it will be replaced by characteristics that are more frequently emphasized by contemporary scholars.

There is a shift in the focus of play studies, which moves play from a cultural phenomenon to a personal one (Sutton-Smith 1997) and may help to explain this. Whereas Huizinga sees culture being born from play that repeats, others like Caillois, Brown, Eberle and Chudacoff insist that play is better characterized as frivolous. Extrinsicly, play does little to change much; as seen in Caillois's example of the poker player, nothing is produced, just shuffled around (Henricks 2010, 166). Other descriptors like self-directed, intrinsically motivated (Gray 2015, 125), quirky (Mechling 1987, 352), "spontaneous and engaging" (Newman 2016, 12:44-13:00) better reflect the more modern consideration of the individual's experience of play.

For our purposes, I will use Huizinga's first few characteristics to root our list; they are well regarded and consistently in use. We will include its autotelic nature to better reflect current understanding of the nature of play. Finally, we will use "intrinsically motivated" as a final characteristic for two reasons. First, the term includes the variety of emotional motivations driving a play experience. Second, its broadness allows for non-ideal playgrounds like work to be considered. As we shall see, the opportunity for work to be turned into play is common.

1.5 Methods

This section will review the process and methods of research. It is divided into five subsections. The first four will describe a step in the process: Academic Research,

Recruitment, the Consent & Survey Form, and Interviews. The rationale behind the Academic Research is discussed in this section; literature reviews, breakdowns and applications will be discussed throughout the thesis. Recruitment and the Demographics portion of the Consent and Survey Google Form are developed in this chapter, as well. Their early review will contribute to the understanding and context of the following chapters. As the main source of information for the thesis questions, the results of the “Three Questions about Play and Work” subsection of the Google Form, as well as the Interviews will be considered in the following chapters. It will conclude with a reflexive consideration of the process with a brief description of how each concern was addressed.

Academic Research

Academic research was conducted using a wide range of materials. These included seminal works and archival materials from the Brian Sutton Archives. Research from peer reviewed journals and texts published from 2008 to the present were given special attention. An initial review of this literature can be found on pages 6-11. Contemporary examples from news articles, phone calls, web sites and guest speakers were also included.

Recruitment

Recruitment for this research came in the form of convenience and snowball sampling. Of the 14 people surveyed, twelve were acquaintances, family members or friends. Though all the participants were aware of my research before agreeing to

participate, only one had been interviewed before. The 13th person's participation was a result of snowball sampling. A fourteenth person was also recruited via snowball sampling, and completed the consent form, questionnaire, and demographic questions. Communication and timing concerns failed to produce an interview, so his contribution is found in the answer to the first thesis question: how do playing adults define play themselves? A copy of the email he used to reconfirm his original consent is saved on the same thumb drive as the participant key.

The make-up of this cohort proved fortuitous. In terms of the size of the cohort, fourteen participants proved to be a large but good-sized cohort. Though creating a lengthier process for this research, fourteen members provided the range of experiences I had hoped to use to address Sutton-Smith's first and third questions without expanding the thesis past its described boundaries. Some of the jobs that participants discussed placed them at an intersection of players and managers of play, providing opportunities to ask about play from multiple perspectives. While all participants mentioned opportunities to play, those in positions such as teaching, the medical therapies, and performance had unique opportunities to observe, manage and participate in playful behaviors as both the facilitators of and the actors in play.

I worked to recruit adults who would feel comfortable being interviewed about play and work. Those with whom I had a relationship were recruited to reduce the risk of embarrassment or fear as they spoke about their experiences (Earl 2015, 44; Deterding 2018, 273). Those who previously demonstrated a willingness to discuss their work in social situations were also asked. Finally, I recruited people from a range of occupations

to shift away from the teacher-centric approach I previously had taken. This was done with the hope of uncovering trends that move beyond what is found in one profession.

Those whose positions could be part of power-based relationships or would involve levels of obligation were not asked. If they volunteered, they were politely declined (e.g.: an acquaintance's offer to help was declined when she and my husband considered competing for the same job).

There was a purposeful attempt to avoid recruiting those I had interviewed before, as well. I have had the opportunity to use interviews for other papers about play and folk drama. Like this thesis, those participants were recruited using convenience or snowball methods. Recruiting new participants for this thesis kept storytelling fresher and less rehearsed.

Consent and Demographics

Once a person agreed to participate, a Google Form was sent to an appropriate email address. This form contained three parts: the consent form; participants' views of playfulness and play; and demographic information about the participants. A sample Google Form is attached in Appendix A. Though the demographic information was optional, all participants contributed to this section.

Consent The first section reviewed risks, benefits, and consent. Participants were asked to check their consent as they moved through the Form and were provided with opportunities to ask questions. All participants gave consent to be interviewed and recorded. Follow-up questions were answered before or during the interview.

Three Questions about Play and Work The next section of the Google Form asked participants about their play experience. It included three open ended questions. The use of a Google Form was chosen to limit the risk of embarrassment by allowing them to answer initial questions privately. The questions' use of brevity and open-ended phrasing allowed the participant to expand their answers to include as much detail as they would like. It also allowed the participant to consider experiences from the point of view of an actor, an audience, or both.

The first question asked how many playful people they work with. This served to introduce the concepts of play, playfulness and the level of play they might think about in terms of their work community. It also allowed them to grow the idea of playful experiences as more than ones in which they were direct actors. In doing so they could include experiences they had as the audience or, as in instances such as brainstorming or practical jokes, ones in which their roles shifted throughout the event. Answers to this question ranged from a numerical digit to a full paragraph. The lack of consistency did not detract from the importance of their response. Non-numerical answers, for instance, provided information that helped answer the first two thesis questions.

The second question asked about the qualities of playful people at work. As we shall see in Chapter 3, play scholars recognize that the quality of playfulness is different than the other characteristics, elements, and functions. Playfulness's attributes include an awareness and willingness to change the context of a situation for the amusement of the group or self (Barnett and Owens 2015, 456). The energy and openness associated with

playfulness was frequently referred to in previous interviews making it an obvious starting point for the interviews.

Question three asked for the participant's definition of play. This question's single purpose was to directly address the gap that Sutton-Smith had highlighted *The Ambiguity of Play*: the lack of connection between player and academic definitions of play. The results of this question will be discussed shortly in Chapter 2 and will help in drawing conclusions for the first thesis question.

Demographics: The third portion of the Google Form was optional. All surveys were submitted with this section completed. A breakdown of the participants' age, occupations, region, work week, and work history follow. General descriptions of the participants and the pseudonym that they have been assigned can be found in Appendix B: Participant Descriptors.

A) Age and Length of Work History. These questions were tackled in questions one and six. The search for participants targeted adults with a work history. These broad criteria were easily met. Three of the fourteen listed their age as 30-39, six as 40-49, four as 50-59 and one as over 60. Length of work experience was varied but substantial. Five had 11-20 years of work experience, three had 21-30 years, five had 31-40 years, and one participant worked for over 40 years.

This large age and longevity distribution are beneficial. First, it avoids the trap of exclusively investigating those 18-24 and those labeled senior citizens – groups receiving greater attention in the growing literature of adult play (Earl 2015, 18). Next, longer work experiences held the possibility of a richer number of experiences for the participants to

recall. Finally, a greater number of experiences held the potential of showcasing if/how the interaction of play and work has changed over time.

B) Current Employment Status: Of the interviewed adults, all but three described their current employment status as including some sort of paid employment. Eight described themselves as working 40 or more hours a week, and three described themselves working 1-30 paid hours per week. Two described themselves as retired, one fully and one partially. A number of the adults referenced experiences from past employers, even those who described themselves as working now, making current employment less important than originally expected. The employment status did not seem to affect the ability or willingness of people to describe play experiences at work.

C) Career Histories: “What industries have you worked in as an adult?” was the third question. The question was included for two reasons. The first was to introduce the consideration of a person’s entire work history by asking the person to briefly reflect on it. The second was to add a potential source of context during the interviews.

Respondents framed their answer as either a job or a place. Some included the same descriptors used when naming their current job’s industry. For those who listed jobs, only education and publishing were mentioned more than once (three and two times respectively). The others listed were archeology, editing, finance, food, healthcare, military, purchasing, public relations, publishing, sales, service, sports, user experience research, theater and writing. Of the places that were mentioned, schools (in general, preschools, and state schools), museums, and medical facilities (rehab and skilled nursing facilities, and hospitals) were used. The unbounded way in which contributors could

answer this question did not allow their answers to contribute anything past context-development.

D) Current Career Industries: Question five asked participants to name the industry in which they currently work. As with Career Histories, participants were able to choose how they described their work experience. The careers themselves represented a range of sectors and demonstrate the successful attempt to include a range of occupations and experiences.

The participants' responses can be broken down into four general industries: education, medical, writing and publishing, and corporate. In this thesis, corporate is used as an umbrella term for jobs within medium to large businesses whose efforts support the goals of the for-profit employer. While most of the occupations here support the goals of an employer, "corporate" provides a loose term for the jobs that do not fit under the more specific occupations already listed. The participant group is too small to draw conclusions about an industry or career; however, the range of occupations helps to focus attention on play at work as a whole.

E) Gender, Geography and Education: Demographically speaking, the nine women and five men are a relatively homogenous group. The survey showed similarities in two other areas. Geographically, almost two-thirds described themselves as currently working in the American Northeast. Three participants described themselves as working in the Southeast and one in the West. All received formal education after high school, with terminal degrees ranging from Bachelors (5) to Masters (7) to PhDs (2).

F) Other: Demographic similarities became apparent through information gained outside of the survey. Though not asked about in the Google Form, the vast majority of the thirteen known participants are white, adding to the relative uniformity of the group even when considering the unknown racial make-up of participants 13 and 14. Despite the different jobs that they have held, all but one of the interviewees stated or described the need for persuasive skills in their line of work. Be it sales, programming or medicine, the need to convince others of value, ability, or the importance of a goal was consistent throughout their overall job descriptions.

Interviews

After a completed form was returned, a phone interview was arranged for a convenient time. The thirteen interviews were conducted February through April 2020. Technological meet ups were required due to the distance between far flung contributors and me. Participants were content to interview over the phone. Consent for an audio recording was reestablished at the time of the call. The participants had been informed that the interviews would range from 60-90 minutes; in fact, they ranged from 17-90 minutes. In all cases, the participants were gracious, helpful, and very much appreciated.

The format of the interviews was semi-structured. The list of questions was anchored around three general topics: the context of their work experience, a consideration of the playful people they worked with, and questions about how work and play interacted with each other. These questions can be found in Appendix C. Since play thrives on context, a semi-structured format allowed me to establish common reference

points while the interviewee was free to describe experiences as they recalled them. An added benefit to the semi-structured interview was a nimbleness to follow up on points important to the participant and/or of interest to the research.

As in this thesis, notes and transcripts anonymized the participants. Contributors are referred to by their participant number, by the pronoun associated with their self-identified gender, by a general description of them (e.g.: The Programming manager from the northeast), or by a work-based pseudonym. The pseudonym drew upon their descriptions in the survey and interviews. Appendix B is available to provide a scorecard of the identifiers and participant descriptions.

During the interview, handwritten notes were taken as the interview was recorded. These were helpful in remembering participant-emphasized or personally interesting points and, in more than one instance, helped to circle back when conversations moved quickly. The use of phone calls to conduct the interviews eliminated some of the marginalization that notetaking can create (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011, 43) since note taking was completed outside of their immediate view.

Due to the attention to playfulness with previous participants, there was an expectation that this theme would surface again. However, as the interviews progressed, several other topics, phrases and perceptions began to appear. This shifted my attention and encouraged a more detailed series of examinations of the data. The grounded theory approach, in which data can speak for itself in order to create a more general theory (Glenn and Knapp 1987, 56) has been helpful in discerning the different ways adults view play and its presence at work.

During and/or immediately after the interview, and/or upon reviewing the transcripts, comments and quotes were organized by theme, keyword and topic (Emerson, Fretz and Shaw 2011, 258). After a second or third review, pertinent information was put into a Microsoft Excel 2013 spreadsheet. Each participant's responses were organized by theme. In doing so, the Excel spreadsheet allowed a specific term or idea to be examined by those who referenced it while at the same time allowing a quick review of the participant's general ideas throughout the interview. In this way, themes in how these adults described play and the interaction of play and work could be more easily recognized and discussed.

Two observations stood out. First, the experts are right. The academic breakdown of the structure of play events, its process, and its purpose are generally reflected in each of the interviews that were conducted. Though attention to adult play is a recent phenomenon, the basic equations of play have not changed since childhood and adults are aware of them when discussing their experiences.

Next, the players' descriptions of their experiences do not remain in any one part of the breakdown. Experts tend to focus on broad topics of play, such as its characteristics or functions. Players rarely spoke about their experiences in terms of one topic exclusively. Instead their descriptions attended to specific points that are included in- and often bridge - separate areas of play studies. Some of the larger themes include:

A) Personality matters: Attention to the personal qualities of players was frequent. Words such as self-selecting, extrovert, introvert, or their synonyms were not uncommon. Not surprisingly, there was also an appreciation of how groups were constructed as well

as conducted. This human networking is an example of a bridge category. While a person's search for playmates clearly reflects functions such as relationship building, the descriptions also demonstrate attention to what Stuart Brown calls play personality, that is, the dominant mode of a person's play (Brown and Vaughan 2009, 773). Because of its prevalence and its relationship with playfulness, this will be discussed more fully in Chapter 3.

B) Community matters: The participants distinguished between play at work, with work, during work, and while working. That said, the distinctions were more like shades of grey as opposed to the colors in a rainbow. The experience of most of these adults indicates a concerted effort to build relationships and communities within the broader work environment. Their experiences also include a near universal desire to dive into these events whether work sanctions them or not.

1.6 Reflexive Considerations

I recognized at the start of this research that some preconceived notions needed to be put aside. Among them was the idealized image that play is always fun and happy. Though exuberance and joyfulness are ideals in play, they are not always felt by all. Examples in the literature of mean pranks or unlaughter (Marsh 2009, 162) reminded me that play's subversive qualities can target as well as uplift. Participant references to spoilsports and unfriendly or unstable work environments highlighted this fact.

A second retired assumption grew from my ten years as a stay-at-home mom. My experience taught me that sustained, productive effort does not need monetary

compensation to be work. I had assumed that others would share my belief. Survey questions had been written in such a way as to allow those who had stayed/are staying home to count parenting as work. Those who wanted to include schooling as work could do this, as well. However, neither parenting nor academics were included by participants in their definitions or interviews. When I introduced these into the conversation, the interview slowed. For this group, only paid work was considered.

Next, the use of family and friends was useful in better understanding context and reducing the sense of awkwardness. However, it led to a greater level of homogeneity in the participant group than anticipated. Familiarity also tempted me to assume a more relaxed style of interviewing. When noticed, the original approach was regained, though this was an unexpected consideration.

