

SPIRITUALITY AND PLAY

**SPIRITUALITY AND PLAY:
A SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC EXAMINATION FOCUSED ON CHRISTIANS**

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis was to explore the relationships between spirituality and play. Phase 1 involved in-depth interviews with ten Christian participants who indicated relationships between their spiritual attitudes and their play experience. The exploration of the spirituality and play intersection resulted in several primary themes, or features, of play: enjoyment, freedom and creative expression, connection, transformation and meaning. Phase 2 consisted of a large-scale quantitative study designed to investigate the extent to which the sample ($N = 346$) reflected the features of play. The Play Experience Scale (PES), developed based on conceptual, theological and empirical research and Phase 1 data, aimed to evaluate ten primary features associated with play: freedom, enjoyment, relationships (with self, God, people, and nature), creativity, transformation and meaning. Overall frequency and enjoyment of play correlated with all the features of play, with the exception of the 'relation to God' feature. In exploring differences between Christian ($n = 187$) and non-Christian ($n = 159$) participants, results showed that non-Christians exhibited significantly greater frequency and enjoyment of participating in play. It was found that Christians scored significantly higher on the overall play experience score, and two features of play: relation to God and relation to nature. Further, Christian sport participants reported significantly higher levels on the PES and the features of enjoyment, relation to others, transformation and meaning, as compared to Christian sport non-participants. Factor analysis of the PES suggested three-factors: creative expression, relation to God, and transformation. Creative expression correlated most strongly with self and nature sources of spirituality; transformation correlated with human-spirituality; and relation to God correlated with theistic and transcendent spirituality. Creative expression correlated with all five categories of playful activity, relation to God negatively correlated with spontaneous and casual play, and

transformation most strongly correlated with physical contests and sports. Overall, creative expression and transformation were significantly correlated with playful activity, self-determined motivation, dispositional flow and frequent sport participation. In Phase 3, in-depth interviews were conducted with seven pastors to explore how play could be integrated into church life. Pastors emphasized the capacity for play to develop and strengthen relationships, notably through pedagogical practice, intergenerational activities, and within organized community programs. Altogether, creative expression, transformation and interpersonal connections were the most prominent features of play that emerged from this mixed-methods study. Findings suggest that even though play is evident in the lives of Christians, tensions persist regarding the role of play within work-life integration. Additionally, contrasting perspectives emerged regarding spiritual maturity and relational and spiritual encounters. Future research needs to examine the utility of the PES, explore the ambiguity of spirituality and play, and engage a broader sample of participants, especially pastors. Study findings have implications for pastors, teachers and leaders wanting to incorporate play into ecclesiological and educational life through emphasizing and facilitating the creative, transformative and relational features of play.

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At the same time, this process has resulted in alienation and disconnection from the people and things I love most. Children, you have been watching me write this paper without realizing that you embody everything contained within it. The irony is that you could care less what these pages say; you just want me to come play. I do, too. My primary regret has been my frequent refusals to your invitations and your dwindling enthusiasm in expectation for a favourable reply. Never again. Gemma, you pick the project, I will bring the tools. Kris, how about some hoops out back? Theo, I would love to draw and colour with you. Gav, do you want to go on a bike ride to the river and throw some rocks? Jack, let's jump!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Spirituality and play have an ancient relationship, from the utilization of sport to honour the gods in ancient Greece to the ritualistic dances of primitive cultures. The numerous academic accounts which document spiritual and religious attitudes of play throughout history often highlight the suspicious attitudes within some parts of the Christian church towards play or the rise of Muscular Christianity during the Victorian era (e.g., Guttman, 1988; Mathisen, 2006; Watson & Parker, 2014). Negative attitudes within the church toward play, most notably sport, are commonly attributed to Platonic-Cartesian dualism where the mind is emphasized over the body, theological ideas and their misinterpretations of 16th century Protestant Reformers John Calvin and Martin Luther, and misinterpretations of English and American Puritans (Daniels, 1995; Guttman, 1988, 2004; Johnson, 2009; Kelly, 1996; Watson & Parker, 2013; Weber, 1958). However, the moral potential of play continues to infuse Western ideology and influences mass interest, enthusiasm and participation in multiple playful activities. Guttman (2004) argued that the Western world's rational, empirical worldview has complicated and inaccurately portrayed the historic relationship between religion, sport and play; therefore, the intersection of spirituality and play requires further study.

Though historical narratives are valuable, they offer little in terms of future implications for Christians wanting to play. Some religious scholars have called for the Christian church to return to a play ethic in their sports and games in order to combat the individualistic, egocentric and overly competitive trends which characterize modern institutionalized sport (e.g., Hoffmann, 2010; Watson & Parker, 2014). Play has been accused of dying, due in part to the commercialization and consumerism prevalent in sport, music and the arts (Anderson, 2012; Hoffmann, 2010; Kretchmar, 2012). Other play spheres demonstrate similar patterns, evidenced

in violent video-gaming and films as well as the loneliness that results from connectivity with technology in place of real people (Turkle, 2011). The contemporary leisure world is a place where accomplishments and acquisitions act as personal identifiers, where people connect with technology more than with others, and where people are more engaged in juggling their consumption of goods, time and resources than they are engaged in the moment and with others (Kelly, 1996; Scott, 2013; Statistics Canada, 2015). Such tendencies suggest a crisis at a societal level, as a capitalist and utilitarian ideology is commonly accused of infecting our playgrounds and denigrating play (Overman, 2011).

Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga's (1950) bid to reestablish the role of *homo ludens*, humans as players, in human and cultural development has reverberated in academic circles, though there remains a disconnect in how that impacts daily life. Examining the spiritual dimension of play can provide a renewed appreciation for play and how it is experienced (Watson & Parker, 2013). Since play is influential to our existence as human beings, and since the Christian worldview expresses concern for the well-being of people, play ought to be at the forefront of the Christian church's interests, and the church should lead the way to restoring play to its rightful place in 21st century living (Bonhoeffer, 1953/1981).

The **purpose of this study** was to social-scientifically examine the spirituality and play relationship and assess the state of play in the lives of Christians using a three-phased, combined qualitative-quantitative methodology. As this study focused on the play of Christians, Christian perspectives informed the development and implementation of the study. When Christians and others understand what they love about play and appreciate its value, they will be positioned to integrate its spirit into their lives without it being distorted or corrupted into commercialized play

and accompanying trends of alienation that separate players from their activity, self and others, and ultimately limit an individual's realization of their full potential.

Play and Spirituality

The academic attention that play has received in the past decades has predominantly been initiated by Huizinga's (1950) classic book, *Homo Ludens*. By focusing on the play element of culture, Huizinga argued that culture arises in and through play. Originally the English 'play' arises from the Anglo-Saxon *plega*, and, aside from referring directly to play, this word includes "rapid movement, a gesture, a grasp of the hands, clapping, playing on a musical instrument and all kinds of bodily activity" (Huizinga, p. 38). In contrast, ancient Greeks were not limited to one specific word to encapsulate an all-encompassing perspective of play, leading Huizinga to suggest that play was deeply embedded in the fabric of Greek life. In *Phaedo*, Plato expressed his deep appreciation for play. Plato associated freedom with play, as noted in how he typically abandoned his usage of *scholē* when referring to freedom, instead using *paidia*, or play (Gallop, 1975; Hunnicutt, 1990). Plato viewed truth-seeking as a playful pursuit, thereby encouraging others to engage in philosophical inquiry of their own. In calling truth-seeking 'play,' Plato was admitting the limitations of the human quest for knowledge and truth, concluding "that what is human...has been devised as a certain plaything of God, and that this is really the best thing about it" (Plato, ca. 360 B.C.E./1980, p. 193). Play provided the avenue to experience glimpses of truth while simultaneously appreciating the limitations of that pursuit (Hunnicutt, 1990).

Plato's perception of play as the ultimate way of living influenced much of Huizinga's work, culminating in Huizinga's (1950) assertion that the "Platonic identification of play and holiness" exalts "the concept of play to the highest regions of the spirit" (p. 19). In drawing similarities between sacred rituals and play, Huizinga saw that while "in play we may move

below the level of the serious, as the child does...we can also move above it – in the realm of the beautiful and the sacred” (p. 19). Huizinga argued that the play-spirit, which was essential in early culture, is being lost in various dimensions of civilization.

Though Huizinga’s (1950) ‘play’ carried sacred and spiritual dimensions, theologian Hugo Rahner (1964) connected play directly to the spiritual life, suggesting that human play enables one to connect with God. Rahner believed that once someone truly loves God, the ultimate player, they are able to “truly play...[and] be truly light of heart” (p. 58). On the heels of Huizinga and Rahner, others have more recently suggested that play provides an opportunity to encounter God (e.g., Berger, 1970; Johnston, 1997; Sing, 2011). While various theologies of play have ultimately aimed to reconcile the historic relationship between spirituality and play (e.g., Harvey, 2014; Moltmann, 1972), few scholars have integrated empirical approaches.

Exploring Spirituality

In the Western world, spirituality has traditionally been associated with the Christian church, thereby relating spirituality directly to religion (Robinson, 2007a). Robinson (2007a) provided a detailed account of how spirituality has since shifted away from the grand Christian narrative towards a more inclusive, privatized understanding of spirituality. Robinson identified awareness of cultural diversity, the breakdown of the traditional family unit, the influence of sociological determinants, and, like Guttman (2004), the explosion of scientific worldviews as all contributing to a decreased acceptance of grand narratives providing the basis for objective knowledge. These shifts in turn have minimized the prominent place of Christian spirituality in the Western world and propelled an evolution toward a diversity of spiritual perspectives.