Finally, I come to the process with certain preexisting conclusions about play. My own choices to create playful opportunities at work shaped my expectations. As a high school teacher, I have included mock trials, board games, and Dr. Seuss to demonstrate skills and grab attention. However, my use of them to meet a goal never hides the fact that they are chosen because they are fun. In fact, I chose teaching because it is fun (usually). This is not so for most of the others in this thesis. Play was often a tool or a diversion; its fun quotient was generally a happy consequence.

1.7 Conclusion

Play is part of the entire human experience. It calls out to people of all ages with its promises of surprise, suspense, and joy. It is functional, but fickle if treated as a tool.

This thesis will address gaps in the literature about player definitions as well as adult play. These are especially important as players negotiate their way through changing work cultures.

Chapter 2 addresses the first research question: how do adults define play? Using survey responses, it will construct a definition built on participant understanding. The stage will be set by first discussing the difficulties in defining play and then by addressing adulthood in general. Once the definition is constructed, the general participant understanding will be compared to various academic definitions for a better appreciation of how the scholarly samples reflect player understanding.

Chapter 3 addresses the survey question that asks respondents to describe qualities playful people exhibit at work. It begins by constructing an understanding of how playfulness is defined in academia. It discusses how play and playfulness are related and how they interact. As before, survey responses are broken down in a manner reflective of academic concerns and reviewed.

Chapter 4 addresses the questions about adult play at work by addressing one of two major themes that appeared in the interviews: the importance of playfulness and personality when considering adult play. Best described as play personalities, interviewees described eight general play personalities within their work experiences. Though participants framed this in terms of personality, the connection with playfulness is significant. This chapter will use Brown and Vaughan's play personalities as a starting point and develop them using participants' own words and descriptions.

Chapter 5 will continue to build foundational knowledge of adult play by comparing how adults play. It will do so by examining themes apparent in the interviews: time and playgrounds.

Chapter 6 will conclude by revisiting the survey-based definitions of play and playfulness. Using the fourteen participants' contributions, it first will determine whether the disconnect that Sutton-Smith had observed has been addressed. It will then evaluate the contributions that the responses have made to lay voice. Finally, it reviews how work responds to play within the context of these responses and suggests possible areas for future research.

CHAPTER 2: PARTICIPANT DEFINITIONS OF PLAY

2.1 The Challenge of Defining Play

Driven as much by pleasure as it is by choice, a person's quest to play is lifelong. Playing adjusts a person's tension levels and provides a safe harbor in which one can develop an "active response to life's problems, offsetting potential passivity engendered by fear or apprehension" (Glenn and Knapp 1987, 50). It promotes happiness and agility of thought even as one ages. When compared to the isolation and anxiety of loneliness, play appears to be its opposite and its antidote (Murthy 2001, 60-61).

The attunement it brings to one's relationships lead to joy even at young ages, and, like safety and being well fed, play can be lived without, but it is a life lived poorly (Newman 2016, 20:53).

However easy it is to recognize, play defies definition. It is a universal human phenomenon, experienced by all ages and groups throughout time (Masters 2009, 179). At the same time, it is uniquely constructed, experienced and understood (Glenn and Knapp 1987, 65). It must be distinctive but understandable (Sutton-Smith Box 23 Folder 3). This makes the motives, identification, participation and benefits of a play event contextual (Wright 2018, 5) and ever-changing. Even within the interdisciplinary approach that play scholars take, there is immense difficulty in creating a concise definition of play.

Part of the intrigue and difficulty in studying play is its there-and-gone nature (Henricks 2008, 160). Playful opportunities are found throughout the day and does not always acknowledge the appropriateness of the time or place. Once completed, they quickly disappear. Play's expression "is always characterized by its own distinct performances and stylizations" (Sutton-Smith 1997, 219).

The English language offers little help in containing its quicksilver status. Instead, the word play is both a noun and a verb (Eberle 2014, 217). It is a metaphor and allegory (Sutton-Smith 1997, 143). Its adjective and adverb forms have drawn their own scholarly attention from researchers such as Sutton-Smith and Nina Leiberman (Henricks 2015, 20). It's combination with other words radically changes its meaning, whether it be "playing up" the value of an idea or "playing down" the consequences of a foolish choice (Eberle, 2014, 217).

The pleasure-ridden elements that Eberle described is a part of this difficulty (Eberle, 2014, 232). While satisfaction is a desired result of play, it is also contextual. It is sought in a wide array of events, different in its relation to the time, culture, and need of the player. Ranging from spontaneity and exuberance "to the "gratuitous difficulty" of the rule bound" (Caillois 2001, 27) play pleurably creates a similar but separated version of reality for the player to engage and explore (Lee, 2015).

For some, play is easier to define by describing what it is not. For instance, it is not about conformity. Though play can reinforce culture and can be repeated, play invites change (Huizinga 1950) and its repetition includes innovation during each iteration (van Leeuwen and Westwood 2008, 155). At the same time, it dwindles with the imposition of

extrinsic needs upon its time or resources (Lancy 2015, 19). It is not conscious of itself (Deterding 2018, 267). It deflates when cheats and spoilsports devalue the game (Caillois 2001, 7). It may be spontaneous or effervescent, but it is not sloppy; miscommunicated cues (Glenn and Knapp 1987, 52) and interruptions (Goffman 1959, 14) throw play into limbo. It is intolerant of assumptions; victory is never guaranteed (DeKoven 2015, 152) and it refuses to be defined by function or meaning (Malaby 2009, 1-2). Importantly, play may be frivolous, but it is taken very seriously, even when players understand that what they are doing is not completely real (Massie 2018, 143).

2.2 Adulthood and Play

Mostly, play is not for adults. In the West, one reaches adulthood when they have successfully cultivated three general qualities. First, the person must have developed a personal ethic. This ethic helps them through life with responsible behavior, an ability to predict the outcomes of their choices, and an ability to properly address what comes their way. Next, adults are able to care for themselves and others. Finally, adults follow society's norms without prompting (Deterding 2018, 263). This means accepting responsibility, making independent decisions, and being financially independent (Arnett 2003, 92). Play, from this perspective, with its autotelic and frivolous nature, is the inverse of adulthood. Unless an activity produces something helpful to the work and responsibilities of adulthood, it is wasteful, and, even worse, childish (Brown and Vaughan 2009, 6-7).

Adults do play, however, and find a myriad of ways of having fun. Using adult sports leagues as an example, the Fairfax County, Virginia government website lists connections to organizations for a dozen different recreational “Adult Sports” (Fairfax County, Virginia, 2020). Clicking on any of these leads to other links which service one or more athletic leagues for adults. FXA Adult Sports is one of the businesses that organizes these sports leagues. FXA advertises almost 50,000 “players”. It offers sixteen different sports and activities to join, from bar sports to volleyball. The kickball option alone claims that it “averages over a hundred teams each year” (FXA Adult Sports 2020). The desire to play is obviously there, and this one example highlights the notion that, while play may be frivolous, adults take it seriously.

The challenge of balancing the desire for fun and the requirements of adulthood is mitigating the risk of failing culture’s “strict test of our aptness, fitness, propriety, and decorum.” (Goffman 1959, 58). In short, adults seek to avoid the embarrassment that comes with seeing themselves as judged incompetent or as challenging the competencies of others (Deterding 2018, 263). Alibis are one way to mitigate this risk.

Alibis are applied in one of two ways. In the first, play is excused as being just part of the job. In her article “Sneak Attack Anthropology: Experiences with Games the College Classroom” Abby Loebenberg created the curriculum for a semester-long role-playing game to teach non-social science students ethnography. Players get to play under the label of ‘student’ in a for-credit class. Loebenberg is allowed to play as both a creator/collaborator and as an engaged audience member because she is the professor

(2018). Playing, then, is acceptable because it is practical means of doing well at work (Deterding 2018, 265).

Adult play is also alibied when it is believably relabeled. Risks like ‘adventures’, for example, are not for responsible adults, but ‘cruises’ are (Notes by Sutton-Smith, "Ideas for Book."). The re-labeling of play as leisure or recreation ensures that play remains separate from the more important aspects of adult life. This is accomplished by assigning specific roles, times, playgrounds, resources and purposes for the event. For example, adults who enjoy costumes or make-up may play by volunteering to paint faces at a child’s birthday party. By veiling their fun with a separate purpose, the artist is permitted to enjoy the creativity and shared delight of the act without challenging their public image. That it is useful in promoting the positive quality of creativity only bolsters the excuse for the adult to participate in this act at all (Deterding 2018).

Another way to mitigate risk is to smoothly perform the play activity. Alibis are one way in which play’s risk can be somewhat stabilized. However, a surprise or a faulty performance can leave an adult fumbling for a response. Those who fail these challenges face a separate risk of being downgraded to a spoil sport or an incompetent. This may explain adult tendencies to couch their play in games. Game play is clearly signaled, bounded in space and time, and, as exemplified in Loebenberg’s class, easily alibied as beneficial. Its execution is more predictable because of its rules and scripts, both of which can be practiced (Deterding 2018). Though games can themselves be disruptive (Goffman 1959, 14), they are often preferred when balancing that desire to play with the threat of embarrassment.

2.3 Survey Breakdown

This section will review the participants' definitions using starting points that earlier scholarship has used. The goal of this section is two-fold. First, it will begin to answer Sutton-Smith's question about how participants define play. It will do so by identifying five themes found in the survey responses. From this, a definition will be created based on how the participants themselves understand play. The second goal is to compare this general understanding to the definitions proposed by a variety of play scholars. Ideally, this will lead to a better appreciation of how play is understood by the players and scholars

Considerations

Participants were asked to answer the open-ended question "How do you define play?" Rules were used when organizing these unstructured, subjective responses. Following the lead of noted scholars, a review of word type came first. The supplied definitions were broken down onto nouns, verbs, adjectives, and antonyms/ "not" descriptors. Organization like this helped to ground player understandings with common reference points. For example, when defining play, most participants used nouns that were clarified with examples or descriptors. The category of adverb was omitted due to lack of use in these definitions.

Definitions are also considered in terms of their components. For example, Participant 2 defined play as "Anything that brings me joy!" For this section's purpose,

her definition is broken down into four parts, “Anything”, “brings”, “me” and “joy”. “Anything” is important since, unlike other answers that specify games or jokes, it sees the possibility of play everywhere (Caillois 2001, 175). This, in turn, introduces the idea of playfulness as a potential component of an adult definition. “Brings” is recognized separately since it indicates how the act of playing is perceived, in this case it is as a delivery system. “Me” reflects its appraisal as an individual experience. “Joy” names both the emotion and a desired result of the event.

Participant definitions were also examined in terms of characteristics, elements, and function. Emotions are included in this section since the participant’s reactions motivate and reward play, making them both an element and a function. In terms of the Participant 2’s definition, play is presented in terms of its function. Her definition alludes to the fact that an experience can be judged as successful or not, and her reference to joy can be easily connected to Eberle’s analysis of play’s third element: Pleasure.

Some descriptors do not fall into the discussion points outlined in Chapter 1. For example, interactions like jokes or games reflect the forms that play takes. Some answers referred to the social or individual nature of play. It is, however, mentioned by several play scholars (Caillois, 2001; Brown and Vaughan 2009; Masters 2009) and will be introduced for consideration.

Finally, several definitions were framed in terms of how play is not work. The consideration of work in the definition was not asked for, but its use of boundaries will be considered in areas such as characteristics. This category serves as an example of how difficult it is for those in the midst of play to define what it is they are doing.

As a side note, several definitions included multiple sentences, examples, or points. Though 14 surveys are used to develop a player-centered definition of play, some of the numbers of words and descriptors, for instance, do not add up to 14. For a complete view of the definitions, please see the Survey Forms.

Using these rules as a means of reviewing respondent contributions, five points of consensus became apparent: play is an act; play is interactive; play is multi-functional; play is generally social; and play's execution can be both structured and undetermined. Some points are composed of a single consistent understanding that most participants clearly articulate. "Play as an act" is an example of this. Others, such as "play's execution" is composed of several different understandings of what play's expression entails. As a result, there are fewer points of agreement on the specifics though there is a general nod to the larger point. The review of the player definitions will begin with the most universally agreed upon. It will continue by analyzing the others in terms of the more specific understandings of the respondents.

Participant Definitions of Play

Play is an act. Thirteen of the 14 participants defined play as a noun. Eight definitions used some form of the word 'activity' to anchor their definition. Other generalized nouns used once included "act", "anything", "event" and "exercise". "Something" was used by the same person in two different sentences. Two definitions began with the phrase "Having fun". Another began with "Doing an activity" and the final one with "incorporating activities". Since the question did not ask for a definition of

players, these phrases are understood to refer to an unspecified act. Since no specific act is included, these definitions are understood to be acts in general. With this understanding it seems that participants understand that play is part of a wide range of undertakings. This point is listed first since it is the most universal of all the themes.

Play is interactive. Those who listed specific forms of play reinforce play as an act. They also introduced a second theme: interaction. Whether it was as the subject of the definition or as an example, engagement with something or someone else was well mentioned. Non-physical play was emphasized, with verbal exchanges in the form of “conversations” or “banter” appearing most often (three times total). “Games” (twice) and “humor” (once) rounded out the specified forms of play (once each). Games and humor are separate from verbal exchanges because, while repartee is an option, they can be conducted with other communicative means. Body language, sight gags, and practical jokes are examples of this division.

Play is multi-functional. Participant 10 is unique in how she constructed her definition. She is one of several who used their work as a reference point, though her description of her work in the survey demonstrated by far the most thorough integration of play and play theory. Unlike the anchors of action and interaction, the four points of her definition were rooted around the idea that play is only functional. Playing is “the occupation of childhood”. As such, it is “the building block of learning”. She shifts from here to play as a verb, and one that invites potential for growth. It does so by “allowing” for some kind of engagement and “encouraging brain development”. Unlike some of the other verbs chosen for these definitions, hers reflect ideas of opportunity and possibility.

They accurately reflect the observation that play does not guarantee anything except potential, no matter who attempts to use it as a tool (Malaby 2009 page #).

Interestingly, the respondents who defined play using “not” statements did so within this context of work and function. Like the second participant, the emphasis that they placed on work shaped their definitions. Participant 11 sees play as a double-edged opportunity for enjoyment or distraction. For him, play is “having fun but short of goofing off”. Participant 8 explicitly partitions work from play. For her, play is “Anything that involves 2 or more people doing something in the office environment that is non-work related.” Participant 7 does the same. For him, play is “Having fun. Something enjoyable. Something that did not contribute to the success of my job.” This group seems to view play as positive but, importantly, something to be managed.

Function was included by other respondents. However, when stating the purpose of play participants most often referred to its emotional pay-off. Participant 12 for example, loaded his definition of play with descriptors related to positive emotions and one’s emotional well-being. For him, play is “intended for fun, enjoyment, relaxation and stress relief”.

Others agreed. Participant 9 wrote that play creates a “positive environment”. Four other respondents described it as something that is enjoyed and another three included the word “fun”. The pleasure or satisfaction it brings is what participants strive for, reflecting Eberle's conclusion that pleasure is both a motive and function of play. The generation of these feelings is as much as a stated purpose for these players as skill development or mate acquisition is for certain play scholars.

There is a slight divide as to who benefits from these positive emotions. Consequently, a second question appears: do the emotions have a purpose themselves (William J. Mohan, pers. comm.)? Five participants mentioned the after-effects of generating these positive emotions which would indicate “yes”. Though this is a small number, it is worth a moment’s reflection. Some focused on the emotional response of the individual. Participant 2 believes that play is anything that brings joy to the player. Participant 6 viewed play as a means of “self-expression” and “growth”. (Participant 10 avoided the topic of emotions but mentioned the development of one’s brain instead.) In these definitions, the positive, individual effects of play qualify as a function for those who wrote them.

However, three members of this group wrote that positive emotions were a way to benefit the group. As an example, Participant 6 completed her list with “camaraderie”. Participant 9 views play as creating a positive environment. Participant 13 concurred, using the descriptor “morale boosting”. It seems, then, that the 14 participants understand the emotional component in two different ways. The first group sees the emotional experience as an end, the second as a means to greater connection between group members.

Play is generally social. The fourth theme is sociability. This differs from interaction. For example, Participant 10 moved beyond the simply social when she wrote that play is an activity that “allows [children] to interact with their environment”. Participant 9 includes individual play as an option, when he wrote “Doing an activity for enjoyment, either by oneself or with a group.” These are the only two mentions of non-

social play. Descriptors, such “Imagination” and “creative” can be both individual and social and are too ambiguous to be considered as either.

Instead, when the number of players was included, participants emphasized group play. Participant 7 begins her definition with the need of play to include two or more people. Descriptors such as “camaraderie” and “morale boosting” allude to the recognition of play as primarily social. Specified play forms require other actors to complete. Participant 5 refers to “teasing” and “joking”. Participant 9 mentions “ice breakers”. Finally, Participant 14 uses the examples of “humor” and “group activities” as part of his definition of play. All these examples emphasize the socially engaged way in which play is understood by laymen.

Play’s execution can be both structured and undetermined. Finally, respondents address the manner in which play is executed. As we have seen with other themes, participants subdivided a larger subject into smaller branches, then approached those branches from different angles again. Play’s performance was no different.

One group of respondents discussed how play unfolds. Participants approached this aspect with three descriptors. For Participant 5, who centered her definition on games, play must be rule-bound and have a winner. For Participant 9, who discussed workplace games extensively in her interview, play must be “voluntary” and “optional”. The third way included ambiguity and open-endedness in how the event progresses. For these adults, play is essentially “creative” and “Imaginative”. Though each of these descriptors came from different contributors, it is interesting to note how closely these answers align with the characteristics laid out in Chapter 1. They also provide a steady set

of expectations that balance the next, more subjective way play is described: the spirit of execution.

The spirit of execution receives more attention than its characteristics.

Respondent 5 wrote that play should be “lighthearted”. Participant 13 writes that playful interactions are “witty [and] ... dramatic”. Play itself should be “joyful” (Participant 1). In fact, joy, joyful, enjoy, enjoyment and enjoyable appeared in six different participant definitions. Fun was mentioned by three. The emphasis here is on the exuberance of play as opposed to the way it is expected to unfold.

We can conclude that, like play scholars, adults do not fall back onto any universal definition. They do, however, reflect the academic breakdown of play. The purpose of play is the most obvious connection, since a number of definitions were devoted all or in part to its physical, emotional, and social functions. However, characteristics of play are also included. These included rules, choice, and its autotelic nature, all of which are a part of the general foundations upon which play events are founded. Eberle’s six elements come up repeatedly, most often in the double-duty category of Pleasure. But deeper investments in the element of Understanding appears when respondents mention camaraderie and morale and creativity (Eberle 2014, 221). Function, characteristics and elements were mentioned often and by many, but few definitions were devoted to solely one category.

2.4 Participant Definition of Play

Play, then, simultaneously addresses a wide range of things in complementary ways. The five themes allow us to begin to construct a layman's understanding of play. Based on what we have read, we can say that these adults understand play to be 'an act in which the person engages with what, and often who, is around them, using stabilizing characteristics, an openness to the new or innovative, and the desire to experience and benefit from positive outcomes affecting them, and often the group, to facilitate this experience.

2.5 Selected Scholarly Definitions

Like the participants, scholars approach play as a concept like progress, work and fun. Caillois provides the broadest example, claiming that playing is "total activity. It involves the totality of human behavior and interests" (Caillois 2001, 175). Huizinga describes it as a thing which imparts meaning, its generation coming from something more than instinct and less than will (Huizinga 1950, 1). The characteristics that make up Huizinga's definition create a launch pad for what play allows next.

Most definitions draw broad outlines to include as many characteristics, elements, functions, and disciplines as possible. As with the participants definitions, feelings are often included. One definition frequently quoted by other play scholars takes care to include these different qualities, characteristics and disciplines. Importantly, it is more conscious than most to include the emotional component of play. In an interview with the *American Journal of Play*, Stuart Brown reluctantly defined play.

Play is an ancient, voluntary, inherently pleasurable, apparently purposeless activity or process that is undertaken for its own sake and that strengthens our muscles and our social skills, fertilizes brain activity, tempers and deepens our emotions, takes us out of time, and enables a state of balance and poise (Brown 2009, 412).

Much of Brown's work balances what he sees as the biological need to play and the social benefits of it. His attention to the pleasurable components is far greater than the other scholars used in this thesis. The joy of play permeates lives well lived, accompanies the rush of empowerment, improves relationships, dissolves anxiety, (Newman 2016) and is a muse and reward for innovation. However, for Brown, the definition is constructed within the idea that "When we play, we are engaged in the purest expression of our humanity, the truest expression of our individuality." (Brown and Vaughan 2009, 4). Play's celebration may accompany some functions, but it is in no way subservient to it.

Feelings are only one consideration in the larger debate. More than just a predictable formula of emotional investment or skill development, scholars like Henricks suggest that play is fun and suspenseful because it unfolds unpredictably. Henricks defines play as:

a dynamic, ever-changing *process* that is filled with ambiguity and surprise. ... This shift in perspective is important because it suggests that play is not just something that people do "to" the world but it is instead a broader event that people play "in." (Henricks 2008, 163).

Wright concurs, agreeing that play is pleasurable, voluntary, occasionally frivolous and contained within a temporary playground of time and space. However, Wright goes further to say that playing expresses a dynamic relationship between the player and their world. In it, the player pushes against constraints that nature and society

impose. Players test hypotheses about how the world will respond and test again as the constraints surprise or confirm. Like Brown, Wright understands playing to be “an expression of autonomy via human energy” (Wright 2018, 5). Unlike Brown, Wright’s attention emphasizes how that energy interacts with limits, agency and contingency.

A final definition to consider is that of Sutton-Smith. In his book *The Ambiguity of Play*, Sutton-Smith uses seven themes or ‘rhetorics’ to discuss how play has been understood over the millennia. Several chapters have definitions based on the specific view of the rhetoric. However, these are the lenses that Caillois warned against using in the conclusion of *Man, Play and Games*. Sutton-Smith’s final chapter about the subversiveness of play agrees that no one rhetoric is complete.

Sutton-Smith developed a definition several years after *The Ambiguity of Play*. Like his fellow scholars, his attempt includes aspects of function (“adaptive variability”), characteristics (the instigation of events which unfold in a temporary reality), and the positive emotional qualities that are found in the elements (hope and pleasure). Sutton-Smith goes a step farther with the introduction of seven genres of play (e.g.: humor, pretense, celebrations) as a way of highlighting which play forms permit the other parts of his definition to be expressed (Eberle 2014, 220).

2.6 Comparison of Scholarly and Participant Definitions

Participants and scholars understand play similarly. As Caillois does with games and Massie does with masks, participants often use play forms to illustrate what play is or how it is executed. Both groups see playing as an act, though the participants seemed to

view it more as a type of activity than as a process as Henricks does. Both groups viewed it as an interaction, though scholars like Wright expanded the boundaries past an office gift exchange to include all of culture and biology. Neither group paid much attention to individual play in their definitions, though Caillois and Brown and Vaughan do include some references to it. Social play is more likely to be mentioned in each but is not the central component for either.

The function of play is very important to both groups. Respondents emphasized the emotional function of play for players. The intrinsic value of emotions was only emphasized in Brown's definition. Instead, scholars tend to view play as a vehicle for expression, skill development, and challenging expectations.

Finally, both groups emphasized characteristics of play in their definitions. Three participants each named a separate characteristic, reflecting the characteristics of rule, choice, and ambiguity/open-endedness. The emotional function of the player's involvement can be seen to include a fourth characteristic, intrinsic motivation. Scholars also included the same group. Like Huizinga, Sutton-Smith mentions choice as well as a separate reality in which to play. Huizinga's definition includes other characteristics, such as its emergence from rules into something unexpected. Only the characteristic of frivolousness was unique to the scholarly definitions, hinting that adults do take play seriously after all.

CHAPTER 3: PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTION OF PLAYFULNESS

3.1 Introduction

The overlapping of academic and lay definitions of play is unsurprising. Playing is a universal part of human experience, and the themes from Chapter 2 recognize perceptions that are understood on a similar level. Participant definitions also reflect much of what Thomas Henricks summarizes as five general approaches that are generally taken when disciplines study play. The first four are reflected in academic and participant responses in the previous chapters. These include:

- 1) The consideration of play as an act or a choice, such as taking part in a gift exchange. This was a fundamental aspect of player definitions.
- 2) The view that play is an interaction with society that tests the player's skills in an environment of challenging, changing circumstances. This was also a part of player definitions. Henricks directs us to disciplines which search for how play relates to the group, like education and sociology, for further investigation.
- 3) Next, disciplines which focus on culture and effects focus on culture, including anthropology, often view play as one of several interconnected aspects in engagements and protocols. Henricks uses the scenarios such as card parties and sports events to illustrate his point, summarizing "When we play, we knowingly

enter, inhabit, and put into action complicated forms of being (Simmel 1971) or frames of perception (Goffman 1974).” (Henricks 2015, 20)

4) Another approach centers on the unpredictability of play’s unfolding nature. Like that plant spilling from its pot, it originates within a certain framework and with its own fuel. However, the play may or may not grow as expected, encouraging scholars to think about how play can reinforce the environment it has emerged from or subvert it and investigate new directions (Henricks 2015, 19-20).

The final approach focuses on playfulness. This is an interesting consideration since almost anything can be transformed into play (West, Hoff and Carlsson 2016, 72). Playfulness is different in that it does not ask what play is or does. Instead, it asks *how*: how does play begin and how do participants work through its unpredictable progression.

This chapter pays attention to this unique quality in two ways. First, it examines academic considerations of playfulness, both in general and with regards to work. It will then contrast these with survey responses describing the qualities that make co-workers playful. Next, Chapter 3 connects playfulness with play personalities. In doing so, this chapter addresses questions surrounding player experiences by examining one of the primary themes of participants’ play: how one plays is intimately connected with how the players are understood.

3.2 Academic Discussions of Playfulness

Defining Playfulness

Henricks leans upon Nina Lieberman's premise that playfulness is a disposition with which a person seeks out and recognizes possibilities for play. (Henricks 2015 ,20). Others, such as Mary A. Glynn and Jane Webster, recognize playfulness" as a stable tendency to approach activities in a nonserious manner" (Petelczyc et al 2018, 171). Sharon Xiangyou Shen, Garry Chick and Harry Zinn agree that it is a disposition, though their definition highlights its spontaneity and its play-like characteristics of intrinsic motivation and self-generated rules and goals (Shen, Chick and Zinn 2014, 68). I would also suggest that Shen, Chick and Zinn's inclusion of the spontaneity and a lack-of self-consciousness in their definition is reflective of play's characteristic of choice, since the concerns of adulthood are not allowed to impede on for at least a little while. For Sutton-Smith, it is less a disposition than "a mood of frolicsomeness, lightheadedness and wit" (Sutton-Smith 1997, 147).

Montana Miller, in her book about drunk driving prevention in high schools, agrees with Galina Lindquist that playfulness is not about the temporary states of one's humor. Instead, playfulness is transgressive, noting "agents disrupt routines, manipulate the expected, and even play with accepted frames of play itself" (Lindquist 2001)." (Miller 2012, 73). This ability to intervene and change grants playfulness the power to challenge the unknown via the play forms we engage in (McDonald, Brown and Jagoda 2018, 20). Wendlin Küpers's reinforces this view when he states that "Playfulness carries the presence, flexibility, and openness needed to improvise (Küpers, 2017) with and expand the stream of possibilities as they emerge in each moment" (Küpers 2017, 997).

However, the definition of adult playfulness that received the most attention in the articles reviewed for this thesis is Lynn Barnett's. It is a wide-ranging definition which encompasses disposition, manipulation, function, and sample play forms. Because of this, it will be used as the base definition of playfulness with the understanding that context may shift how and why a person is playful. In this definition, Barnett defines playfulness as:

[...] the predisposition to frame (or reframe) a situation in such a way as to provide oneself (and possibly others) with amusement, humor, and/or entertainment. Individuals who have such a heightened predisposition are typically funny, humorous, spontaneous, unpredictable, impulsive, active, energetic, adventurous, sociable, outgoing, cheerful, and happy, and are likely to manifest playful behavior by joking, teasing, clowning, and acting silly (p. 955). (Proyer 2018, 262)

Playfulness's Relationship with Play

Goffman suggested that playfulness and play are on a type of continuum from attentiveness to action (Glenn & Knapp 1987, 51). This image is an excellent way of recognizing its relationship with playing. Like play, playfulness changes the frame of a person's circumstance. However, whereas play events reframe an experience into something specific like a joke or a contest, playfulness chooses to fool with the idea of play itself. (Sutton-Smith 1997, 148). If, as Caillois claims, play elevates society with its discipline of games and their rules (Caillois 2001, 27), perhaps playfulness challenges civilization with the assumption that a frame, like a toy (Levonovitz 2017, 217), invites the playful to recognize its potential and repurpose it for its own devices.

It seems to this researcher that the playful energy that galvanizes the continuum comes from the permission it gives itself as a part of an if-then decision cycle. As with play events, the cycle can be broken down into function (pleasure), characteristics (agency), and elements (repeating progressions). It is clear that acting on an opportunity for play indicates a degree of choice within a liminoid moment. Research has also shown that adult playfulness benefits from feedback during the event. This can be either from other participants (Glenn and Knapp 1987, 52) or from the activity (van Leeuwen and Westwood 2008, 158). The pattern begins with curiosity and openness to the unforeseen potential of a situation, its unplanned nature a part of spontaneity. Recognition leads to a quick and hopefully accurate reckoning of the benefits and the risks (e.g.: Is taping an air horn to the doorstep a good idea?). If the answer is yes, play unfolds using one or more of the various play forms. The decisions and feedback that occur challenge the player to ask if this is fun or has the potential to be fun. If there is, the player returns to the start of the cycle and infuses the next part of the event with anticipation, engagement and agency. If not, playfulness subsides. The idea of cycles can embrace a myriad of temperaments as well as the transgressive methods of expression.