Spirituality has often lacked clarity, and defining it is made more challenging as Western culture transitions away from traditional religious adherence to more individualized and

subjective perceptions of spirituality. Even though 55% of Canadians identify themselves with the Christian religion, there are growing numbers of people indicating that they are not religious, prefer their own individualized spirituality, or are spiritually uncertain (Angus Reid Institute, 2017; Pew Research Center, 2019). Another Canadian opinion poll showed that more people describe themselves as “spiritual” rather than “religious,” with 39% of Canadians identifying as spiritual but not religious, and 24% identifying as spiritual and religious (Angus Reid Institute, 2015). The limitation of these analyses is that identification with a religion is often one of cultural affiliation and not actual practice. These changes in the religious landscape are typically attributed in part to generational replacement, demographic and regional trends, and immigration influx, but are also impacted by trends in redefining spirituality (Pew Research Center, 2013).

To explore spirituality in play, Robinson’s (2007b) working definition of spirituality was utilized in this study. Robinson’s definition of spirituality contains three parts. The first is *awareness and appreciation of the other*, which can include the self, another person, the group, the environment, or the deity. Secondly, spirituality includes the *capacity to respond to the other*, suggesting an active role in continuing the relationship with the other by putting spirituality into practice. Finally, based upon these aspects of awareness, appreciation and response, *significant life meaning* may be developed. Of relevance to this study, Robinson concluded his working definition by highlighting what he considered the key strengths of his model: inclusivity, person and other centeredness, practicality, holism, and dynamism which focuses on the spiritual journey rather than the end or sense of attainment. Together, these characteristics help inform how the relationship between spirituality and play was examined.

Given that Robinson’s (2007b) working definition of spirituality has not been operationalized into a measurable scale, Davis et al.’s (2015) spirituality scale was used. Both

Robinson and Davis et al. assume an inclusive relational spirituality that emphasizes awareness and connection to others. While Robinson identified those ‘others’ as inclusive of the self, another person, the group, the environment or a deity, Davis et al. recognized five sources of spirituality: theistic, nature, human, transcendent and self. Both definitions recognize the dynamic nature of spirituality, and provide flexibility in exploring spirituality within religious and non-religious people. The primary extension provided by Robinson’s definition is his emphasis on response and meaning-making, which benefits explorations of spirituality and play.

The tendency towards religious non-affiliation and personalized spirituality has alarmed some scholars. Watson (2007), writing from a Christian perspective, questioned the humanistic abuse of spirituality in that “personal meaning is derived from whatever people deem to be ultimate, and valued in and of itself” (p. 99). Likewise, Elkins et al.’s (1988) humanistic allowance of “whatever one considers...Ultimate” seemed to recognize the global shift towards individually tailored spirituality (p. 10). Though some challenge this approach (e.g., Watson, 2011), Robinson (2007b) maintained that a more inclusive view of spirituality is reflective of community perspectives towards meaning. For the current discussions on spirituality and play to have widespread application, such an approach is necessary. However, heeding these warnings, and given the Christian context of the participants of this study, examining spirituality and play included a review of historical and contemporary Christian theologies of play.

Often Christians mistakenly place that which is ‘spiritual’ as superior to what is material, or physical (Douma, 1996). This duality suggests that Christian worship and living must be done with the spiritual eyes of the heart rather than the physical eyes of the body. Engagement of the senses is sometimes viewed as less important than thinking and contemplating. Dualism suggests that experiences can be categorized as either spiritual or physical, which ignores a holistic view

of the person. From a Christian perspective, the human person is united, which means that physical experiences (e.g., playful activity) contain the spirit, just like spiritual experiences (e.g., worship) contain the body (Douma, 1996). Due to this close-knit unity of the human person, play will naturally possess spiritual components, just like worship and prayer include the body and a physical presence. Upholding that the spiritual is superior to the physical seems incongruent with marveling at the beauty of creation, confessing the incarnation of Christ, and having hope for the resurrection of the body. In this way, Christian living, in all its domains, encompasses the soul, mind, and spirit along with the body in a way that comprises the totality of the person. Life for the Christian is not to be disjointed between moments that are more or less spiritual, as echoed in the well-known words of Abraham Kuyper (1998):

Oh, no single piece of our mental world is to be hermetically sealed off from the rest, and there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over *all*, does not cry: 'Mine!' (p. 488)

In summary, according to scripture and Christian theology, and in light of the purpose of the current study, the characterization of the human person should be one more of wholeness than dualism; the soul, or spirit, is what gives the body life.

Gill (2003) noticed that while adherence to religious beliefs has decreased, participation in, and popularity of, playful activity has inversely increased. Hoffman (1992) previously noticed the same trends, pointing to the Sunday morning joggers who “claim to have found on the roads passing by the church what they could never find within its walls” (p. 157). In this way, sport, play and leisure have become, for many, a primary means of seeking relationships, transcendence and meaning which are often associated with spirituality.

Examining the spirituality of play is not about some disconnection from reality or transcendence into some immaterial place as some theologies of play have suggested (e.g., Moltmann, 1972); from a Christian perspective, humans are material yet spiritual beings, body and soul, and cannot be torn apart (Sproul & Mathison, 2005). Taken together with a holistic anthropology of the human person, the spirituality of play is not about a disconnection from reality but a full immersion within it. So, while spiritual qualities differ from physical (e.g., gross motor skills) and psychological features of play (e.g., motivation), they remain intimately interconnected with them. Examining the intersection of spirituality and play constitutes exploring the spiritual dimension innate to play and playful experiences.

Spirituality and the Features of Play

A review of Huizinga's (1950) description of play and Watson and Parker's (2013) more recent synthesis of the theologies of play, as well as an exploration of empirical, historical, contemporary (especially Robinson's (2007b) definition of spirituality) and biblical literature, suggests that six key features, or qualities, reflect the spiritual dimension of play: freedom, enjoyment, relationship, creativity, transformation and meaning. While the literature that informs these six features is synthesized in detail in Chapter 2, in this section these features are briefly described with connections made to Christian spirituality.

Freedom and Individual Agency

Play affirms individual agency and freedom where players both freely choose to play while also forfeiting freedom by deeply immersing within the play experience itself (Kretchmar & Watson, 2020). Play is bounded-but-free, which is to say that play expresses human freedom while submitting both to the contingent order of play and an awareness and appreciation of others (Huizinga, 1950; Robinson, 2007b). In accepting that intrinsic needs met through playful

behaviour can be captured within the self-determination framework (Deci & Ryan, 1985), an understanding can be reached as to how a submissive autonomous agent, rather than a controlling autonomous agent, can experience satisfaction and well-being in play. As erotic beings, humans cannot derive a sense of completeness within themselves, and are therefore only autonomous in as much as they seek wholeness through relation with others (Hyland, 1978).

The Christian agent can do whatever is lawful, provided it remains helpful and does not interfere with the well-being of others (1 Corinthians 10: 23-24). The spiritual dimension of play espouses freedom and individual agency, all directed by demonstrating an appreciation and awareness of the other which prioritizes expressions of love, peace, gentleness, kindness, and self-control, for “against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:23). This spiritual dimension cannot be an entirely autonomous spirit. Instead, it is a submissive spirit, as seen in the loyalty to surrender “the self to a person, cause or idea” (Huizinga, 1950, p. 104). This submission is not a notion of passivity, as play is active and participatory; instead, spiritual freedom and agency are a surrendering to others and/or to the moment and structure of play itself.

Enjoyment

The second key feature is that play is enjoyed, though not always pleasant (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975a, 1975b; Fink, 1960). History has repeatedly demonstrated that when play is utilized to serve therapeutic (Keen, 1969, 1970), political (Moltmann, 1972), religious (Harvey, 2014; Johnston, 1997) and other ends, it often loses its loftiest quality – enjoyment. For this reason, scholars tend to emphasize play’s *autotelicity*, that is, that play has its own purpose (Harvey, 2014). However, this characterization is idealistic and ignores the multiplicity of human motives for behaviour (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ellis, 2014; Schmid, 2011). Even though our best experiences of play may be experienced as ends in themselves, play is better understood as being

autocharactic: “we play because we enjoy it for its own sake” (Ellis, 2014, p. 266). Such a characterization of play aligns with the foremost quality of enjoyment found in Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) conception of flow and autotelic experiences.

The deepest absorption and enjoyment of play occurs when an individual’s abilities, resources and power are stretched, which could present struggle and challenge. So, even having experienced suffering, defeat and disappointment, players returning to play testify to the power of the play spirit (Ellis, 2014), and indicate that joy is play’s intention (Berger, 1970). Even though suffering and pain is not play’s intention, for the Christian player a world tainted with the burden of sin cannot be escaped (Sproul & Mathison, 2005). In play, like in work and all of life, Christians can taste God’s grace and the future promise of play, work and life restored in balance. The Sabbath is meant to signal that rest and delight. The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1986) describes humanity’s “chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever” (p. 1).

Community and Relationship

Third, play and spirituality are both manifestations of human relationship (Fink, 1960; Twietmeyer, 2007). Christians ground their innate human need for relatedness in being created as image-bearers of the relational, Triune God (Myers, 2011; Sproul & Mathison, 2005). In being shared and collaborative, play embodies and fosters intimate relationships, which are necessary for the development of genuine responsibility and compassion towards other humans (Twietmeyer, 2015). Johnston (1997) presented the social nature of play in its expression of freedom and individuality within the confines of a loving community, citing Buber’s (1958) ‘I-Thou’ relational encounter as the process in which players commune with other players or playthings on a personal level, rather than in an ‘I-It’ relationship. For Buber, “all real living is meeting” (p. 11) where agency (‘I’) remains central to understanding and relating to others as ‘It’

or ‘Thou.’ The ‘I-It’ relationship is a distant and detached relationship characterized by the objectification and distinction of the other to be primarily utilized for functional purposes. The ‘I-Thou’ relationship recognizes the inexplicable, spiritual living relationship with others, where players and playthings meet without judgment as authentic beings. A personal encounter is possible when players immerse themselves in the objects and persons of their play (Nesti, 2007b). Play confronts human predispositions for self-centeredness by forming relational encounters with oneself, other people, God and the world around us.