Playfulness is embedded in the previous discussion of the ludic activity. The playful qualities of lightheartedness and fun clearly connect this disposition to the play elements. For example, playfulness's curiosity and recognition of opportunities is included in Eberle's first element of anticipation (Eberle 2014, 223). As with the third element, pleasure motivates and rewards playful people as it pushes the event forward.

Playfulness is also embedded in the characteristics of play. For example, playfulness requires a safe space free from disturbance and undue pressure (Bateson 2015, R13) highlighting the need for an insulated ‘playground’ for the players. Playfulness also forgoes judgement and achievement (DeKoven 2015, 147) making it frivolous and autotelic.

But similar is not the same. Adult play, for instance, does not have to be playful. Children are generally seen to be playful, but their play is more physical and observable. As people mature, their play becomes more symbolic and intellectual. (Barnett and Owens 2015, 454). It is frequently expressed with humor or laughter (Proyer 2018, 261), manifestations that are less quantifiable. It requires the disposition and ability to perform the necessary mental exercise required to anticipate, imagine and predict outcomes, and then reframe a moment to amuse oneself or others in a manner that suits the situation. Those qualities are not fully developed in children and, in some cases, adults. However, for those adults who have these skills, and are willing to engage them, playfulness imbues their ludic choices (Barnett and Owens 2015, 457).

3.3 Playfulness and the Family of Play

When an adult plays, a number of adjectives can describe the type of play involved. These descriptors can be understood to constitute a family of play types related by the exuberance, motives and considerations of playing. When beginning this research, I assumed that playing at work would be discussed in terms of deep play. Play’s risks to one’s “esteem, honor, dignity, respect ... [and], status” (Geertz 1972, 16) would be too

great to be participated in openly or often. My assumptions that deep play would require play to be surreptitious or policed were wrong. In fact, most participants had much different experiences.

Deep play's opposite is the more child-like ideas of playfulness found in Patrick Bateson's concept of "playful play". Playful play is marked by the joyousness, unselfconscious way immersed participants freely express themselves (DeKoven 2015, 148). It is not limited by the weights of judgement and failure. It is the one that seems to be most related to the Caillois's description of *paidia*, "the spontaneous manifestations of the play instinct (Caillois 2001, 28). In an interview with the *American Journal of Play*, Bernie DeKoven discussed Bateson's playful play in terms of his preferred way of playing, explaining:

DeKoven: My kind of play is the kind of play that makes you laugh. Well, that makes me laugh with other people who are also laughing. I like to change rules, to play without rules, to make new rules. Me, I don't like telling jokes. I'm a situation comedy kind of guy. An improviser. ... Free play, I guess you'd call it. A manifestation and celebration of our capacity to free each other from social restraints, fear, cultural differences, intellectual predilections, you name it (DeKoven 2015, 143-144).

However, not all players have the interest or ability to playfully play at work. Neither should employers trust playful play or the playful-play continuum as a consistent means to a job well done (Malaby 2009, 7-8). Consequently, there are attempts to manage playfulness in a way that benefits the company (West, Hoff and Carlsson 2016, 75). This can be by addressing playfulness in two ways. One approach includes treating play and playfulness as "the handmaiden of work, an activity dedicated to recharging the

worker” (Wright 2018, 13). It can also treat them as a means of increasing player creativity and collaboration in the workplace (West, Hoff and Carlsson 2013, 8).

Companies depend on their own framing to indicate expectations about playfulness on the job. Prompts such as props, toys, or a change in architecture help signal the shift to less formal ways of doing work. In West, Hoff and Carlsson’s research of the use of playfulness by consultants, distinct framing that indicated a temporary change in expectations was a predictable entry to more playful, creative behavior by the participants. In fact, it was a go-to method to generate engagement from those who were attending their sessions.

One consultant described how she uses candy to cue a playful environment “I have always got sweets of various kinds with me—adults still associate ‘sweeties’ with children and somehow giving them sweets also gives them permission to let their ‘inner children’ out to play” (13). (West, Hoff and Carlsson 2016, 76)

The vocabulary used to frame work-based playfulness substitutes the term “playfulness” with ones that are function driven. In the first instance, playfulness is expressed during in-house digressions such as video games, door decorating contests, and Fantasy Football. Playful employees’ boomerang from work to play and back to work recognizing the primacy of the job. Understood as temporary and diversionary, “bounded” play events trade the inconvenience of minor distractions for an increase in collegiality and collaboration (Küpers 2017, 1003).

“Serious play” is a different matter, one in which the player applies playfulness to meet the job’s requirements (West, Hoff and Carlsson 2016, 72). It is a contentious practice since the worker must accept that play and work have conflicting obligations,

particularly when it comes to issues of agency (Caillois 2001, 45) or purpose. The obligations of work challenge the voluntary nature of playing. However, a serious player accepts the challenges and uses playfulness to complete their assignments (West, Hoff and Carlsson 2016, 72). Depending on several ingredients like time and skill, serious play can ascend to the level of professional artistry (Küpers 2017, 1004).

3.4 Survey Descriptions of Playfulness at Work

The survey asked the participants two questions about playfulness. First, it asked participants to think about how many playful people they worked with.

Then it asked them to describe how playful people played at work. Playfulness was included in the survey because research for previous assignments indicated that it is a quality that sets the stage for play. Playfulness, in the form of attitudes and certain kinds of actions, also provided earlier participants the energy and attention needed to sustain engagement. The qualities of initiation and energy were important in the academic discussion of play as well for those interviewed for two of my earlier classes.

Like the survey definitions of play, written participant responses about workplace playfulness were addressed with a set of organizing principles. An initial review of the survey indicated three similarities with the Chapter 2 analysis. First, as with their written definitions of play, respondents tended to address several large concepts from different angles. They also framed some of their clarifications in the form of “not” responses. Third, an understanding of the elements, characteristics, and functions of playfulness were marked off in their word choices and examples.

However, apart from “not” responses, a breakdown by number of adjectives (eleven same or similar by eight respondents) and nouns (seven same or similar by thirteen respondents) was not helpful overall. This is in part because phrasing allowed similar concepts to be slotted in different categories, as with Participant 3’s descriptor of being “socially aware” and Participant 11’s ability of “knowing limits”. Other words, like joke(ing) and laugh(ing), can be nouns and verbs.

More importantly, word type was irrelevant because that which the descriptions ultimately spotlighted fell into one of the three categories found in Barnett’s definition of playfulness: disposition/personality; function; and forms of expression. It is with these categories that the survey definitions will be reviewed. The elements and characteristics of play, while connected to playfulness, were also connected to the categories found in Barnett’s definition. Elements and characteristics will be considered in light of the qualities set out in that definition as well.

3.5 Participant Descriptions of Playfulness at Work

Survey responses will be examined for their references to dispositions first. However, descriptions encompassed more than attitudes. Instead, they included connections with the characteristics, elements and functions of play. Relevant connections to characteristics and elements are made when applicable. When possible, direct quotes and clear inferences will highlight the associations that participants made between playfulness and the breakdown of play.

The relationship that play has with playfulness does not make this an unreasonable way to analyze direct and inferred responses. An example of a clear inference can be found in Participant 3's response that playfulness at work is marked by "Joyfulness, sociability, positivity, and a high energy level". Though used within the context of dispositions, these answers can be easily linked to the element of Pleasure and the function of community-building. Participant 8's response, though brief, would also indicate a function of sociability and community-building.

Disposition is an attitude

Eleven of the fourteen respondents referred to the player dispositions when thinking about how adults play. Five answers specifically described qualities related to ebullience. Participant 1 focused on attitude when she wrote "I would expect playful coworkers to joke with each other or interact in a lighthearted manner about topics not related work." Participant 10, an Occupational Therapist (OT) in a NICU wrote that the playful nurses she works "tend to be bubbly and silly even in interactions with other staff...telling jokes, finding the positive is sometimes a sad/intense environment, being infectious in their happiness." Other descriptors included "lightheartedness" (Participants 1 and 5), and "joyfulness" (Participant 5) and "Positive and happy dispositions" (Participant 9).

Attitude was also described in conjunction with the play characteristic of agency and the element of Anticipation. In terms of characteristics, the voluntary nature of play is seen as an important component of playfulness. For the second participant, this means

a “willingness to be vulnerable”. For Participant 12, this means a “willingness to engage in conversations or activities not geared towards work, openness towards having an enjoyable time at the workplace”. Participant 13 described this as being “open to new ideas”. These examples of anticipation and readiness are good examples of how playfulness is like a jack-in-the-box waiting for its cue.

Other references to choosing playfulness more directly relate to Miller and Küpers appreciation of playfulness’s initiation of engagement. This is different from anticipation because players are not just receiving information about the potential around them. Instead, they are using the vitality of playfulness to expand outwards. This can be seen in Participant 3 reference to playfulness’s “high energy”. For others, this is noticeable in the action words that they choose. Participant 9 sees her playful colleagues as “Taking Initiative to incorporate games/activities to have fun/bond with coworkers. Going above and beyond their normal/required tasks.” Participant 6 is the most explicit about the outward reach of playfulness. The playful people that she works with “poke jokes at situations and themselves; try to use current events to highlight humor & how you have to have laughter in your life; do something to bring a smile to others' faces; have them think differently with humor”. Participant 7 concluded her description with a list of “Qualities: Outgoing, social, competitive”.

Understanding the need to respect the rules, and keep play balanced, is found in nine participant descriptions. Of these, five answers used specific examples such as gift exchanges to clearly divorce play from work. Participant 4’s description seems to reinforce the play/work dichotomy, writing: “The ability to get the job done while still

finding time to be social and joke around together.” Participant 7 agreed, writing that playful colleagues are “Those who feel comfortable stepping away from their desks to talk about non-work-related things.” Phrases such as “topics not related work” (Participant 1) and “conversations or activities not geared towards work” (Participant 12) back this up. Each of these samples demonstrates that a frequent rule of play at work is that it must be bounded by the requirements of the job.

Two responses stand out from this. These two respondents mention rule-bound play at work in a context of serious play instead. Participant 10, when describing how the NICU nurses play with the babies wrote:

In the NICU: playful would defined by the ways they interact with the babies-things like singing and talking to them, reading them stories, positioning with toys /purpose.

Participant 11, a Middle School teacher, described playfulness as a requirement of the job during his interview. His written response to this question foreshadows this: “flexible, confident, knowing limits, not taking oneself too seriously, just having fun with students in a constructive way”.

Though not directly stated, a playful disposition at work seems to require a degree of maturity. The push for positivity and a recognition of boundaries echoes back to Deterding’s first quality of adulthood - the ability to be responsible and predict the consequences of one’s actions - as well as the second - to be able to care for oneself and others. To be unplayful or disrespectful would discourage interactions with others or threaten their ability to be successful at their job. Adulthood requires the opposite. The

preparedness to positively engage with others while respecting their position at work leads us directly to the second part of Barnett's definition: function.

Socialization is the Function

As with play, respondents recognize the positive results of a playful disposition. Twelve of the fourteen surveys somehow refer to the social function of playfulness. More specifically, nine responses either directly or indirectly mention the power of playfulness as a way to build social connections. The third participant alluded to it twice: "Joyfulness, sociability, positivity, and a high energy level. Their ability to be socially aware ("reading the room") also contributes to their being playful." Participant 9 was explicit, writing "Taking Initiative to incorporate games/activities to have fun/bond with coworkers." "Communication, respect, and "[doing] something to bring a smile to others' faces" (Participant 6) was reiterated by Participant 13 with her final comment being "easy to communicate with". These twelve answers emphasize that participants believe that the outward direction of playful engagement is done with the intent to engage and build relationships with others.

Interestingly, elements farther along Eberle's play progression are used to describe playfulness's social function. Again, Participant 10's description is insightful as she talks about NICU nurses working together to stay positive in difficult places as well as the ability to readily spread happiness. Participant 6 echoed much of the same when she wrote "do something to bring a smile to others' faces". The ninth respondent also noted this by beginning her answer with "Taking Initiative to incorporate games/activities

to have fun/bond with coworkers”. These descriptions reflect the empathy, drive and composure that are part of the final three stages of play. The third respondents' note that playful coworkers who can “read the room” as a form of social awareness can connect with “sensitivity” and “empathy”, both a part of the element of Understanding.

The two participants who were silent on relationship building included “creativity” and “wit” (Participants 5 and 14 respectively) in their response, both of which are found within the element of Strength. Though a small sample, this seems to indicate that, beyond simple pleasure, a higher level of personal engagement, awareness and accomplishment is also a desirable end. Clearly playfulness is seen as a benefit by all.

Forms Reinforce Dispositions and Function

The creation of community was facilitated in the different play forms that participants listed. The examples reinforced the idea of community and brought with them the potential to be lighthearted and fun. Most referred to verbal interactions as forms of play at work. These include conversations/talking/singing/communicating (mentioned by 5 people), jokes (4), and humor (4). Games, competition and gift exchanges (1 each) were the more physical examples provided.

Participants 5 and 6 blended disposition and play forms with the inclusion of laughing at yourself or the situation as an example of playfulness. For the purposes of this paper, laughing at oneself or one’s situation is considered a form of humor. Though less

direct than the examples listed above, this kind of humor can bring benefits not only to the individual but helps to release tension from the group.

3.6 Comparison of Academic and Participant Perceptions of Playfulness

Sutton-Smith's concern as to whether theoretical understandings are in concert with players seems to be unwarranted within the subject of playfulness. The construction of survey answers reflects an understanding of the playfulness that academics generally accept. Barnett's three-pronged test provided an easy template with which to review the descriptions; no stray ideas were left behind. Player responses also seem to understand that play and playfulness are similar, but not the same.

Though elements, characteristics, and functions connected play with playfulness, player disposition seemed of special interest during the interviews. For these respondents, how an adult plays at work is dependent on a playful personality. For this reason, the next section will investigate play personalities in greater depth, using information gleaned from the interviews.

CHAPTER 4: PLAYFULNESS AND PLAY PERSONALITIES

4.1 Play Personalities

Chapter 4 continues to investigate the theme of playfulness and its relationship with play personalities. Interviews now flesh out the information, providing insight that is helpful with understanding the context of participant experiences within the larger academic theories of play (Geertz 1973, 14 and 27). Using the thick description that was provided in the interviews, this section uses participant conversations as a starting block for fuller investigation into how adults play at work.

The inclusion of play personalities is relevant for two reasons. First, connections between playfulness and play personalities are reflected in the current research. Recently, attention to play has grown to include playfulness. From this has come a small but increasing interest in how personality and playfulness are related. A small percentage of that interest addresses personality and playfulness within the context of adulthood (Proyer 2017, 241). The lack of attention seems surprising considering that a person's search for playmates is lifelong. However, growing academic interests indicate its relevance to this thesis.