In relation to the self, players proceed in confident humility while recognizing their deepest identities and authentic selves (Harvey, 2014; Kretchmar, 2013). Ellis (2014), like Huizinga (1950), noted that humans are natural players: “we play to express our nature, we play to be human” (p. 266). In drawing a connection between the identity of God and his act of creation in humanity, Harvey (2014) understood humans as unnecessary-yet-meaningful creatures, and, given his identical description of play as an unnecessary-yet-meaningful activity, ultimately claimed that, when humans play, they “chime with our being” (p. 84). Through play, people freely experience their deepest identities, express their multidimensional human nature, and ultimately recognize the totality and wholeness of their personhood (i.e., thoughts, feelings, sensuous experience, volitions, relationships) (Ellis, 2014; Fink, 1960; Harvey, 2014). Being cast as unnecessary-yet-meaningful creatures captures the finiteness, fragility and humility of both humanity and play, while simultaneously granting people and play value and meaning.

In relation to others, play is marked by love, cooperation and inclusivity, where others are met as valuable, personal and authentic beings (‘Thou’), not as objects to use or overcome (‘It’). The authentic self is fully realized when play gives way to friendship rather than alienation and disconnection (Hyland, 1978). When the power of play leads to recognition of others as ‘Thou,’

competition serves to recognize the other as mutually valuable (Simon, 2010). If play is indeed a celebratory experience, we should be able to experience shared joy with others even when facing defeat or disappointment. When ‘the other’ in play involves other people, one would expect that Christian play exhibits love and peace with others. A spiritual encounter invites participants to consider the hindrance in their competitive play, the opposition, not as obstacles to be overcome, but as people of equal worth and value to themselves (Hyland, 1978; Kretchmar, 1972; Simon, 2010). Other people are both similar, and therefore encountered with collaboration and compassion, and different, and so met with curiosity, wonder and disclosure (Robinson, 2007b).

In relation to God, play can function as a spiritual act of worship in which people, as image-bearers, relate to and reflect God (Guardini, 1994; Twietmeyer, 2015). Even though play occurs within its own space and time, it is not secluded from God’s presence (e.g., Harvey, 2014), nor is play a parallel universe where God magically resides, waiting for your encounter (e.g., Johnston, 1997). In either case, God’s sovereignty is limited and His spiritual nature existing outside of space and time are undermined (Sproul & Mathison, 2005). To limit God inside or outside of play is to say that an omnipresent and omniscient God is not God. While Berger (1970) famously called play a ‘signal of transcendence,’ play, like worship, does not earn God’s grace; it is not the act itself which enables one to draw closer to God, but instead the existing relationship that one has with God through Jesus Christ which permeates all of life (Ellis, 2014; Lewis, 1955). As Christians confess that eternal life is about harmony of purpose and closeness to God, both play and non-play are opportunities to be driven by the Spirit.

In relation to the world, while humanity’s relationship with creation is balanced both by pragmatic development and environmental protection, creation provides playful opportunity for awe, wonder and an awareness of the totality of the universe (Jirásek, 2015). To establish an

integrated life that balances stewardly development and creaturely delight (Treat, 2015), the Sabbath represents a call to enjoy the world in celebration and thankfulness through rest, leisure and play (Harvey, 2014; Johnston 1997; Naugle, 2012). The weekly rhythmic pattern established by the Sabbath led Smedes (1975) to suggest that people are “destined for playfulness” (p. 59). While most North American Christians hear God’s call to work, it is unclear whether they also hear God’s invitation to Sabbath and that life involves more than work. Play ought to serve a prominent position in the life of Christians as a reminder of their non-seriousness (Harvey, 2014; Renner, 1981). In practice, a relationship needs contact time, which suggests that relational play is noticeable as one interacts with the world, in one’s daily work as well as in creation and products of creation. A living relationship with the world implies that individuals relate to nature as Thou, an other to be enjoyed, valued and protected.

Creativity

A fourth spiritual feature of play is its impulse for creativity. Play has power to facilitate freedom of expression, novelty and imagination, as predominantly seen in artistic play-worlds (Sutton-Smith, 2001). Huizinga (1950) suggested that play’s link to creativity can be seen in Plato’s writings, where he claimed the expressive, creative and imaginative capacity of play to be the most virtuous activity and central to its spirit. Play’s power is in its freedom of expression, where individual and societal inhibitions are overcome for the sake of something new, which, upon discovery, floods the individual with joy and satisfaction (Bateson & Martin, 2013; Kotler, 2014). ‘Creating play’ or ‘creative brilliance’ need not be strictly limited to artistic expressions, though it is in the arts that greater depths of creativity are often experienced (Huizinga, 1950; Schiller, 1965). As artists perfect their craft to communicate something to an audience, what is unique about art-forms is the opportunity to respond to them aesthetically, where both audience

and artist achieve sensuous understanding (Drewe, 2003; Guttman, 2004). Given that many creative expressions include the presence of an audience, a dimension of risk is associated with the creative impulse, a quality which heightens spirituality (Robinson, 2007a).

Viewing the goodness of creation as a creative expression of God's delight, freedom and joy has prompted some Christian scholars to interpret God's work of creation as God's *play* of creation (e.g., Moltmann, 1972). Theologian Hendry (1980) suggested that creation represents God's 'artistic expression'; as artists reveal themselves in their art forms, so too does God reveal himself in creation. It is this creative expression and outflow of God's character through creation that led Moltmann to call all creation God's play. In both Hendry and Moltmann's accounts, creativity and play share elements of spontaneity, goodness and freedom of expression.

Transformation

Fifth, the spiritual element of any human experience is dynamic and changing (Robinson, 2007b), and so the spiritual dimension of play is persistent in inviting repeated encounters, creating optimal conditions for the actualization of individual and collective potentiality (Sutton-Smith, 2001). Players, especially in aesthetic and creative expressions, articulate who they are and what they value, reflect upon the significance of whom and what they play with, negotiate new meaning in what they do, and begin to embody and respond to the tensions that exist between different purposes and relationships. Through play, people grow and experience an increased desire and longing for perfection (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990).

The lure of the joy of play, combined with the innate need for mastery and competence (Deci & Ryan, 1985; White, 1963), enables self-transcendence, which is not a disconnection from reality but a deeper engagement with it (Robinson, 2007a). Rather than limiting transcendent experiences to mystical moments, Ellis (2014) proposed an understanding of

transcendence as “moments of striving and reaching ‘beyond’ the present and its achievements” (p. 236). In being created with the capacity for growth and potential, rather than as static and complete, humans reach beyond themselves, transcending towards a more authentic and complete self (Ellis, 2014; Robinson, 2007c). For the Christian, transformation and reaching beyond themselves means “being transformed” into the image of God (2 Corinthians 3: 18) and becoming a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5: 17). Christians are called to experience ongoing spiritual growth, something play offers through the connections with others and opportunities for learning and meaning (Thomas & Seely Brown, 2011). Not only is play fun, but the possibility of learning and acquiring new skills captivates and enchants as well.

Meaning

Finally, spirituality is ultimately concerned with the pursuit of meaning (Robinson, 2007a; Jirásek, 2015). Play tends to be meaningful because it fulfills a sense of purpose, invites actionable engagement, and establishes rhythm and harmony in chaos (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Huizinga, 1950). Play’s relational capacity, value affirmation, and inclusion of adversity and uncertainty all serve to enhance the development of meaning (Caillois, 1961). If the purpose of an activity is seen as valuable, it can become internally rewarding and possess value-based meaning (Deci et al., 1994).

The meaning of play is not merely seen in what someone does; play’s meaning is seen in who people are (Harvey, 2014). Put simply, play is meaningful because it affirms who people are and what they share with each other. For Fink (1968), play reminds people of their existence in the world, and their relation to it as a totality, for “human play is the symbolic act of representing the meaning of the world and of life” (Fink, 1968, p. 28). Humans exist in relation to the totality

of the world, and play serves as a symbol that represents that totality (Alvis, 2019). The spiritual ability to comprehend the totality of the world is what sets play apart (Fink).

For Christians, identity and meaning are found within the context of their relationship with God through Jesus Christ. While some Christian scholars have viewed the nature of play as foreshadowing eternal life (Moltmann, 1972), and others have partitioned it off from God's presence (Harvey, 2014), whichever conceptual beliefs one holds will ultimately determine what meaning is ascribed to playful activity. So, meaning is not uniform, but is found in actual experiences and is as rich and varied as the wide spectrum of play experiences (Anderson, 2012; Fink, 1968; Huizinga, 1950). What is shared is that play has power because it has meaning.

Summary of Empirical Research

Given the ambiguity of play (Sutton-Smith, 2001) and that play is often recognized as a universal phenomenon (Godbey, 2003), empirical research on spirituality and play generally occurs within the context of specific playful activities or academic disciplines. For example, the field of leisure studies has demonstrated a recent increase in empirical research on spirituality and leisure (Heintzman, 2020), though few studies have examined Christian populations (Heintzman, 2017). Notable exceptions include examining how Christians integrate their faith into belly dance (Kraus, 2010) and how New Paradigm Christians experience spirituality within leisure activity (Livengood, 2009).