More importantly, participant descriptions of themselves and others often included words like introvert, extrovert, goof, serious, mean, fun, etc. The labels were often used in relation to a willingness to participate and/or the forms of play people

engaged in. Interviewees described permanent and transient play groups, the appreciation of finding compatible people to play with, and the occasional run-in with those who did not play well with others. The near-universal references to what people ‘are like’ makes playfulness and play personalities important to consider when asking how adults play at work.

Psychology has taken a special interest in the connections between playfulness and personality. Studies have attempted to identify the key traits which link the two, have set up tests and scales with which to do so, and evaluated the methods of study and their results. Though there are certain traits in personality and playfulness which seem to overlap, nothing has been proven conclusively (Proyer 2017, 241). Like play, theory has only progressed so far.

It is not in the scope of this thesis to evaluate the studies nor is it to decide which of the personality traits are more significant than others. Instead, when speaking of play personalities, we will follow Emily Earl’s lead and use the list provided in Stuart Brown and Christopher Vaughan’s book *Play: How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul*. Brown and Vaughan define play personalities as experience-based descriptions of a person’s “dominant mode of play ... No one is a perfect example of a personality type; most of us are a mix” (Brown and Vaughan 2009, 64-65). Our play personalities also change over time and we choose which modes to use based on context. The eight personalities suit our purposes because they are broad enough to describe a range of playful behaviors and are unlimited by a focus on youth or species (Earl 2015, 57). Additionally, they avoid the formal discussion of which personality traits are at the

heart of playfulness and apply the concept of disposition to something more objective: means of expression.

Brown and Vaughan list eight play personalities: the Kinesthete; the Joker; the Explorer; the Director; the Competitor; the Collector; the Storyteller; and the Artist/Creator. Seven of these personalities were represented in some form in these interviews. Only the Collector was absent. Apparently the “thrill of [having] the most, the best, the most interesting collection of objects or experiences” (Brown and Vaughan 2015, 68) is not in the play DNA of these participants.

The following section will review the remaining seven personalities, pulling examples from interviews and notes to demonstrate the importance of play personalities to these men and women. Thirteen interviews provided a wealth of comments, anecdotes, and references too great to include in its entirety. As a result, examples with the greatest depth or relevance were chosen to address the two key questions of this research. Doing so addresses the gap that Sutton-Smith found regarding participant voices and academic considerations and begins to contribute to the thin reserve of player perspective. It does this by highlighting the first major theme is how adults play at work: who one play with matters very much as to how one plays.

One way that context will be developed is with the expanding of participant ‘names. Beginning with the following section participants will be referred to with both their participant number and a job title. This reference to their employment serves two purposes. First, it will help to provide a sense of context as their individual stories inform

the research to a larger degree. It will also help to keep the participants straight by providing an image or a label for the reader that is more descriptive than a number.

4.2 The Kinesthete

The Kinesthete personality finds joy in the movement of their body. This is different than using costumes, as Participants 4 and 11 do for certain lessons, or the enjoyment of food at the various social gatherings as with Participants 12 and 13. It is an athletic endeavor, such as sports or dance. Only the Participants 6 and 10 cite physical play at work, however neither describe themselves as finding joy in movement. For the Participant 10, a pediatric occupational therapist (OT), play was the work and her occasional enjoyment of it was portrayed as a benefit. It was not cited as the reason why she chose to go into occupational therapy, either. Her personal workouts were completed at home to de-stress.

Indirect descriptions were provided by the Participant 6, a physical therapist (PT) who works with adult clients as well in addition to teaching physical therapy to graduate students seeking their degree. In one example, the PT discussed integrating physical play into her classes with an extra credit assignment. The goal was to offer graduate students an opportunity to a) create a neuroplasticity activity like ones that PTs use with clients, and b) to try it out on classmates. The activity needed to combine a physical action (e.g.: Do forty jumping jacks!) with an intellectual one (e.g.: Name seven red fruits!). Extra credit was earned if students engaged the whole class in their activity during their break. Video indicated to her that many of the students ended up smiling and laughing after

trying the exercise. The intrinsic motivation that marks ideal playfulness was muddled by the extrinsic benefits of their participation, making the PT's kinesthetic examples better labeled as "serious" instead of "playful" play.

4.3 The Joker

The Joker is one who attempts to make people laugh with jokes, pranks, and nonsense. (Brown and Vaughan 2009, 65-66). Most participants mentioned jokes or joking behavior in their interviews, some as "small bursts" of engagement. Participant 12, a programming manager at a global corporation (the Manager) describes this type of joking as:

Small bursts like you could be on a phone call and you could make a joke, ... like, "Hey, how are you doing this week? How is this Monday? Um, uh, it can't be too good because your ... I know your football team got crushed this weekend." Yeah. "Hahaha, your team is not as good." And then you move on to work, like those are kind of like small bursts ...

Some work has made space for longer bursts. The second participant is a user experience researcher (UXR) from the American west. Unlike most of the participants, employees at this company often work remotely. As a result, communication is accomplished electronically using Slack, an informational and video network used for an organization's internal communications (Slack 2020). Management at this company has dedicated Slack channels for employees to share jokes. For example, one Slack channel is dedicated to dad jokes. Another is dedicated to meme parties. Meme parties are started by colleagues who suggest a theme and are attended by coworkers who are eager to read or contribute to the meme of the day.

Pranksters made an appearance, though stories indicated that practical jokers were related to younger populations. In one example, the PT described an instance in which students reciprocated another professor's generally playful behavior in class by covering his door with caution tape and CDC warnings of a spider infestation.

Participant 13, an elementary school music teacher (MT), laughed as she recalled a series of pranks, she and another teacher played on each other during her first year of teaching:

Um, there are a few moments that do stick out in my mind. One of them is from one of my very first years teaching where during the prep time that I had, uh, uh, I knew that another teacher really enjoyed working on a crossword puzzle. So I was, uh, taking the time to take the puzzle and cut it out of the paper. So, when they went to work on it- ...

They would hold it up and it would be gone. In return this teacher took the entire contents of my desk during my prep time from the office and moved it into the classroom where I was teaching. In response to that I took duct tape and duct taped everything down on this person's desk. ...

(laughs)So while that probably is the funniest thing that I experienced as a teacher (laughs) it does in fact seem a little extreme though. ...

Yeah, my, my duct tape and things are over. Um, it's, I, you know, I just try to make sure that when I go into my day and there's something that I can take away that brings a smile to my face.

Participant 9 (PK) described the gentle holiday pranking that fellow preschool teachers play.

Oh! Um, well that's a really great question. We actually have fun together. ...So, like, for St. Patrick's Day, one of the plans was that, in the morning, we, we picked, um, names out of a hat. And we were gonna be leprechauns ... but nobody knew which leprechaun was gonna attack their room. (laughs)... So, um, we would sneak into the other person's room

when we knew they weren't there and like, hide something or move something or ... turn a table over. Something like that. Now, so when the kids came in, they were like, "Oh my gosh! The leprechaun came!" That, that was the plan. Um, but with, um, that was, you know, us playing with each other as teachers ... 'cause we didn't know which teacher did it to the other teacher.

Apart from Participant 2's description of the joke channels, most references to jokes tended to fall under the "small burst" category. Pranks were also inconsistent, less mentioned and usually then in reference to younger populations.

4.4 The Explorer

With this personality "Exploration becomes their preferred avenue into the alternative universe of play—their way of remaining creative and provoking the imagination. ... Exploring can be physical... emotional...[and] mental:" (Brown and Vaughan, 2009, 67).

Though she enjoyed and contributed to the joke parties, the UXR is a good example of a worker who playfully explores. UXR joined this company after actively pursuing information about the requirements she would be asked to meet. She is happy with her job. The research schedule cycles between dynamic questioning sessions with the users and quieter, individual time dedicated to analysis of their responses. Engagement may surface again when reporting to the client about their findings. However, the active search for answers is serious fun for her, providing a compliment to the bounded fun of the Slack channels.

Participant 6, the physical therapist (PT) is also an excellent example of how adult explorers because of the ways she incorporates play into her long-term work projects.

Like the UXR, she explores by asking questions. When first choosing a college path, this woman chose PT because “I really like to think, I like you know I can use my brain”.

Later, the PT was able to change how her time at work was scheduled so that she could explore what interested her.

... I love to do research, but I wasn't really having, you know, a lot of time to do it. So, I ended up creating this group exercise class with people with stroke that is total like play, ... honestly, like, if I want to play more, I just, do more of my job. Like, you know, like I realized a couple of years ago, that my job was getting kind of boring, like I, I wasn't having as much fun as I had previously in my life. So, then I created a research project that had fun embedded in it so that, that, you know, then I get to do that. ... I tried to make my life so that play's involved. Um, but I don't think it inherently has play. So, if, if I didn't do that, those research projects then I don't necessarily know if there would be a ton of play.

Both women are fortunate in that work is fun for them, creating the happy synergy of serious play. However, jobs which encouraged exploration by the employees were not as obvious outside the fields of research. One example came in the form of a bonus opportunity to be completed outside of work hours. Participant 7, a customer liaison at a company that provides support for virtual and in-person events (Tech Events), was previously employed by an art school. Their perks included free classes of which she took one. However, these examples of an employer-based encouragement of discovery is not reinforced enough in the other interviews to determine if this is a dominant play personality in this group.

4.5 The Competitor

The Competitor “is a person who breaks through into the euphoria and activity of play by enjoying a competitive game with specific rules and enjoys playing to win.” (Brown & Vaughan 2009, 67). Like jokes and physical play, many of the participants competed in games at some level, though this was more often framed within a different context. There is one exception: Participant 8.

Participant 8 was 81 at the time of this interview, the oldest of the group and the only one fully retired. He worked several jobs including sales and purchasing but is referred to as the VP because of his rise to the position of Vice President of his company. Coming from a time when there was no place for on the job fun, he was incredulous about play at work as a legitimate research topic. His written answer to the survey question about playful colleagues was a concise “They tell a lot of jokes”.

However, while his job may not have tolerated the lighthearted, witty qualities that are often equated with playfulness, his interview revealed him to be a life-long competitor.

Participant 8:

... I found much more fun were outside sales. Much more challenging, much more beneficial. And for me it's much more profitable for the company and for myself, since I was ultimately paid, to some degree, on commission. ...

So, a certain percentage of the sales that I generated would be on c- on commission. For me ... and my family.

MKM:

...[You] you liked the challenge, as well as the fun part of it, as well?

Participant 8:

Oh, absolutely. Uh, I found to some degree inside sales to be, uh, to a degree, boring. ... Uh, and the outside sales, much more challenging, more interesting, and certainly a lot more fun. And it was certainly more rewarding. For me and for the company.

Some of the qualities that make the VP a good example of a competitive personality may be attributable to the competitive nature of sales and some may reflect that era's work culture. Either way, the VP made work into a type of play by casting it as a competition with rewards that were both economic and personal. In this way, the VP is like the UXR and PT in their ability to turn work into serious play.

Others used competition as a means to an end. For example, Participant 11 used competition to test the knowledge of his students when he played "Name That Suffragette". There were also examples of workplaces offering extrinsic rewards for good production using elements of competition. For example, the VP's company rewarded employees with trips. Participant 5, when describing her work in a public relations firm (PR), noted that competitions were used to encourage workers to do better. She noted in her interview:

... I talked about my definition about, you know, kind of structure within rules, there's definitely some of that, "Hey, we need ideas for such and such." And you know, "The company had season tickets to all the sporting events, so if you can come up with, you know, two good ideas we'll put your name in a hat for two tickets to the box suite in the hockey game."

Competition as an option for diversionary activities brought out the competitors in several offices. For example, Tech Events, who used the term "competitive" in her description of playfulness, discussed regularly competing with members in two of her

three jobs. At her current company, competition can be emotional. Tech Events described how those competing in multi-stage games can get quite disgruntled when they lose. Some become frustrated, disinterested and bitter.

4.6 The Director

The Director is an organizer who likes “planning and executing scenes and events” (Brown and Vaughan 2009, 68). In many of the interviews, participants describe strong if not dominant Director tendencies. This should come as no surprise. Ten of the interviewees were involved in interactive therapies, education, and event planning at some point in their careers.

Of note is Tech Events. Though her job as a customer liaison is goal driven, her creation of bounded fun is significant. Within her office, Tech Events is the organizer of several bounded play events. These include March Madness brackets, Superbowl squares and group lottery purchases.

Most notable is her annual competition based on the show Big Brother. Part chance, part skill, players randomly choose a character from the show. Coworker success is tied to their players on the show. In the latest iteration, Tech Events added a layer of competition for her coworkers. Colleagues now participate in games to determine influence in the next round. Competitions are carefully constructed to be respectful of their colleagues’ time and space, are solo events to decrease the possibility of friction and are based on random but general knowledge to keep the playing field as level as possible. Playing pop-a- with basketballs shot in the conference room is one example. Identifying

the capitals of states that the participant has visited is another. The time, imagination and organization are significant, but this is something that she is willing to invest in. This can be seen in the amount of time devoted to it in the interview. Discussions and references to it began at the 19:02 mark and lasted 45 minutes. Her appreciation of fellow employee's time and purpose as well as the conscious use of company space helps management to approve of the diversions.

There are examples demonstrating that work rewards the serious play of the director. Tech Events regularly won the annual Most Spirited Award until she declined even being nominated for it. The UXR described the success and appreciation she and a coworker received with a play-based meeting they constructed. The goal of the meeting was to enlighten the client on areas and avenues for improvement. Eager to avoid a tone of finger-pointing, UXR and her coworker created a murder mystery game that engaged participants in a scenario that delivered the same information.

4.7 The Storyteller

The Storyteller is an imagination-based player who delights in reading, writing, or drawing. They can be the playwright, the actor, the audience, or a combination of them all. It is, at its heart, a performance-based play personality (Brown and Vaughan 2009, 69-70).

All participants told stories in some fashion; it is part of what the ethnographic process asks of the contributors. The contributors were generous with their time and their stories. However, there is a difference between participating in and preferring ways of

play. Several participants demonstrated Storytelling personalities in the way that they gave their interview. Tech Events told funny stories with humor, sound effects and references to our relationship. The PT was also a storyteller, laughing and asking questions to pull me along for the ride.

The Storytelling personality is most evident in the interview with Participant 11, an eighth-grade social studies teacher (MS) of 27 years. Like Tech Events and the PT, he framed much of his interview in story form. His only rule is “just be a good human being”, a theme woven into the description of play and work. It is clear from his interview that storytelling is his favorite type of play. Following his father's advice of breaking up a presentation every 15-20 minutes, MS interrupts his lessons with stories that appear off-topic but wrap around to the subject at hand. They can be funny (“I have an allowance of \$5 a- a week. I have to be good”) or about the curriculum (as when he explains how “B*Tre” became his rap name just as the students began learning about impeachment).