Within sport study disciplines, studies specifically examining the lives of Christians have predominantly focused on the intersection between prayer and sport (Hoffmann, 2011; Price, 2009). Prayer in sport has been found to be useful in coping with stress or injury (Czech et al., 2004; Watson & Nesti, 2005), developing group cohesion (Murray et al., 2005), and enhancing performance and meaningful experience (Huffman & Etnier, 2020; Park, 2000; Vernacchia et al.,

2000; Watson & Czech, 2005). Additional emerging empirical research has explored Christianity and sport psychology consultancy (Egli & Hoven, 2020; Noh & Shahdan, 2020) and sports chaplaincy (King et al., 2020; Maranise, 2016). Overall, despite the significant scholarly activity on sport and Christianity, the majority has been historical and theoretical and therefore “there is a distinct lack of quality empirical research” (Watson & Parker, 2013, p. 41).

An additional discipline that tends to examine spirituality and play is that of childhood education, prompting the development of a recent chapter entitled *Looking Deeper: Play and the Spiritual Dimension* (Harrison & Robinson, 2017). The concept of relational consciousness is a core component within studies exploring how play relates to and facilitates the spiritual wellbeing of children (Hay & Nye, 2006). Relational consciousness has been shown to be a core component of sport (Moriarty, 2013). Additionally, studies in childhood education have demonstrated that play has been utilized as a means of nurturing children’s spirituality (Mata-McMahon, 2019), play facilitates childhood awareness of community and purpose (Harris, 2014) and spirituality is expressed through creative and imaginative play (Goodliff, 2013).

The investigation of spirituality and specific activities, such as dance, music and arts, typically occurs within the academic disciplines of sociology, psychology and religious studies, though tends to be more theoretical than empirical (McCullough, 2015). Empirical studies exploring spirituality and dance have examined the therapeutic and transformative uses of dance (Snowber, 2019), with few exceptions examining Christian settings (e.g., Kraus, 2010, Schuff, 2019). While Christianity has long been associated with various artistic expressions, there is a growing trend in artists associating their art with spirituality (Binder, 2016). Recent studies have identified how art facilitates increased vulnerability and awareness of spirituality and faith (Linesch, 2017) and how art therapy parallels the Christian faith (Hansen, 2018). As a specific

artistic expression, the relationship between spirituality and music is well-documented (Cobussen, 2019). Through integrating conceptual and empirical research, a model of music education highlighted four primary components associated with music and spirituality: corporeality, relationality, temporality, and spatiality (van der Merwe & Habron, 2015). Despite the long-standing relationship between Christianity and music, few empirical studies exist, with a notable exception being Fung's (2017) recent phenomenological study that explored how music facilitates holistic development and self-discovery in Christian musicians.

Examining Spirituality and Play – Considerations for Present Research

In light of the current state of the literature, several considerations informed this study. First, the extent of empirical research on spirituality and play is limited, especially research on Christian populations, prompting appeals for more empirical study on how Christians view play participation within sport (Ellis, 2014; Watson & Parker, 2013, 2014) and general leisure behaviour (Heintzman, 2017). Secondly and relatedly, though some scholars have integrated psychological, philosophical, and theological perspectives when exploring spirituality and play (e.g., Teismann & Weber, 2020), such multidisciplinary approaches lack integration of empirical findings. Third, given that Western culture is argued to be saturated with a rationalized and scientific worldview that invades cultural playgrounds, "further research on play in organized sport is vital" (Watson & Parker, 2013, p. 19) and a better grasp on the spiritual dimension of play will "help to counteract the commercialized and scientific world of sport" (Watson & Parker, 2013, p. 19). The present study responds to calls to explore spirituality and play.

Fourth, in light of the historic suspicion and ambivalence of the Christian church toward play, be it associated with the Protestant work ethic, Platonic-Cartesian dualism, or other socio-cultural factors, the restoration of a play-ethic for Christians is of utmost importance (Watson &

Parker, 2014). Dualistic understandings of the human person continue to praise mind over body, with such Platonic-Cartesian philosophies also heavily influencing Christian theology over the past two millennia (Watson & Parker, 2013). Play and games within education models often act as accessories to overall education (Twietmeyer, 2015). While Christians, in practice and in theology, demonstrate great attention to faithful work, historical resistance towards play, leisure and recreation may impact Christian receptivity towards playful activity. If Christians do embrace the value of play, then the prominent attitudes, motivations, emotions and behaviours demonstrated in their play can be examined using the qualities described by historical, contemporary and biblical writings, and further affirmed through empirical research.

Fifth, the playfulness of many activities is buried in professionalization and commercialization, and replaced with economic attitudes, utilitarian earnestness, and work obsession, which impact secular and religious communities alike (Huizinga, 1950; Kelly, 1996; Watson & Parker, 2014). Play is given various ends (e.g., financial, political) which distort its intrinsic *telos* (Harvey, 2014). What is needed is not an understanding of *why* people play (though motivational theories will assist in this discussion), but clarity on *what they love about it*. Kids play because it is fun, but that simplistic enthusiasm often dissipates with age. In characterizing play as adaptive variability, Sutton-Smith (2001) challenged inconsistent Western societal notions of play being reserved strictly for children while adults recreate, which depicts play as essential to child development but viewed merely as a diversion for adults. Surely, some might suggest, adults must have something better to do than engage in frivolous activity. Theologies of play may be best positioned to counteract the commercialized and scientific trends of play (Watson & Parker, 2014). Play possesses certain inherent qualities that have become distorted in current play-forms, and recognizing those features will allow us to preserve them.

Sixth, given how central relationships and community are to a Christian worldview, there is a lack of academic studies exploring Christian interpersonal relationships in play and sport contexts (Watson & Parker, 2014). Several scholars have suggested utilizing Buber's (1958) I-Thou philosophy to explore those relational encounters (e.g., Johnston, 1997; Nesti, 2007b; Progen & DeSensi, 1984; Watson & Parker, 2014). While not disregarding the I-It world as part of human existence, an "authentic human life cannot be achieved" without I-Thou encounters (Progen & DeSensi, 1984, p. 81), which may be characteristic of genuine play experiences. In other words, the best versions of play are when the other is Thou, a subject to be appreciated, rather than It, an object to be used as a means to an end. To date, very few studies have empirically examined subjective experiences and relational encounters utilizing Buber's I-Thou philosophy, least of all within play contexts.

Lastly, as the connections between spirituality and flow states are complex and unclear (Dillon & Tait, 2000), investigating the spirituality of play may also uncover how varying degrees and depths of play impact subjective experience, thus expanding potential areas of needed research (Watson & Parker, 2014). Adams et al. (2015) suggested further exploration of how different types of play express spirituality, including links to flow states and differentiation between spiritual and social relationships.

Research Questions

1. How is play evident in the lives of Christians?
2. What are the spiritual features of play, and how are they evident in Christians at play?
 - a. How do the spiritual features of Christians at play compare to the spiritual features of play for people from other religious/spiritual traditions?
 - b. Are the spiritual features of play related to flow? If so, how?

3. How does a spiritual and relational attitude, or 'I-Thou' relational encounter (Buber, 1958/1986), influence playful experiences?
4. How is play experienced by Christians in organized, competitive sport?
5. How can playful activities such as sport, dance, music and the arts be integrated into ecclesiological praxis, i.e., church life?

Research Studies

This thesis involved three phases to answer the research questions. The first phase involved in-depth interviews with a Christian sample to broadly explore the relationship between spirituality and play. Specifically, participants were asked to describe their own playful experiences (research question 1), to identify how spirituality and play intersect (research question 2), and to share how spiritual and relational attitudes influence their play (research question 3). As some of the participants were involved in organized, competitive sport, interview results were also used to examine research question 4. Results from the first phase informed the development of measurements used in the second phase.

The second phase involved a large-scale quantitative study designed to investigate the extent to which the sample reflected the features of play as described in the literature review and as informed by the in-depth interviews. A number of measures were utilized to assess playful activities, play experiences, motivation, dispositional flow, and sources of spirituality. Analysis of the data was utilized to answer research questions 1, 2 and 4. In addition, some resultant data was utilized to inform the third phase of this study.

The third phase entailed in-depth interviews with a small sample of Christian pastors. Questions were asked to specifically answer research question 5, though data also provided insight into research questions 1 and 2.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter reviews historical, contemporary and Christian theological literature, as well as empirical studies, to examine the relationship between spirituality and play. Huizinga's (1950) foundational work provides a starting point for a more detailed examination of the characteristics of play introduced in Chapter 1.

Exploring Play – An Overview

Coming to a consensus on the spirituality and play relationship is not simple, given the academic attention play has received in past decades, following Huizinga's (1950) thesis that play is everywhere; culture arises in and through play. He suggested this relationship is not evolutionary, in that play turns into culture, but rather primitive, archaic cultures were saturated with the play-character, and culture develops as play. Huizinga's argument rests on connecting play and *agon*, the contest, and the belief that people are naturally competitive and have "the innate desire to be first" (p. 101), something Huizinga sees in all play activity. In comparing *agon* and play, Huizinga demonstrates how these natural "agonistic aspirations" and human's "glorious exhibitionism" (p. 146) are seen in law, war, education, poetry, philosophy and art in archaic societies. Huizinga's oft-cited definition of play includes characteristics rather than a concrete definition. To this end, Huizinga described play as:

A free activity standing quite consciously outside 'ordinary' life as being 'not serious,' but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner.
(p. 13)

Notably, Huizinga opted to broadly characterize play rather than operationally define it.

While Huizinga (1950) is often accredited for resurrecting appreciation for play, his thesis contributed to an already prolific academic conversation on play, games and sport. Early play theories were put forward by both Herbert Spencer (1873) and Friedrich Schiller (1965) who maintained that people play to release excess energy once needs of subsistence have been met. However, such theories of surplus energy are generally dismissed as embedded in primitive understandings of biological systems (Ellis, 1973). Schiller's appreciation for play, especially within various art forms, was in its capacity to synthesize the sensuous and rational drives of people, a mediating instinct he referred to as the play drive. For Schiller, play was a uniquely human activity wherein players could promote personal development and aesthetic beauty by conjoining subjective experience and empirical conditions.

In opposition to the theory of surplus energy, *play as relaxation*, or *recreation theory*, describes play as serving to relax people and restore them for work (Henle, 2013; Johnson et al., 1999). Pioneered by the work of George Patrick, this theory views play as opposite to work, and in replenishing energy stores through rest and play, the worker will be recreated to attend to daily labors with energy and rigor (Ellis, 1973). A significant shortcoming of recreation theory is that it does not account for why children play more than adults, despite lower work demands. Similarly challenged are perspectives that view play as preparation, a theory developed by Karl Groos (1901) who argued that through play, children develop and refine instinctive responses in a safe environment, and so prepare for work and develop the skills needed for adulthood (Henle, 2013). These preparatory tendencies are also seen in several psychological theories of play (e.g., Chateau, 1954; Piaget, 1962) which primarily focus on the role of play within childhood development. Such preparatory and psychological theories cannot account for the tendency for

children to play for the experience of play itself; rather, it is often adults who seek to develop in children specific or general skills through their play.

In response to Huizinga's (1950) seminal work, Roger Caillois' (1961) developed a more comprehensive perspective on play within *Man, Play and Games*. Rather than directly associating all play with *agon*, Caillois suggested that four play forms, or games, exist: *agon* (competition), *alea* (chance), *mimicry* (simulation) and *ilinx* (vertigo). Each of these play forms can further be experienced along a continuum from *ludus*, more structured activities, to *paidia*, more spontaneous activities. While the inclusion of these playful activities expands on Huizinga's narrow association of play with *agon*, Caillois was also cautious in narrowly defining play, rather opting to characterize play with six features: free, separate, uncertain, unproductive, governed by rules, and inclusive of imagination.

While Caillois' (1961) categorization and characterization of play expands on Huizinga's (1950) thesis, others have sought to define play, games, and sports more concretely. In beginning with describing play as either spontaneous or organized, Allan Guttmann (2004) classified games, contests and sports as further categories of play. Games, or organized play, could be either noncompetitive or competitive, and contests (competitive games) could be classified as either intellectual contests or physical contests (i.e., sports). Play is therefore categorized as becoming more regulated with an ever-increasing emphasis on outcome as one moves along the spectrum of play, games, contests and sports. Appreciated within Guttmann's classification is his recognition that games, contests, and sports all represent a category of play, and that play is intrinsic to each of these broader activities.

Overall, additional definitions for play permeate academic literature, and in citing several authors, including Huizinga, Watson and Parker (2013) present an integrative description of play:

Play can be characterized by a sense of freedom and autonomy, a nonutilitarian ethic, a celebratory and spontaneous spirit, creativity, joy, intrinsic enjoyment (the autotelic), a transcendence of ego-boundaries and a feeling of psychic (and spiritual) holistic integration. (p. 16)

Rather than foolishly restricting play to the boundaries of a rigid definition, Huizinga's description and Watson and Parker's collective characteristics provide a starting point in examining the relationship between spirituality and play. Additionally, Christian theologies of play and Robinson's (2007b) definition of spirituality will be integrated into this examination.

Empirical Research

While Watson and Parker's (2013) systematic and multi-disciplinary review of theologies of play assisted in identifying the features of play, it is important to note that Watson and Parker arrive at their list of play's characteristics through drawing on scholarly essays and reflections; a noticeable omission is reference to any empirical research. Therefore, a summary of empirical research will be provided following each respective feature of play.

As described in Chapter 1, empirical research on spirituality and play has emerged within a range of academic disciplines. The three primary disciplines that have examined spirituality and play include sport studies, leisure studies, and childhood education. These, as well as studies that have examined spirituality in dance, music and art, are included within each feature of play.

Six Features of Play

Drawing from Huizinga's (1950) description of play and Watson and Parker's (2013) more recent synthesis of the theologies of play, as well as having explored empirical, historical, contemporary and Christian theological literature, six key features characterize the spirituality and play relationship: freedom, enjoyment, relationship, creativity, transformation and meaning.

Feature One: Freedom and Individual Agency

Two qualities of play often simultaneously acknowledged are the sense of freedom experienced in play and play's nonutilitarian essence. For Huizinga (1950) play is "a free activity" (p. 13) done during "free time" (p. 8). In saying this, Huizinga asserted that play is pursued free from demands of necessity and obligation; it is not a duty or a necessary task, for "no profit can be gained by it" (p. 13). This freedom is commonly characterized by the word *autotelic*: the purpose of play is play, and is nothing more and nothing less. When work and play are dichotomized, a common distinction is that work produces while play does not. Work functions as a means to an end, while play's end is play where "the doing is its own reward" (Kretchmar & Watson, 2018, p. 72). A defining feature of play, according to Roger Caillois (1961), is that play is unproductive and uncreative; when the purpose of play becomes something else, it is no longer play. Therefore, when scholars present versions of play that serve greater means, they lose something of its intrinsic *telos* (Harvey, 2014).

Sam Keen

Despite Sam Keen's (1969, 1970) celebration of play, many have criticized his use of play to serve a therapeutic agenda (e.g., Harvey, 2014; Johnston, 1997). According to Keen, *homo faber* and the work-dominated Western world contribute to a diseased society where people are alienated from expressions of sensuality and an authentic life, and where dualism

perpetuates bodily abuse in service of industrial manipulation and control. Further, Keen viewed play as the means by which people may be liberated from this societal infection, where people can come to know themselves wholly by turning inwardly, to their own feelings and bodily sensations. According to Keen, the spiritual essence of play is its ability to provide an individualized sense of wonder lived through the body; what is sacred is thus within oneself.

For Keen (1969, 1970), play is an escape from the monotony and drudgery of life, providing opportunity to optimize psychological health. Keen's Christian upbringing was characterized as "legalistic, repressive" and absent of grace, where a controlled and rigid Christianity left no room for play and needed to be discarded entirely (Johnston, 1997, p. 62). Keen's play presents as aristocratic, individualistic and autobiographical, resulting in his underappreciation for humans at work or having any realistic interest in the well-being of other people. There is limited room for compassion or other-orientation for Keen, and therefore limited room for anything spiritual. In short, Keen's theology-therapy of play is excessively utilitarian; play is meant to improve health and escape the control of everyday life (Harvey, 2014).

Jurgen Moltmann

While Keen's approach was to use play to inform theology, Jurgen Moltmann's (1972) approach in *Theology of Play* was eschatological – a theological framework oriented towards the destiny of humanity – which informed his understanding of play. Moltmann characterized culture as infected by political oppression, resulting in plagues of international suffering and meaningless work experiences. People play, therefore, to escape work and inadvertently carry with them the very attitudes and interests from which they seek liberation, resulting in a degree of alienation in their play as in their work. For Moltmann, play without hope is inauthentic; play provides moments of freedom from oppression, moments of hope and celebration of the future

Kingdom. Due to Moltmann's hope in the resurrection, play is not a denial of current reality but rather functions as a rehearsal, or a forecast of the future. In viewing the end of creation to be liberation, Moltmann called Christians to live out their lives as play, thereby providing for others a glimpse of the freedom and liberation found in Christ. Moltmann's hope-oriented theological reflections are akin to theologian Richard Neuhaus' (2009) description of *prolepsis*, that is, Christian acts "in which a hoped-for future is already present" (p. 14) but gives way to "moments of encounter with the good, true and beautiful in which we are moved to say "Ah, it [heaven, the divine, truth] must be something like this" (p. 228).

Others have been critical of Moltmann's (1972) highly functional, instrumental approach to casting play as a revolutionary act (e.g., Harvey, 2014; Johnston, 1997). If play is to encourage 'productive imagination' in addition to unnecessary relaxation, and highlight humans 'suppressed spontaneity' as a way for social change, it ignores play's autotelic qualities. Despite Moltmann's attempts at championing creative play as unnecessary, in emphasizing play's revolutionary and liberating function, he utilized play for a political agenda.

Constraining Autonomy and Bounded Play

Despite their weaknesses, both Keen's (1969, 1970) and Moltmann's (1972) 'theologies of play' celebrate the freedom and liberation often associated with play behaviour. A defining characteristic of play is the freedom to choose to do it (Huizinga, 1950; Kretchmar & Watson, 2020). The sense of freedom in play is often associated with autonomy that, by definition, is a form of self-government; it is understood as complete freedom to make informed, un-forced decisions. To Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory, autonomy is considered a basic human need, which suggests that humans experience greater satisfaction and well-being when given options from which they freely choose (Ryan & Deci, 2000; 2002).

However, freedom and autonomy do not negate the need for relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000); to be an agent of one's life is not done independently of others, for behaviour is influenced by socio-cultural environments and the need for relationships. Freedom does not permit persons to act immorally or unethically, so autonomy, even complete freedom, is constrained by responsibility (Frankl, 1959). In contrast to modern trends towards unbridled autonomous and individualistic living, a spiritual perspective means surrendering some autonomy and realizing optimal vitality through actively appreciating and engaging with the other (individuals, groups, nature, and/or God) (Robinson, 2007b).