Like Tech Events and the PT, MS’s interview was structured as a story, though on a larger scale. Small stories nested in bigger ones (such as how an old mentor’s advice shapes how he organizes social events with new teachers today) and then fell into new ones (including anecdotes about the lasting friendships begun at work) which loop back to the beginning (the choice to build relationships at work was based the advice given by the old mentor). MS’s interview is an excellent example of how this playful personality shapes how adults can view and participate in their occupation.

Others, like the PT, choose a profession which allowed her storytelling disposition to be expressed in the manner she desires. Participant 4 is one such person. A writer of children's books (Writer), she has found joy in writing since she was a child. For her, playing at work is the joy of doing the work.

Participant 4:

Um, I always loved words and writing. As, as, as soon as I was old enough to write, I just for some reason was very interested in writing stories and things. ... I would do my classwork and then I would turn the sheet over to the blank side, and to me, that was just like a big writing tablet. ... And, uh, it was second grade that I decided that someday I would be a children's author. ... I never wavered from it. Yeah. So, I don't know.

MKM:

Is it what you, is, is it what you've expected or what you had thought about when you were in second grade? ...

Participant 4:

It really is. I, um, it's, it's wonderful. I'm, I'm very happy, um, and I'm like very motivated to keep trying to find new ideas for books. Um, of course, you know, every author's dream would be to be like, you know, Judy Blume or somebody who actually makes money from it. (laughs) ... But for me, I mean, I don't have to be a famous author. I'm happy doing what I love and, um, you know, I'm proud of how hard I work to get here. ...

The power of Storytelling invites the audience to become Storytellers themselves. For example, the Writer includes a public aspect to her job when she moves to another phase of her writing - school visits. During these, she invites students to dress up as the characters of her story. Students become a part of the storytelling process when they play the character, ask questions or make predictions.

Participant 13, an elementary school music teacher (MT), is exceptional because of her clear distinction between play and performance. Well before the interview, MT

had a specific philosophy about play and her role as an educator that makes her. As we began talking about student play at recess, MT stated that play in elementary school is chaotic. Children do not know how to create the rules and organization they need to truly play. As a result, organization and thought need to be modelled for them. This modelling is something that she does in her music classes as she demonstrates how to sing, dance and make music. Materials and lessons are organized as far as possible in advance to create a spiraling curriculum of skill building and enjoyment. Modelling play, however, is not to be confused with playing.

MKM:

... when you're demonstrating, are you working or playing?

Participant 13:

I am performing. So I've, I've thought about this a lot over the years and when I'm demonstrating I am, I am performing, I, I'm working on my craft to present the students. So it's a little bit of both. So I'm working in the fact that I'm doing it during school time and I'm getting paid for it and I'm also sharing them at this point, something that I really like to do.

Regarding the word play from the perspectives of a musician and of a child:

Participant 13:

Um, I think it means two different things in two different arenas. I think in the, the instrumental sense it means to perform on your instrument. And then I think in the classroom it means to interact with your classmates. ...

The question of teaching as a playful experience ended our interview.

MKM:

... do you find teaching to be playing? Like does it meet the qualities of play that you have when you teach?

Participant 13:

Yes. Although I would [rather] align the words play with perform...Because the classroom is my stage ... So it's kind of like stepping outside of your comfort zone

MT's specific distinction between play and performance reinforces Barnett's conclusion that adult play is not always playful. MT is not the only one who sees her work this way. This sentiment is echoed in the OT's description of her work when she says "...just like you don't feel like it at work sometimes just because your job is "fun" ... doesn't mean that you don't do it". Huizinga states the same when he wrote "The gambler at the roulette table will readily concede that he is playing; the stockjobber will not." (Huizinga 1950, 51).

Like the VP, performers like MS and the Writer layer play onto work tasks. However, actions that are perceived as playful are only such if the player is willing to frame the situation as such, making labels such as Storyteller open to interpretation. That said, professions such as writing, and teaching provide a type of playground that is ready for the player to create and perform should the person choose to use it. Curriculum and plot provide the topical boundaries; job deadlines limit the time. Within those restrictions, jobs like teaching and writing offer a level of freedom that allows the adult to choose how they will engage with their audience. The lack of negative reinforcement that the Writer, MS, MT and the OT received indicate their employers are content with their play(like) performances. The choice to be playful is also made room for in Brown and Vaughan's final play personality of the Artist.

4.8 The Artist/Creator

Brown and Vaughan's last play personality is the Artist/Creator. They write that Artists find happiness in the creation of things, whether they make "something beautiful, something functional, something goofy. Or just to make something work" (Brown and Vaughan 2009, 69). This is a vague and disappointing definition; creation is more than just a production of things. Like play, creativity "is an act, a process, and a result" (Earl 2015, 2018) and, as such, it is as difficult to define (Selkreig and Keamy 2017, 318). The artistic and creative process "means that boundaries are being pushed in order to develop new ideas or a final product" (Earl 2015, 110). West, Hoff and Carlsson focus on the result of the process when they define creativity as "as the development of a novel product or idea that is of value to either the individual, group or society (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010)" (West, Hoff an Carlsson, 2013, 6).

Businesses are interested. Play (Petelczyc et al 2018, 175) and playfulness (Petelczyc et al 2018, 176) have been shown to increase creativity. Business that encourage play can provide alibis, safe environments, and socialization needed to encourage playfulness (West, Hoff, and Carlsson 2016, 75). If they are successful, businesses hope to reap the rewards of playfulness: improved creativity, heightened creative atmospheres in meetings, non-linear thinking and better problem solving (Petelczyc et al 2018, 163).

The Writer is clearly a Creator, and other participants, such as the MS, the PT and the OT, all need the creative qualities of mental nimbleness and innovation to do well in interactive and demanding jobs. However, Participant 5, who discussed her tenure at a

northeastern public relations firm (PR), is the only participant to use any form of the word “creativity” in their survey reflection about playfulness. Her best days were those that included the serious play of brainstorming sessions. This was play for her because they included:

bumping ideas back off of each other, [the need] to pay attention and see how other people think and how they work and, uh, you know, how smart they are and, gosh, I would have never thought about that or ... Or feeding off them, "Oh, you know, here's some ... What about this idea?" And then we'd come in, "What if you do that idea and then you do this right after it." And, "Oh, my gosh." And that makes it better or ... Or that's not going to work at all, but you know, you just ... That ... I make, that's fun.

The excitement of the session came from working with people who had different skills and temperaments. It also required a thick skin, an open environment and the willingness to find out if a failed suggestion could surprise with a new solution.

Well, I mean, when you're in a group setting you have to be ready ... You don't go to the brainstorms if you can't take criticism, but no ... And in a public setting like that there's not going to be huge reprimands like, "Uh, I don't know if that's going to work." Sometimes, you know, it's really off the wall people will laugh at you, but you have to be able to take that. You have to know that it's all for the ... It's all part of the game, it's all part of trying to ... Because you might give out this terrible idea and that might trigger somebody to give, "Well that's never going to work, but what if we do the flip side of that?" And so, you know, anything that comes out of your mouth in those kinds of things can be a jumping off point for somebody.

For this playful Artist, creative play was easy and fun because the firm encouraged it. Work sponsored happy hours were events that fostered networking and further discussion of ideas. Good work was encouraged with the enticement of tickets to sporting events.

4.9 The Clunker

The final play personality is not found in Brown and Vaughan's book; instead it results from a description made by MS. MS's interview is rich in its description of how time, intention and action merge to create a life worth living. The context from which this philosophy springs is the serious play he uses to engage work. Several the colleagues that also engage in serious play seemed open to the relationships that can come from this.

Clunkers have other things on their mind. In addition to being "unprofessional" and generally anti-social, Clunkers are inconsiderate of others.

[They are] somebody who thinks that their subject is more important than anyone else's subject. ... and assigns just boatloads of work and stresses the kids out to the point that they start complaining to me. ... Because that puts me in a very awkward position of defending the professional versus agreeing with the kids, that- that just is an excessive amount of work. Or somebody who treats kids in a negative way. ... those are the clunkers, the complainers.

Less mean spirited than a previous boss of the OT, and less sly than a coworker of MT, Clunkers are the draining kind of spoilsport that deflates playful atmospheres.

4.10 Conclusion

This chapter addressed the primary question of how adults play at work. Participant attention to how people play at work focused heavily on how adult playfulness is expressed. The manner of playing was one of two major themes that emerged from participant surveys and responses. Play personalities are helpful in organizing them into easily identified and familiar categories. For this cohort, people in

number of ways. Play was both serious and bounded. As Brown and Vaughan predicted, individuals prefer certain personalities, play in several ways, and may change over time.

The second primary question asks how work interacts with play. Interviews with UXR, PR, the Writer, PT, VP, OT directly or indirectly referenced employer encouragement of playfulness, some more specific than others. Interviews with UXR, PT, Tech Events, PK, and MS demonstrated the extensiveness of and thereby the permission for bounded play at work. Playfulness's help with communication, problem solving, creativity and positive social aspects was seen as a boon.

Regarding the academic research used in this chapter, the qualities that are described in these interviews reflect the conclusions that academics have made thus far. This chapter concludes with the observation that the gap that Sutton-Smith had written about in *The Ambiguity of Play* has received more attention in recent years and suggests that the distance has begun to close.

CHAPTER 5: ADULT PLAY AT WORK

This chapter will continue to build foundational knowledge about adult play. It will do so by addressing the second major theme found in the interviews: adult play is related to community and relationships. As before, participants did not address this from a single standpoint. Consequently, the analysis of their interviews is subdivided in a way that reflects the participant-generated approaches. Their insights will be preceded by academic considerations about work and the perforation of the play/work divide.

5.1 Defining Work

Like playfulness, the study of play at work has gained greater attention in recent years. Work has shifted with the increased influence of technology resulting in a changing nature of job organization and expectations. Another result is the disruption of the office community as remote workers, many of them younger, have increased in number. Conclusions about play in this changing environment are lacking in part because of the inability to understand the nature of play or to agree on a general definition of it. (Petelczyc et al, 2018, 163).

That said, there is a greater sense of agreement about the definition of work. Sutton-Smith cites a dour definition, writing that "Work is obligatory, sober, serious, and not fun, and play is the opposite of these" (Sutton-Smith 1997, p. 202). A more practical

definition, written by anthropologist Herbert Appelbaum, defines work as the use of the “things and materials of nature to fashion tools with which to make objects such as tools, shelter, roads, and machinery which are used up over a long period of time’ (1992, Introduction, p. x).” (Statler, Roos, and Victor 2009, 89). More broadly, work can be effort, employment, and, in some cultures, there is divine work (Turner 1982). This effort creates things of value, the worth of which can be measured in accomplishments (Wright, 2018, 7) money, recognition, pleasure or something else (Statler, Roos and Victor 2009, 89). Intention is an important component of this definition. With effort, even pretending to work can be a type of work (Goffman 109-110).

There is some discussion as to the meaning of work beyond physical production or consumption. Both Henricks and Talmadge Wright consider work from a Marxian perspective:

If we accept the materialist understanding of work as that which one has to do to maintain oneself in life, then the criteria of work can no longer be confined to merely survival but will resemble a relationship between play, joyful expression, and the labor of life when such work is not confined or forced. (Wright 2018, 13)

Drawing on scholars including Marx, Durkheim, Turner and Freud, Henricks goes one step further to link work and play with two other means of human transformation: ritual and *communitas*. Henricks proposes that these four ways of living in and understanding the world form a complementary network. Like work, play allows the individual to demonstrate their talents and transform the world about us. Play links with *communitas* and ritual in their joint mission to stave off isolation. In ritual, this can be

found in the development of long-standing relationships and moral systems of living. In *communitas*, transformation is found in the feeling of community we experience when

we find pleasure in one another's company, applaud the actions of others, and align our spirit with that of the community. This act of public immersion is tremendously important to our understandings of who we are. But it is different from play's testing, teasing commitment (Henricks 2015, 13).

This connection of work, play, *communitas* and ritual is not simply a theoretical construct. Both the academic and participant perspectives move between these concepts as they attempt to better articulate the experience of play at work.

5.2 Definitions of Adult Play at Work

As with anthropologists, scholars who study business and organization approach play from a specific angle. From this vantage, play again receives attention as a tool or a conduit. However, this function is framed within the context of an influence on business structure. With this perspective comes refined definitions and ideas. Two studies about adult play at work are of note. Both concluded that research into play and play at work showed promise but remained inconclusive (Statler, Roos and Victor 2009; Petelczyk et al. 2019). Despite the desire for more research, each suggested definitions of play at work that are sufficient for this thesis, particularly in light of the survey responses.

Play for example, is re-examined in terms of adulthood. Matt Statler, Jonathan Roos and Bart Victor argued that play at work is imaginative, ethical and autotelic (Statler, Roos and Victor 2009). Imagination, in the form of complex what-if considerations, allow workers to create ideas about new strategies, systems and

relationships. Imagination also allows them to internally test their idea's potential. Ethics are applied to determine if ideas are right or wrong. The comparison forces a reckoning of where the ideas and player/worker relationships stand. That said, both of these qualities can be found in work activities. These aspects are in concert with the first and third qualities of adulthood. What makes this kind of activity play is an autotelic nature. With this, the adult chooses to indulge in this imaginative testing for their own purposes. For these scholars, adult play has the potential to shape the evolution of the worker and their organization - if the employers are patient enough to allow play to unfold.

A similar definition was proffered in the 2019 article "Play at Work: An Integrative Review and Agenda for Future Research". In this research, Petelczyk et al. focused on a definition of adult play suggested by Van Vleet and Feeney. This definition also shrinks adult play to three components. The first two components - a search for fun and an engagement with what and who is around them- were also included in the participant definition. Interestingly, the element of fun is not considered a detriment to work. Like play, fun can occur at multiple levels and in multiple scenarios. However, it is a result of work and play, and one that does not necessarily conflict with the ability to get the job done. The third component is a spontaneous, playful disposition (Petelczyk et al 2019, 168) a quality also appreciated by the participants. Like the first definition, the element of curiosity and the characteristics of rules and intrinsic motivation are included. Imagination is a quality of playfulness, linking these definitions again. Based on our discussions of play and playfulness, these definitions provide a relevant, consistent foundation from which to discuss participant understanding of their play at work.

5.3 Work's Rush to Play

The shift to a more playful work environment has been popularly celebrated. In addition to awards and news buzz, companies that introduce opportunities of play hope to reap its rewards on several levels. In terms of the individual, a playful workplace seems to decrease burnout, increase mental flexibility and improve feelings of competency. In terms of the office, sociability seems to increase as does friendliness and involvement in the work culture (Pretelcyc et. al 2018, 163). Offices which introduce play do so with the hopes of triggering creativity, improving atmosphere, improving collaboration and creating helpful diversions (West, Hoff and Carlsson 2013, 8).