Freedom constrained by the presence of others does not mean individuals can no longer act freely or experience freedom in their play. In relationship to others, Guttman (2004) considered that the choice is not to be made between individualism and conformity, but between conceptions of 'freedom from' and 'freedom to,' commonly referred to as negative freedom and positive freedom. This dichotomy contrasts an individualism where a person is free from constraints and independent from society with a democratic socialism where a person is free to choose and act among alternative options. Cooperative individualism requires relinquishing the ability to be unbounded from restraints, and so cooperation risks "degenerating into restrictive conformity" (Guttman, 2004, p. 159). In assuming cooperation and submission, we surrender some 'freedom from' and recognize that obstacles, barriers and constraints are unavoidable in play contexts, and in fact assist in heightening the play experiences. The player is *free to* participate and *free to* express themselves within the rules and conditions of play.

Though free, play is constrained by moral and ethical conduct. It is clear that for Plato play has a centrally important moral function in the teaching of children in that he distinguished 'unlawful' from 'lawful playing,' and advised teachers to use 'guiding play' as a teaching

method (Gallop, 1975; Hunnicutt, 1990). Even though Huizinga (1950) stated early on that play has no moral function, and that “in itself it is neither good nor bad” (p. 213), he concluded that conscience and moral judgment cannot escape considerations of play. While the rules within play are not always continuous with everyday life, players are subject to ‘bounded’ action and conduct. It remains common practice for educators to emphasize the moral growth that occurs through play, often emphasizing development over enjoyment (Sutton-Smith, 2001), an instrumental approach codified within Muscular Christianity (Watson & Parker, 2013).

Freedom and individual agency remains ‘bounded’ within play, where the freedom the player experiences demands responsible conduct in the presence of others. Twietmeyer (2007) noticed this aspect of play, for when “genuine concern for others” fosters “human dignity,” all human lives will be recognized as meaningful (p. 378). When acknowledging what Twietmeyer called a “sacral aspect of play,” the result is that “the play spirit creates a moral imperative” and “demands personal responsibility” (pp. 326-378). Ultimately the spiritual nature of anything cannot ignore the relational sense of others, so therefore play cannot exclude the capacity and need to respond either (Robinson, 2007b).

Christian Submission

As the character of a Christian is to live in community with others, so too is it the character of a Christian at play. As *erotic* beings, humans cannot derive a sense of completeness within themselves, and are therefore only autonomous in as much as they seek wholeness through relation with others (Hyland, 1978). Within community, autonomy is constrained by submission, not unlike Huizinga’s (1950) linking loyalty to the spirit of play, “the surrender of the self to a person, cause or idea” (p. 104). This submission is not an attitude of passivity, for play is active and participatory; instead it is an attitude of surrendering or giving in to the others

and to the moment and structure of play itself (Robinson, 2007b). A reconciliation is made in how a submissive autonomous agent, rather than a controlling autonomous agent, can experience satisfaction and well-being in play (Ryan & Deci, 1985).

According to Huizinga (1950), play includes stepping outside of normal life and into a temporary “magic circle” (p. 10). Within these temporary spaces and times, different rules from ordinary life apply. When these rules, the play-order, are broken, play no longer takes place. Harvey (2014) described the play-order as the “contingent order of freedom” in play, where it is neither a “lawless vacuum nor an unavoidable necessity” (p. 66). In play, noted Harvey, players “submit unnecessarily to the absolute necessity of the rules” (p. 66). However, submission and ‘bounded’ conduct extends beyond the rules of the game. Lawful play means that even though the magic circle’s rules often differ from the rules of everyday life, principles of social conduct still apply. Permissive play rules that grant freedom for violence and abuse does not render those actions as ethically appropriate. In viewing autonomy as volitional, rather than as selfish, detached or independent (Ryan & Deci, 2000), the call to cooperate within a group or singular activity does not devalue individual autonomy.

A paradox of play is that “we use our freedom in order to lose it,” because as players we both freely choose activities to play while also forfeiting freedom by deeply immersing ourselves within the play experience itself (Kretchmar & Watson, 2018, p. 73). The forfeiture of freedom and losing of ourselves within play due to the ‘spell cast over us’ does not warrant uncontrolled behaviour. Obeying the rules, whether formal or imaginary, of any play sphere is required for all participants to be granted equal access to joy and fun. When an individual is required to surrender their own freedom for the sake of others, whether that simply means adopting a luscious attitude to abide by the contingent rules of the magic circle (Suits, 2005), such submission need

not result in a loss of freedom or in immoral behaviour in order to exercise individual autonomy. In this way, play should not be at the expense or suppression of others; play ought to be freeing, not tranquilizing. For the Christian, the freedom of play is not freedom to sin, but an expression of joy and thankfulness in the believers being free from sin (Smedes, 1975).

From a Christian perspective, Scripture informs the characteristics of an appropriate mode of existence within socio-cultural and environmental constraints. Paul's letter to the Galatians challenged the church's attempts to earn eternal freedom by keeping laws and decrees. He contrasts obedience to the law with God's grace and freedom in Christ, where Christ liberates believers from justification by the law. In confessing freedom in Christ, Christians declare that they are no longer enslaved to sinful ways of their deviant selves. This confession leads the Christian to cast aside a host of behaviours including "immorality... idolatry... strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy..." (English Standard Version Bible, Galatians 5: 19-21) so the fruit of the Spirit can develop in their lives, which Paul lists as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, [and] self-control," adding that "against such things there is no law" (Galatians 5:22-23). A free Christian agent would espouse these qualities as dominant features of their play. Of course, the 'goods' of play often give way to ethical and moral lapses within and outside of Christian play-spheres, including violence, abuse, cheating, corruption and greed, drug-abuse, and alienation, all of which distort the presence of any genuine play-spirit (Watson & Parker, 2013). Nevertheless, spiritual freedom includes every attempt at fostering those fruit in and through playful interaction and activity.

Empirical Research: Individual Agency and Freedom

Empirical studies have associated freedom with self-expression of individuality, which has been seen in artistic (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007), belly dancing (Kraus, 2010), music (Hays

& Minichiello, 2005), poetry reading (Trousdale et al., 2010) and sport (Moriarty, 2013) settings. In a study examining children's spirituality and poetry reading, the process and "freedom to play with the poems" facilitated spiritual expression more than the content of the poems itself (Trousdale et al., p. 326). Elsewhere, Nelson and Rawlings' (2007) phenomenological analysis of various artists (musicians, writers, visual artists) discovered a sense of freedom, relief or release as a result of immersion in the artistic process, which many artists experienced as flow.

Having developed his serious leisure perspective from various empirical studies, Stebbins (2001, 2006, 2016) highlighted the agency of augmentative play within a variety of leisure activities (e.g., sport, arts, hobbies), defining augmentative play as the capacity for play to enhance a leisure activity. Stebbins concluded that "to use one's agency to meet challenging circumstances is to find in augmentative play freedom, however momentary" (p. 155).

In one of the few empirical studies to examine the presence or absence of play among Christian athletes, Bickley (2014) found a "loss of a sense of play around elite sport," and feelings of less freedom as performance expectations increased the seriousness and anxiety in sport (p. 24). Additionally, participants viewed Sabbath rest as freedom from those expectations.

Feature Two: Enjoyment

Scholars have repeatedly argued that when play is utilized to serve instrumental ends, it often becomes serious and pursued with a rational and earnest ambition. In doing this, it often loses its loftiest quality – enjoyment.

Utility versus Enjoyment

Huizinga (1950) challenged many early theories of play given their absence of the quality of enjoyment. Early classical theories of play share a primitive foundation of instinct, genetic inheritance and energy exchange, which are noticeably influenced by evolutionary and Protestant

work ethic principles of struggle and progress (Goodale & Godbey, 1988), all of which seem to function in relation to work or in serving species development. However, those theories are limited due to their exclusion of elements of intrinsic pleasure (Henle, 2013). So, Huizinga rightly criticized classical theories as being excessively utilitarian, and ultimately radically confronted Marxist historical materialism in suggesting play as “an activity with no material interest, [where] no profit can be gained” (p. 13).

An important distinction between *homo ludens* and *homo faber* is that the player is not trying to create something from the world, but is rather trying to enjoy the world. This enjoyment contrasts with approaches that value play for what it can offer: human development through education and self-improvement (Sutton-Smith, 2001). Play is often celebrated for its productivity rather than its non-utilitarian nature. Sociologists, psychologists and educators utilize play to serve ends of productivity and development, further embedded by the proliferation of a scientific world-view seeking to rationalize human behaviour and activity. However, saying that play is superfluous or ‘for nothing’ does not mean that secondary byproducts of play do not occur. Johnston (1997, 2020) presented this tension between non-utilitarianism and productivity by suggesting that it is the intrinsic value of play which attracts participants, while play still produces external meanings that transcend the boundary of play. Thus, the paradox persists that play is simultaneously useful and useless (Kretchmar & Watson, 2020).

Play is Autocharactic

A utilitarian perspective contrasts with many perspectives that define play as autotelic. However, limiting play to activities that are autotelic is inappropriate given the range of motivations that players experience (Schmid, 2011). When players experience mixed-motivations, which discredits autotelic definitions, the behaviour can still be considered play

when intrinsically motivated and meeting the basic, intrinsic needs of autonomy, competency and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 1985; Schmid, 2011). Ellis (2014) also challenged the predominant attitude of play as always being autotelic, arguing that it is too idealistic to characterize all play experiences as ends in themselves. Instead, borrowing from the Greek word *chara*, which denotes joy and delight, Ellis argued that play, and specifically sport, is better understood as being *autocharactic*: “We play because we enjoy it for its own sake” (p. 266). Characterizing play as autocharactic encapsulates the joy experienced in play, and also aligns with the foremost quality of enjoyment found in Csikszentmihalyi’s (1990) conception of flow and autotelic experiences. Describing play as autocharactic aligns with Ellis’ empirical research which demonstrated the multiplicity of reasons why people play.

The Discomfort of Play

While play is characterized as being enjoyable, that does not mean play is always pleasurable or comfortable. Smedes (1975), for example, distinguished between pleasure and comfort in noticing that play is sometimes painful. While Smedes referred to the goodness of play as pleasure, Csikszentmihalyi (1975b) was careful to distinguish pleasure from enjoyment. Pleasure is the feeling experienced upon return to homeostasis; when an individual’s biological or social expectations are met, as when the taste of food satisfies hunger or good sex satisfies personal urges, one experiences pleasure and order is restored. Enjoyment, on the other hand, goes beyond meeting biological desires and is characterized by developing the complexity of the self, novelty, and “a new order of consciousness” (p. 46). To experience enjoyment an individual is required to invest psychic energy, skill and complete attention into challenging activities through which the complexity of the self grows. These experiences, Csikszentmihalyi admitted, may not always be pleasurable, but in reflecting on the activity, the individual desires more and

remarks, “That was really fun” (p. 46). Enjoyment, in other words, is not always pleasant. Perhaps the point of distinction is that pleasure is experienced in the short-term while joy may be experienced in the long term, allowing for the struggle experienced in many playful activities.

Philosopher Eugen Fink (1960) also examined the discomfort of play. To Fink, the foremost structural element of play is that it “has the coloring of joy” (p. 101), as opposed to sadness or indifference. In each moment of play, joy rules the soul as master; when the joy is gone, play dissolves. However, Fink also noticed that the joy of play differs from the functional pleasures of the body. He argued that the joy of play could also include pain and “profound sadness, a tragic suffering,” though such pain is not “real pain” but rather modified emotional sorrow that itself is played (pp. 101-102).

In exploring the spiritual nature of play, Murphy and White (1995) viewed the prevalence of pain as indicative of the meaning of suffering: “One key to the mystery comes with the ancient mystical insight that a fundamental delight exists within or behind all suffering” (p. 129). Murphy and White’s extensive research demonstrated that moments of “illumination, out-of-body experiences...surpassing joy...unearthly beauty” occur most often when safety and comfort are compromised (pp. 1-2). The enjoyment of struggle and challenge contrasts with viewing suffering as the opposite of joy. The prevalence of pain and injury in sport, for example, is often viewed negatively despite some evidence that physical and psychological pain can produce the humility and courage that aids in development and persistence (Nesti, 2007c). While some have appealed to the delight of play to counteract the stress, anxiety and decreased sense of well-being that many sports players experience (Watson & Parker, 2013; Weinboug & Gould, 2011), these appeals disregard the meaning associated with suffering and the significance of discomfort.

The pulse of play is one of enjoyment and delight, though not to the exclusion of suffering and challenge, but rather it recognizes discomfort as facilitative of the enjoyment ensued through playful activity. Players returning to their activity, even if experiencing suffering, defeat and disappointment, is not a “testimony...to the irresponsibility of the human spirit” in as much as it is a testimony to the power of the play spirit (Ellis, 2014, p. 233). In calling joy play’s intention, Berger (1970) suggested playful encounters act as signals of eternity that are best realized in the face of suffering: “When adults play with genuine joy... it is [their] ludic constitution that allows [them]...to regain and ecstatically realize the deathless joy of [their] childhood” (p. 50). The deepest absorption and enjoyment of play occurs when an individual’s abilities and resources are stretched as found in struggle and challenge (Csikszentmihalyi & Bennett, 1971). The hope of tasting moments of deep experience and mastery is what lures the recreational golfer back onto fairways even if it might mean cursing the hazards along the walk.

Empirical Research: Enjoyment

By drawing from empirical studies to develop their phenomenological model on the relationships between music and spirituality, van der Merwe and Habron (2015) identified temporality (joy, flow) as a primary theme, with enjoyment being identified in a follow-up study on spirituality and connectedness in a group music class (Nortje & van der Merwe, 2016). Playing and listening to music contributes to quality of life through experiences of profound enjoyment, positive emotions and familial bonds (Harmon & Kyle, 2016). Evidence shows that musical play developed an interdependency of human life and a greater appreciation for others (Gellel, 2013), provided enjoyment, and ascribed meaning and emotion to experience (Hays & Minichiello, 2005). Joy, excitement and pleasure, experienced as a celebration, satisfaction or connection with something beyond the self, directed the production process of creative activity

for various artists (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007). Playing sport has been identified as a spiritual source of delight and wonder for children, especially through expressive movement (Moriarty, 2013). Wonder and awe emerged as themes in a study of elite European athletes (Ronkainen et al., 2013). A spiritual sense of enjoyment was found to be retained in activities which stretch the capacity of the self, such as canoeing and hiking (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999), dragon boat racing (Parry, 2009) and other leisure activities (Schmidt & Little, 2007).

Feature Three: Community and Relationship

Play's communal capacity is well documented, notably exemplified by Fink (1960) who viewed play as a very social phenomenon, for "to play is to play together, to play with others; it is a deep manifestation of human community" (p. 102). When people play, it is with someone or something, whether real or imagined. Even in solitary play, Fink suggested, a sense of community is generated while a player's imagination invites the presence of others. Twietmeyer (2007) also acknowledged play's ability to develop intimacy in relationships, not distant and impersonal relationships, which are necessary for the development of genuine responsibility and compassion towards other humans. Elsewhere, Twietmeyer (2015) defended the ability of play to develop human dignity, for when "play suggests that one's own life is actually meaningful, then by extension one sees that all human lives are *actually* meaningful" (p. 327). "Play breeds compassion" because the play-sphere is fragile, and in play people recognize their own limitations (i.e., winning/losing, injury, fatigue) when confronted by others and challenged by the demands of the activity (Twietmeyer, 2007, p. 205).

Martin Buber: I-It and I-Thou

Johnston (1997) explained the social nature of play as play's expression of freedom and individuality within the confines of a loving community, citing Martin Buber's (1958) 'I-Thou'

relational encounter as the process in which players commune with other players or playthings on a personal level. For Buber, “all real living is meeting” (p. 11) where agency (‘I’) remains central to understanding and relating to others as ‘It’ or ‘Thou.’ The ‘I-It’ relationship is a distant and detached relationship characterized by the objectification and distinction of the other to be primarily utilized for functional purposes. The ‘I-Thou’ relationship recognizes the inexplicable, spiritual living relationship with the other, where players and playthings meet without judgment as authentic beings. A personal encounter is possible when players give and immerse themselves to the objects and persons of their play (Nesti, 2007b).

To mutually meet others as subjects rather than objects occurs by will and by grace; individuals give themselves to another (will) and experience the gift and spontaneity of meeting the other (grace) (Buber, 1958; Robinson, 2007b). The willingness to give oneself over to play or people is an expression of human agency, though a preoccupied ‘will’ compromises the playful experience (Kretchmar & Watson, 2020). In contrast, grace connotes passive immersion and reception to the gift of play, as when lost in the ‘spell cast over us’ (Kretchmar & Watson, 2020). We meet play (will) and play meets us (grace). That play is “enchanting, captivating” (Huizinga, 1950, p. 10) is the absorptive quality of play experienced when players are immersed with the sculpture, the music, the dance or the ball, and these others become extensions of the self, subject playing with subject, rather than foreign objects. That others will be encountered in play is guaranteed; how one encounters others in play, as It or Thou, as subject or object, as someone appreciated or as someone vilified or alienated, is another matter altogether (Kretchmar, 1975). How one relates to others in play will directly impact the quality and meaning of that experience.

Pieper (1952) touted that the human spirit holds the capacity to understand the totality of the world and all that exists. The nature of a spiritual being demands that it corresponds or relates

to the world around it. Spirituality includes the awareness and appreciation for the other and the capacity to respond to the other (Davis et al., 2015; Robinson, 2007b). The awareness and response to these others (self, people, God and creation) necessitates the development of relationship with them. Play is a way of relating and knowing the self, God, others and nature (Berryman, 1991). Therefore, the spiritual dimension of play must include relationship.

Relationship with Self

Robinson (2007c) described the reflection and relationship with the self as including the identification of feelings, ideas and personal values and beliefs, which “inevitably leads one to reflection on how the person sees [themselves], not least whether he or she is someone of value” (p. 42). According to Jirásek (2015), a primary characteristic of spirituality and sport, and by extension play, is *an authentic mode of existence* which stresses individual awareness of the self’s needs, attitudes and agency within human living.

Chiming with Our Own Being

Harvey (2014) connected the identity of God, creation and innate human identity to the implications this has on play. He argued that even though creatures exist out of the grace of God because God did not have to create, “we are created freely out of nothing and for something” (p. 81). Similarly, the Belgic Confession, a doctrinal document written by Guido de Bres in 1566, asserts that God created all things “out of nothing...when it seemed good to him...[for a] specific task” (Article 12). The church believes that the ultimate purpose of creation is Jesus Christ, and therefore all creation was established unnecessarily towards the “meaningful movement from nothingness towards love in Jesus Christ” (Harvey, 2014, p. 83). The doctrine of creation suggests that human beings are “best described as the unnecessary-yet-meaningful reality of being freely loved into existence” (p. 83-84). Given his definition of play as an

“unnecessary-yet-meaningful activity” (p. 69), and his understanding of humans as unnecessary-yet-meaningful creatures, Harvey concluded that when humans play they “reverberate” within themselves and “chime with our being” (p. 84). Play, then, enables humans to connect with their deepest identities. Play is an extension and expression of the authentic self (Jirásek, 2015).