That said, none of the studies here have indicated a high level of consistency in these results, and studies which address what happens when play becomes dark or fails are lacking (Pretelcyc et al 2018, 176). Play is not necessarily welcome by employers who see it as distracting or unwieldy, which may also affect its interaction into a workplace. Those companies who integrate play into the workplace introduce a level of ambiguity for the worker. Playful work models can attract employees with trappings of games and napping rooms. However, scholars such as Brown warn that most are working around the clock trying to achieve work goals, missing out on sleep, and live their life there without really playing, “despite the veneer of being a playful corporation” (Newman 2016, 48:36-48:38).

Interestingly, fun is more likely to be studied than play. Fun is engagement (DeKoven 2015, 142). Henricks defines it as “... the quality of pleasurable interruption

and tension, (176) when the world is seemingly overturned and then allowed to get back on its feet again” (Henricks 2008, 175). In terms of this thesis’s focus, fun is better defined as “a multidimensional construct that “involves any social, interpersonal, or task activities at work of a playful or humorous nature which provide an individual with amusement, enjoyment, or pleasure” (Fluegge, 2008: 15).” (Petelczyk et al, 2018, 170). It is a motive and a reward. It is also an adjective, one that can be attached to many other things, including work (Petelczyk 2018, 170). Finally, it is something that adults will try to find at work, whether it is welcomed by employers or not.

Just as the employer’s impression of the effectiveness of play will influence how it is approached and promoted at work, employee perceptions of employer approval of play will affect their willingness and ability to be playful. The following section introduces the theme of community building by first examining how participants recognize safe spaces to play.

5.4 Perceptions of Playful Workplaces by the Participants

Play unfolds when players are willing and able to engage. Gauging the openness and stability of the workplace to play is akin to judging the safety of a playground. Boundaries at work may be physical, virtual or both, but the rules that accompany the play space and the risks that go with playing are evaluated by players. In the end, players must trust the group that they are working for to supply what they want or need before they can invest in play. Participants described the safety of their work’s support of

playground safety in terms of conscious attention or general disregard of the workplace environment.

Several employers actively created stable working environments that were open to fun and/or play. For example, PR's company was clear in its desire for playful professionalism and promoted this with contests, public and private encouragement, mentoring, and company sponsored happy hours. When running meetings, PR was able to choose who she thought would best help the problem-solving process from start to finish.

PK's school leaders also demonstrated playful professionalism, using funny speakers and ice breakers for professional development. The leprechaun pranks pulled double duty, modelling playful curiosity for the children when looking for the leprechaun while enjoying the adventure of finding out where the doll would be found that day.

Playful professionalism is a clear indicator to employees of their workplace's openness to play. In this regard, special attention was given to the hiring practices by four participants. In two cases, the company was 'interviewed' by the employee using their social connections. For example, UXR spoke with those who worked at her company to see what the job was like before applying. Tech Events met her contact for her current job on the softball field.

MS, the middle school social studies teacher, focused on the effects of the school's hiring practices. He considers the school's choices to be influential in creating a climate that the teachers enjoy. He has worked for 27 years in the same school. Longevity-wise, there has only recently been openings for new teachers to be hired;

before that the youngest member on his team had been there 10 ½ years. When asked about the reason for this, MS replied:

So, the atmosphere in my school is, is fantastic. ... well for me ... it's the staff ... the hiring process, the administration did a nice job in assembling a very, very competent staff. And it is, like, we all like each other. There's- there's very few potholes in our staff ... And we're starting to get new teachers in now, one of the guys calls me Pops. (laughing) But ... it's a very welcoming ... We all have the same attitude, we're comfortable, we've gotten our ... We're treated as professionals, which is very important to the culture. And I think that plays off of the kids, is they, we know that we're professionals, and we know that we're supported.

Administrative responses to employee playfulness reflects this. When standing in the hall as the kids left for the day, MS and his friend started waving and loudly calling “Whoa!” as the students walked by. Wondering what the noise was, an administrator hustled out into the hallway. Seeing that it was two teachers being silly, she shrugged, laughed and left them to it. Signals like this illustrate a trust that the administration has in the ability for the teachers to reframe hall duty into an opportunity for serious play.

The Manager, speaking as someone involved in the hiring process, described the extensive and well considered pattern of hiring and training at his multinational corporation. Hiring practices focus more on “key behaviors” than skills, though both are considered. Key behaviors include the ability to communicate, collaborate, and problem solve. This is reinforced each year to both newcomers and veterans alike. E-learning is used to teach and reinforce behavioral expectations. In the case of a joke gone wrong, the company teaches clearly laid out paths of resolution. Though more formalized than with MS, the Manager’s company established boundaries for safe work and play that were respected and adhered to.

Interviews also reflected discontent with environments that were not interested in stability. For example, Tech Events left her sports agency job because of the blatant sexism in attitude and in pay.

Um, that was kind of fun, uh, because I got to go to a bunch (laughs) of sporting events and didn't have to pay for it and met some sport celebrities. Um, but there was no money there for women, so I moved on.

Tech Events's next job was at an art school on the executive floor. The atmosphere there also squashed play, in part because of the authoritative nature of the environment was "stuffy". It has been at her current position that she has found the playful professionalism that MS, PR and PK described.

MT described a lack of leadership as a threat to a generally playful approach to her school. Whereas Tech Events described demeanor and bias, MT describes an organization floundering from inattention. Leadership was seen to be lacking in authority and objectivity when two schools merged.

Participant 13:

The principal that was present at the, the merge definitely had more of a relationship with the teachers that were already in place. ... well actually we're not quite sure what's happening, but he has not been our principal since October.

MKM:

Oh wow. See what I'm interested in also is how administration encourages like playfulness or, um, play in their school. But your school was in flux?

Participant 13:

Yes. ... Playfulness was not very encouraged at our school, at all, among certain administrations because it was, you're here to do your job and then you get to leave ... there are many, many different thoughts on that. A lot

of the thoughts from some of the teachers that are, we're here to do our job and then we get to leave. The other, and I, I'm hopeful to say that this is the new kind of philosophy coming in. This is where I am spending a lot of my time outside of my home. I might as well enjoy it while I'm here.

There did not seem to be any expectations in the thirteen interviews that toys and games were to be provided for employees. However, participants recognized in big and small ways how businesses made their workplaces friendly or not to the needs of those who would like to bring play to the office. Those workplaces that had stable environments cued respondents that this was a place they might play.

5.5 Play at Work Invites Community

Several the participants' jobs put them at an interesting crossroads. As teachers, therapists, and managers, they facilitate 'work' experiences for students and clients even as they play as employees. Men and women in these positions modelled play and playfulness while performing their jobs using whatever materials were around them. These in turn laid foundations for future bonds.

Technology helped and hindered in community building, though the way this manifested reflected the needs of the job. For the Editor, the introduction of email provided relief from the interruptions of the telephone, limiting emergencies that might distract from the assignment. Conversely, technology provides a way of connecting with coworkers in a way that respects the need for silence and convenience.

So, you know, every now and then I'll just send random comments to this one person I'm friendly with and she kind of responds in kind so this way we're not disturbing anybody but we're still kind of joking with each other.

For UXR and The Manager, channels such as the ones provided by Slack allowed them to connect with coworkers in far-flung locations. Whether it be for work or play, the sense of togetherness was built when virtual play environments were constructed in ways that accounted for distance.

Participants were less likely to play with others if playgrounds were divided between virtual and face-to-face. In terms of bounded play, Tech Events's attempts to include remote workers in office play was unsuccessful. Translating the physical nature of the games to include virtual players made at-home Big Brother participation impossible. Difficulties with the Xbox settings and work schedules made electronic game play a fail, as well.

Regarding serious play, UXR described how split playgrounds proved difficult to build even temporary participation in the serious play of colleagues.

... there's one workshop that I helped design with, um, a previous team member where we, where we- we planned, like, um, a ... essentially a murder mystery-party, um, to kind of drive home some of the things that we were seeing in the research. ... The- the folks in the room certainly wanted to play. We had a couple people who called in online, um, over Skype, and they- they were less enthused. But, you know, being in- in-person is really the best way for those kinds of workshops anyway. But the people in the room were really excited and really got into it (laughs).

Play as an invitation to connection is easily recognized in a pair stories by Participant 3, the Sub. One of two participants who described themselves as retired, the Sub now works for several districts in the northeast. Prior to retirement, he taught high

school special education and social studies. Like MS, he was conscious of how his performance affected student perceptions of themselves and of the learning process. This included making fun of himself when accidentally hitting himself with a desk:

... Oh, one of my favorites was, I was trying to make a very big point, and emphasis. ... And I had forgotten my- my bag, my briefcase around my neck. So, I tugged on my bag and I slammed it down, and promptly slammed my forehead ... Yeah, I got the old lump on the head, and I burst out laughing. (laughs) Because what else are you gonna want to do? (laughs) You made a fool of yourself.

The Sub's sense of humor implicitly invited students to take the same risk. In one example, students were asked to create a puppet show as their assessment for the Crusades. One student, vulnerable and generally non-communicative, broke through her silence by creating a puppet show that was different than the others and well-received by her peers.

... she enjoyed it. ... I mean, out of her shell completely. And she built her own shadow box and brought it. ... she built her own stage and- and brought it in. ... I found when we would do projects like that that incorporated play elements, it went better.

The connection between the Sub and his students has resulted in a few his old students reaching out to him, as well. Most significantly was a connection from a student the Sub had in 1993. The student was in a summer English course and usually went to school in a different district. The Sub's choice to engage in an unexpected way gave the student the courage to reach out to him decades later.

I said, "Give me your full name please," because he had like, a little pending. And I said, "Oh, yeah, I- I remember you." And he goes, "How are you doing man?" I go, "I'm doing great". (laughs), ... he said, "I just wanted to know that you had such a passion for teaching Macbeth, that I

thought you were a college professor." And I said, "No, I just took it from a, you know, a- a textbook I was using with my special ed kids. That's it."

[I was able to hook them because of] The animation. ... I wasn't going through the motions. I mean, think about, it's a summer program in Camden County College. They're kind of getting paid to be there. Upward Bound is a great program, it's gets kids from you know, like, I think he was a Woodrow Wilson kid. And the fact that I wasn't just handing out worksheets and just saying, "All right, that's good." No, I had them act out parts, ... and that hooked him. So, again, uh, I had- I had a fleeting moment, and 20-some years later, 30, well, almost 30 years later, he remembered that. So, that- that is why I go into education.

In this manner, the risk that the Sub took when performing playfulness invited the student to take a risk himself and reconnect as an adult.

By indicating a willingness to engage, a player lets others know that they are open to building community.

5.6 Play and Work Maintain Community

If a stable environment was available participants used play to seek out and develop relationships with their co-workers. In ways large and small, players sought bonds which would pass the tests of time and crisis. Participants were generous with their stories about how connections enhance their lives; three examples are included below.

The Writer was one of only a few to mention community in the time of COVID-19. With her children home because of school closings, she laughed because her regular schedule was disrupted by her new role as their homeschool teacher. However, in normal time, she respects the flow of imagination and inspiration, balancing writing, presenting, and caring for her family. Even isolated with the children at home, play relationships were made room for. In this case, friendships were partnered with taking classes at the

gym together. With gyms now closed, group video classes make the work of exercise less isolating.

So the gym is closed now, we can't do that. Um, so the, the coaches from the gym are posting the workouts on Facebook. And what we do, this group of friends, is we go on House Party together and we work out that way. So, we're still kind of like laughing and having fun together, um, and that's a good outlet for me. ...

That's been very helpful because we really do look forward to that time each day together and we're doing something for ourselves and we're also enjoying being together. So being able to get on that app and see each other and work out together is the next best thing, because when we first started this, we were all doing the workouts at home-

... by ourselves and it was kind of like, ugh, you know, you're so happy you worked out, but it's not sport, it's not as fun. And this way, we're able to still joke around and get the workout in and see each other and enjoy it.

MS's interview centered heavily on the richness of relationships that he has developed in school. He actively creates and promotes opportunities for staff to go out together; he organizes both annual and spontaneous events. The group of friends he has made over the last quarter century regularly interact inside and outside of school. Part of this is the result of the advice an 80-year-old guidance counselor had given him when he first started teaching, which is something that he takes quite seriously. Sitting with MS during a happy hour, the counselor said:

... "Don't ever let this go. Don't ever let this, this is teaching." So, I've maintained that philosophy.

MKM:

So teaching is the community that you build with the other teachers?

Participant 11:

Absolutely. And I think that sense of community, like, I- I really believe, I mean I have poker games at my house, other people have poker games at their house, and we hang out. And other people have socials. We all hang out ... I know about their kids. I care about the faculty and staff. And, in that respect, we can joke about things we do. Like ... remember at dinner last night when you choked on that hot pepper?

The bonds that these groups create can have profound effects in other ways.

Participant 5, the PR representative from the northeast, joined a book club organized by one of her colleagues. After a few years, PR eventually moved away and keeps in touch electronically. When a crisis arose, this community of women drew on their talents and trust in one another to save a friend's daughter.

[A coworker's daughter] had cystic fibrosis [and] needed a lung transplant and she couldn't get one, uh, I don't know, something about her age ... They basically told her we can't get her as high up 'cause all the adults are first, you have to wait for a child, not the first available ... And the doctors ... said the only thing you have left is a PR campaign, and so book club put together this PR campaign that was award winning nationwide and they literally saved this girl's life.

... And they changed, uh, organ transplant laws, which was kind of the idea of the whole thing. They [got] thousands of signatures ... it's just amazing what they did and being up there, I mean, so proud of them, you know, just heart is full full full, when I saw them the next time I'm like, "You know, you guys are heroes." And they said, you know, they didn't formally meet, everybody's professional, they've been doing this for long enough, and so they ... You know, you do this, you do this, you do this, we'll have a call in two days, get it done, and figure it out, so it was really, really amazing what they did.

That work can provide talented people access to each other is unsurprising.

However, the playfulness that initiated and maintains relationships is something that is valued for the precious gifts it provides.

5.7 Conclusions

These and other anecdotes demonstrate that methods used to create relationships and communitas are generally consistent and well-understood. Play needs a dedicated environment in which participants feel they can fully engage with. Playfulness is one way in which participants demonstrated shifting the official frame of work to include something greater. When the invitation to play is extended, there is a risk of rejection. However, the rewards of playing together made the lives of these participants much happier and fuller than if they had not.

CHAPTER 6: FINAL CONCLUSIONS

6.1 Research Goals and Thesis Questions

The goal of this thesis is to address two gaps in the literature. The first gap is the general lack of ethnographic information about adult play at work. Adult play in general is understudied; middle adulthood even more. Thirteen interviews, ranging from seventeen to ninety minutes, were conducted using a semi-structured interview process. Hand-written notes were taken as the phone calls were recorded. The interviews were primed by a survey asking for participant definitions of play and descriptions of playful coworkers.

The thirteen interviews provided a wealth of information about participant understandings of play, work, and the play/work relationship. The primary thesis question - how do adults play at work - was answered. Adult play at work is informed by a) the playful personalities of others and b) the players' search for *communitas* in and outside of the workplace. In one sense, the "how" of play is that adults search for it at an intersection of "who" and "why".

The second gap was noted by Sutton-Smith in *The Ambiguity of Play*. He was concerned over the disconnect between academic research and the perspectives of the players when it comes to defining play itself. Chapter 2 directly addresses this gap. Fourteen participant-generated definitions of play were analyzed in terms of word choice,

elements, characteristics and functions of play. A generic definition of their responses was constructed and then compared to scholarly work. Academic considerations included definitions of play as well as their understanding of the aspects that shape the play experience. The result is that participant definitions generally reflected what academics posit with variations on emphasis.

The one difference in the participant and scholarly definitions is the sense of frivolousness. Participant definitions did not reduce play to the inane. Chapters 4 and 5 reinforce this. Play events may be framed in a silly manner, but they are deeply personal and meaningful. The thirteen interviews describe play's power to cut through vulnerability, fear, boredom and anxiety. They also described play as a way of beginning and extending the relationships that can come out of these experiences.

The second research question asked how play and work interact. Participant interviews indicated that stable environments that are at least tolerant of play create spaces that are claimed by the playful. Openness to play can come from the worker, or, as seen when the UXR's employers created joke channels on Slack, or the company. Rules are important; respecting the needs of your employer and your coworker are paramount. However, workers are generally considerate of the job and employers are eager to reap the benefits of happy, collaborative workers. For this group, work and play have a synergistic relationship.

6.2 Considerations for Future Research

The research for this thesis includes participant generated information from fourteen surveys with two short answers each. It also includes thirteen interviews that lasted as long as an hour and a half. The thick description offered more information and inspiration that can be included in one thesis. The two most prominent themes centered on play personalities and the development of community. These are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. Other themes presented themselves and are worth greater consideration. Three of the themes are included here.

Time Though the issue of time was included in Chapter 5's discussion of community building, it is presented there as a component of something larger. In fact, it can be used to study play in a number of ways. Age is an obvious choice. Tech Events and MS mention how the younger coworkers change the environment. This was a result of where they are in terms of life's milestones as well as their own cultural context as millennials. Change over time was also evident, not only in the differences between the age groups, but in the introduction of technology and with the acceptance of playful professionalism. Chudacoff (2007), Dyson (2015), and Bramham and Wagg (2014) use time to study the historical arc of technology, power and voice in work, play and leisure. They provide a good foundation for an examination of change over time in any of these topics.

Risk I entered this thesis assuming that risk would be a major theme. Inviting someone to play is a risk, as is choosing to participate in an event which unfolds with loose scripts at best. Miller's book about drunk driving prevention programs, the class

discussions associated with it, and author's visit heightened this expectation. I assumed that interviews would be peppered with stories of professional missteps and jokes gone wrong. However, descriptions of play fails were generally avoided; I had to ask for examples to learn more. This could be in part because I held the belief that the work/play dichotomy was still solid. It may also be because participants preferred to be respectful of others or perhaps because of a preference to focus on the positive memories.

Indirect references to it referred to coworkers playing poorly, and were few. With the increased interest in play at work, risk and playfulness is a topic that might be of interest, though researchers are reluctant to examine the downside of play (Petelczyz et al 2018). Turner's different discussions of liminality and social drama would be helpful when beginning an academic look at risk. Goffman's (1959) discussion of managing audiences and missteps would also be of benefit. Deterding (2018), Marsh (2015) and Glenn and Knapp (1987) provide starting points from which to consider the risk of play with regards to adulthood, issues of play forms and unlaughter, and change over time.

Physicality Finally, there is a physicality to adult play at work, though it is unevenly and indirectly referenced. Serious physical play, like the medical therapies, is obvious. However, the architecture of The Manager's office building, which includes a cafe and chat spaces, is a sign of corporate creation of space for play. In a similar way, teachers manipulate and move through classrooms to create stages, design and collaboration spaces, individual desk arrangements, enforce oversight etc. to signal and implement their goals. An examination of how play is physically made room for and by whom would be a practical consideration for those studying work's use of play.

APPENDIX A: GOOGLE CONSENT AND SURVEY FORM

7/27/2020

"How Do Adults Play at Work?": Research Introduction and Consent

"How Do Adults Play at Work?": Research Introduction and Consent

Thank you for being a part of research into how adults play at work!

This form is broken into four parts. The first is this introduction. It includes contact information should you have any questions.

The next part will review items such as process, risks, benefits, confidentiality, audio recording and participation. It will ask for an electronic signature to indicate that you consent to being interviewed. It will also allow you to ask questions should you have any.

The third portion contains three open-ended questions about how you see and experience play at work.

The final section asks for general demographic information.

Should you have any questions, please contact the student researcher, Mary Kay Murphy, at mmurph29@masonlive.gmu.edu. You may also contact the Primary Investigator, Dr. Courtney Hughes Rinker at (703) 993-1440 or chughe13@gmu.edu for questions or to report a research-related problem. You may contact the George Mason University Institutional Review Board (IRB) Office at (703) 993-4121 if you have questions or comments regarding your rights as a participant in the research.

* Required

1. Email address *

2. How would you like to be addressed? This name will be used when contacting you. *

Consent

Please sign your name by typing it at the end of this section if you have read the Consent section and agree to participate.

3. **RESEARCH PROCEDURES:** This research will examine how adults play at work. As a result, adults who describe themselves as someone who is working or has worked as an adult are eligible to participate. This research will examine how adults balance play and work while in the work place. Specifically, it will address how adults and the workplace think about play, how workers engage in play while at work, and how work and play interact in an adult's work day. The research begins after the consent portion of this form. It is comprised of 11 questions and will take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete. The first three questions ask you to reflect on play and playfulness at work. These three questions will be followed by eight demographic questions. The survey will be followed up with an individual interview lasting approximately 60-75 minutes. This, too, will ask about play, playfulness and work. *

Check all that apply.

- I confirm that I have read and understand the procedure of this thesis research.
 I have a question.

4. **RISKS:** There is little or no risk with completing the survey or the interview. The survey form asks for a definition of play, the estimated number of playful people work, and adjectives that describe play/playfulness in general. The interview continues with questions about play, playfulness, and work. There is a small risk of feeling uncomfortable or embarrassment while answering questions, though this will be lessened with the separation of your responses from your name during the research process. Participating in this research is voluntary and you may opt out before, during or after the interview's completion with no consequences. If you wish to stop at any time, please notify the interviewer. These risks are reasonable in terms of the subject being studied. **BENEFITS:** Your contributions will help further knowledge in the areas of anthropology and play studies in the form a master's thesis. There are no direct benefits to you. *

Check all that apply.

- I confirm that I have read and understand the risks and benefits of this thesis research.
 I have a question.

5. **CONFIDENTIALITY:** The data in this study will be confidential. Your name will not be used in note taking during the interview or interview transcripts. You will be assigned a number and will be identified by that number. Demographic information will be generalized in order to provide context to the person's experiences (e.g.: a carpenter from the suburban Midwest). The only individual who will have access to an identification key with your name will be the student researcher of this study, Mary Kay Murphy. The identification key will be stored in a lock box to which the student researcher has the only key. The de-identified data could be used for future research without additional consent from participants. Finally, you will be asked to help select a convenient time and place for the interview. Privacy during an in-person interview will vary with the choice of location. Computer transmissions will be used during this research. While it is understood that no computer transmission can be perfectly secure, reasonable efforts will be made to protect the confidentiality of your transmission. Participants may review Skype's website for information about their privacy statement. <https://privacy.microsoft.com/en-US/privacystatement/> *

Check all that apply.

- I confirm that I have read and understand the commitment to confidentiality above.
 I have a question.

6. **AUDIO RECORDING:** The interviewer will request that the interview be audio recorded. If you give permission to do so, the interview will be transferred from the audio device to the laptop computer of the student researcher, which is password protected. This transfer will take place within one week of the recording and a password will be assigned to your specific file, as well. The original recording will be deleted. The only individuals who will have access and listen to the audio file are the student researcher and her supervising professor, Cortney Hughes Rinker, an Associate Professor of Anthropology at George Mason University. The interview files will be transcribed word for word within three weeks of the transfer. No identifiable data will be used in the transcription. The audio files will be permanently erased after the transcription is complete and double checked for accuracy, no more than 90 days after the interview is completed. *

Check all that apply.

- I confirm that I have read and understand the information about audio recording.
 I have a question.

7. Do you agree to the use of audio recording? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

8. PARTICIPATION: Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time and for any reason. If you decide not to participate or if you withdraw from the study, there is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. *

Check all that apply.

I confirm that I have read and understand the information about participation.

I have a question.

9. What questions do you have about this research?

10. Please sign your name by typing it below if you have read this form and agree to participate. *

Three Questions About Play and Work

11. Thinking about the people at your workplace, how many people would qualify as playful at work? *

12. What qualities make these people playful at work? *

13. How do you define play? *

Demographic Information

14. How many years in your adult life have you worked?

Mark only one oval.

- 0-10 years
 11-20 years
 21-30 years
 31-40 years
 Over 40 years

15. Using the descriptors below, how would you describe your current employment status? More than one box may be checked if needed.

Check all that apply.

- 1-30 paid hours per week
 40 or more paid hours per week
 1-30 unpaid hours per week
 40 or more unpaid hours per week
 Unemployed and currently seeking employment
 Unemployed and not currently seeking employment
 Unable to work
 Retired

Other: _____

16. What industries have you worked in as an adult?

17. In which industry do you work now?

18. In which section of the country do you currently work?

Mark only one oval.

- West (including Alaska and Hawaii)
- Southwest
- Midwest
- Northeast
- Southeast

19. What is your age?

Mark only one oval.

- 18-20
- 21-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60+

20. What is your gender?

21. What is your highest level of education or training?

Check all that apply.

- High School
- Associates
- Bachelors
- Masters
- PhD
- Apprentice
- Journeyman
- Master

Thank
you!

Thank you so much for participating! I will email you at the address you have provided to answer any questions and to arrange a convenient time to interview. I look forward to speaking with you!

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT DESCRIPTORS

Since the personal experiences of the participants is important and the number of people interviewed is large, a brief preview is helpful. Unless stated otherwise, these men and women are family members, are from the northeast, and/or describe themselves as working 40+ paid hours per week. Italicized information was gleaned from interviews but is included as a means of improving comparisons or descriptions. A title/pseudonym has been created from these descriptors. In addition to the descriptors themselves (e.g.: the computer programmer from the northeast), these pseudonyms will be used when addressing their contributions throughout the thesis.

Participant 1 (The Editor) was recruited as a friend of almost 40 years. She is between 50-59 years old and has worked for over 30 years in the medical publishing field.

Participant 2 (UXR) has worked between 11-20 years in contract archaeology, museums and user experience. She currently researches user experience for a marketing research firm. This woman from the American west was recruited via snowball method after hearing about the opportunity from another anthropologist I had contacted about their research. She is between 30-39 years old.

Participant 3 (The Sub) is a *substitute teacher* who has worked also in the finance and education industries. He is 50-59 years old and has worked 31-30 years. He is also the only participant to have been interviewed before. He is a friend and former colleague of mine who was recruited because of his sense of the absurd, his occasional irreverence for authority, and the depth of his experiences *as a high school social studies teacher*.

Participant 4 (The Writer) is a self-published author of children's books whose background also includes education. She is between 40-49 years old. Like Participant 2, *she works primarily from home*. She describes her work history as lasting 11-20 years in the Education and Writing and Publishing industries. She is the only one who described her work as unpaid.

Participant 5 (PR) has worked in public relations and editing. She is 40-49 years old and has worked 31-40 years of that. Though I have not interviewed her before, I interviewed her husband for a previous paper about play and work at her suggestion. She is currently in search of a new job in the southeast.

Participant 6 (PT) is a physical therapist who has worked 31-40 years in hospital settings, inpatient and outpatient rehabilitation settings, skilled nursing, and academia/university settings. She currently works two jobs, the primary one in academia and the secondary one in a skilled nursing/rehabilitation facility. She is between 50-59 years old. She is one of two participants to have earned her PhD.

Participant 7 (VP) is the most experienced member of this cohort with over 40 years of work experience. He is the only participant over the age of 60. After leaving the military in the 1960s, he built a career in sales and purchasing in a Midwestern city, eventually rising to the level of Vice President of his firm.

Participant 8 (Tech Events) work history included references to food, sports and sports marketing, education, and in-person events on both coasts. She currently works in a technology/software firm that hosts virtual events in the Southeast. She is 40-49 years old and has worked for 31-40 years.

Participant 9 (PK) has also had jobs in several industries, including the federal government, a state university, a US consulate preschool and a private state-side preschool. Like Participant 5 she is 40-49 years old and is in the Southeast. She was recruited as a friend. At the time of her survey, she worked 1-30 paid hours per week in a private preschool. She listed her length of work history as 11-20 years.

Participant 10 (OT) Like Participant 6, this PhD is a medical employee currently holds two jobs. Her work history is 11-20 years and is anchored in healthcare and schools. She works as both a pediatric occupational therapist as part of an early intervention home care program and works in a NICU unit, as well. She is 30-39 years old.

Participant 11 (MS) has worked 21-30 years in education, as a middle school social studies teacher in the same school. He is 40-49 years old.

Participant 12 (The Manager) has worked 21-30 years in the technology industry as a software engineer and manager for an international corporation. He is 50-59 years old.

Participant 13 (MT) is a 40-49 years old elementary school music teacher who has worked 21-30 years in education. She works 1-30 hours per week and was recruited as a friend. Like Participants 2,3,7, 11 and 14, she has earned a Master's degree.

Participant 14 (The Theater Manager) has worked 11-20 years in the service and theater/entertainment industries. He is between 30-39 years old. Like Participant 2, he was recruited via the snowball method. His voice appears only through survey answers.

APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your line of work?
2. How did you get into your line of work?
3. Would you describe the expectations of your job?
4. How would you describe the environment of your workplace?
5. Have your experiences matched your original expectations? How (not)?
6. Would you describe the ideal workday? How does a general day match this?
7. How would you describe the most enjoyable/fun/happy moments? Why are these the most enjoyable/fun/happy?
8. How does your work approach play or playfulness?
9. In your/ your colleagues' eyes, is playing a positive?
10. What does it mean to play at work?
11. Is there a place at work to play? Who established/creates this space or the opportunities that create play?
12. How do employees/colleagues respond to these opportunities?
13. How do employees/colleagues responded to playful behavior?
14. How has management responded to its use?
15. How many playful people did you think of when you answered the form? Has that number changed?

16. Were there any characteristics that struck you as most important or noticeable about playfulness at work?
17. Is there any story that comes to mind first when thinking of these playful people?
18. Are these people playful at work, outside work or both?
19. How do the most playful people at work play?
20. How do you play at work?
21. When playing is related to work, how does playing while ____ different than how you play outside of work?
 - a. At work
 - b. While working
 - c. Not at work

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