Image-Bearers

A properly functioning relationship with oneself requires the recognition and appreciation that people are created in the image of God, and as image bearers are called to reflect God’s being (Myers, 2011). Though the scope of God’s image in humanity is not specified in the creation account, the context presents God as rational, creative, personal, and morally righteous (Sproul & Mathison, 2005). While image-bearing is often restricted to the creative dimension of play, Ellis (2014) argued that humans play because they are made in the image of a playful God. Likewise, Berryman (1991) suggested that Godly play “awakens us to new ways of seeing ourselves as human beings. It is a way to discover our deep identity as Godly creatures, created in the image of God” (p. 7). Humans play to be more fully human and reflect the image of the playful Creator (Johnston, 2020). Johnston (2020) grounded an appreciation for play in humanity’s created design after God’s image: “When we are truly at play, we participate in God’s creative life; it is a foretaste of heaven” (p. 12).

Humility and Pride

According to Christianity, God’s image expressed in humanity has been distorted by sin (Sproul & Mathison, 2005). The result of that distortion is a spectrum of impoverished relationships with oneself. Shame and low self-esteem, for example, result from viewing oneself as inferior to others rather than as image-bearers. Equally dangerous are god-complexes, arguably a common view of the self within meritocratic societies where achievement is attributed

to individual prowess. Recognizing the intrinsic value of humanity means appreciating the whole person, “including thoughts, feelings, physical experience, practice and relationships” (Robinson, 2007b, p. 25). A balance exists between sin’s totality and accompanying feelings of self-degradation with awareness of image-identity and risk of self-glorification.

Rather than experiencing and expressing love and other-centeredness, humans have a greater tendency to turn inwards towards self-centeredness and self-worship (Harvey, 2014; Pearcey, 2015). Watson and White (2007) argued that much of the winning-at-all-costs mentality and accompanying corruption and problems in sport is a result of human pride, which C.S. Lewis (1952) described as the “complete anti-God state of mind” (p. 121). While Huizinga (1950) may not have referred directly to human pride, he captured the essence of this vice in closely associating play with the Greek word *agon*, or contest, which suggests that play, and people, have a natural competitive impulse. Humans have an innate desire to be first, so Huizinga claimed, and in social settings people are driven by “glorious exhibitionism and agonistic aspiration” (p. 146). Huizinga saw it natural for people to be preoccupied with improvement and perfection, with play serving as the platform for this competitive manifestation.

Despite Huizinga’s (1950) questionable association of play and *agon*, he recognized the human infatuation with self-praise and merited excellence, especially in individualistic cultures. Rather than positioning *agon* as inherent to play, the Christian tradition maintains that humans’ designed purpose of genuine otherness has been distorted by a self-loving and proud nature. Therefore, any innate ‘agonistic aspirations’ within play may be better positioned as a self-seeking quality inherent to people. This self-seeking quality seems at odds with the Christian call to seek humility, which has been argued as the only way to counteract the harmful and destructive effects that come with pride (Lewis, 1952; Watson & White, 2007). Even though

humility may not be common currency in many play-contexts that embrace individual adulation and glorious exhibitionism, a spiritual relationship with the self also demonstrates an “awareness and acceptance of the limitations of the self” (Robinson, 2007b, p. 25).

Philosopher Kretchmar (2013) sought to reconcile whether “hard-won sporting achievements” are compatible with “spiritual humility” (p. 269). In appeals to three of the world’s major belief systems (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism), Kretchmar found humility to be the “linchpin for spiritual transformation” (p. 276). Each religion presents humility as both ego awareness, a kneeling or cultivating submission and recognition of dependency on others, as well as a mode of gratitude, a bow, with the former functioning as a preceding condition of the latter. Kretchmar suggested that, in desiring to play better, kneeling in humility is “a kind of nervous, uncertain, yet hopeful humility... We risk. We give something up” (p. 282). Humility requires “a degree of self-confidence” which for some is akin to pride, though for Kretchmar “appears to be a healthy pride, one that is enabling not narcissistic” (p. 282). Ultimately, Kretchmar concluded that sporting encounters are open to experiences of complicated reciprocity, where the confidence of pride and the awe and dependency of humility mutually interact. In line with the Christian tradition, humility does not devalue the self or force one to think less of oneself.

Cautious warnings regarding self-centeredness are not limited to traditional religious beliefs. For example, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) described two personal characteristics which may compromise one’s ability to enjoy anything for its own sake: self-consciousness and self-centeredness. Self-conscious people are more preoccupied with controlling how others view them than they care about others, which limits the enjoyment, connectivity, openness, and freedom that characterizes play. Csikszentmihalyi argued that self-centered people do not value things in and of themselves, but always look for instrumental uses of others (be it objects or

people). Information for self-centered individuals must relate to their own desires, and therefore “for such a person everything is valueless in itself” (p. 84). In other words, self-centered people are better characterized as relating to others as It rather than Thou.

Kelly (2011) acknowledged that people are more able to enjoy activities for their own sake when a person is accepted and aware of their own intrinsic value. Therefore, for someone to truly enjoy something for its own sake, the ‘Thou’ can be reflected inward, where the ‘I’ views *themselves* as Thou, creatures of intrinsic worth and value. We may appreciate our limits without degrading ourselves as inferior or meaningless. The humility of the self in play demands recognition of limitations, a need to submit to the play-order, and a sense of gratitude for experiences of harmony and grace.

Relationship with Other People

The potential to develop intimate and meaningful relationships is characteristic of both spirituality and play (Robinson, 2007b; Twietmeyer, 2007). In having a basic need for relatedness, humans thrive in community and relationship with other people (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Myers, 2011). Appreciating the spiritual relationship with other people speaks to the mutual enrichment of human interaction (Jirásek, 2015).

The awareness of others includes recognizing both sameness and difference between people (Robinson, 2007b). Viewing another person as strictly different from the self can lead to the dehumanization of other people, a catalyst for racism and a barrier to the cultivation of compassion. Viewing all others as entirely the same, however, forfeits individual uniqueness and causes identity confusion. Where this mutual reciprocity of recognizing both sameness and difference has proven challenging is within competitive play (Watson & Parker, 2014).

Striving Together

The 21st century's alienating trends often characteristic of current play-spheres have been attributed to competitive impulses associated with capitalist ideology (Overman, 2011; Fairchild, 1978), a claim that warrants clarity given Huizinga's (1950) 'agonistic' description of play. The multiplicity of play motives and any inherent self-preserving quality of people challenges attempts to disconnect competitiveness from play (e.g., Caillois, 1961; Kohn, 1986). Pride and a competitive impulse (innate or culturally-bound) fundamentally influence how players relate with other people as It or Thou, and therefore cooperative and communal understandings of competition garner appreciation.

Drew Hyland (1978) suggested that humans are naturally competitive. However, Hyland grounded natural competitiveness in the *eros*, which individualizes people as relational beings. Hyland aimed to eradicate the alienating tendencies of competition with his conception of competition as a mutual striving together towards excellence. By suggesting that human beings are naturally both competitive and relational, Hyland asserted that, "Both in its origin and goal...competitive play should be one of those occasions where our encounters, intense, immediate, and total, are those of friendship, in which we attain to a fulfillment, however momentary, together" (p. 36). Simon (2010) noted a common criticism of competition is that it is naturally selfish, given that an individual aspires to demonstrate superiority over others. However, especially within games and contests, competition demonstrates a cooperative ethic highlighted by a shared value in meeting a challenge. Gaffney (2015) similarly acknowledged that in the interactivity and reciprocity of competition, an individual pursues excellence both *with* and *through* others. Competition is defensible in sport, games and any competitive play given this social contract, mutual quest and voluntary engagement.

Ultimately, Hyland (1978) proposed that a socialist, cooperative orientation of competition can function and exist within individualistic cultures. Play requires significant cooperation, including mutual acceptance of rules, so Guttman (2004) suggested “we err greatly if we assume that cooperation is always the enemy of individualism” (p. 158). Hyland does not propose that cooperative play eliminates the possibility of alienation, but rather demonstrates these effects as failures of one’s relational nature. What is needed is not abolishment of competition, but a re-education of the ‘win-first’ or ‘me-first’ conceptions commonly held by participants and players (Torres & Hager, 2007). Instead of ‘striving together,’ self-centered individuals seek to objectify others as It, often resulting in alienation and greater destructive than constructive impact (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The possibility of alienation and community fragility is a risk when players participate in competitive play.

That play gives way to friendship embodies the true potential of competition and the mutual quest for excellence (Hyland, 1978). Though play is not always competitive, and though competition is not always playful (Anderson, 2012; Callois, 1961), there is no need to insist that play cannot be competitive, for when the power of play leads to recognition of others as Thou, competition serves to recognize the other as mutually valuable. Hyland argued that any competitive play which does not produce friendship “must be understood as a deficient mode of play” (p. 35). In its highest form, play cultivates friendship. The development of friendship is possible in competitive play through the authentic awareness and appreciation of others, made possible in recognizing simultaneously the difference and sameness of others (Robinson, 2007b).

A spiritual and relational encounter is therefore marked by inclusivity (Robinson, 2007c). Similarly, Christians recognize that all members have a role or a function to fulfill within the group, where individual contributions are valued and no member is superfluous (e.g., 1

Corinthians 12: 12-27). Though Johnston (1997) marked this loving community as exclusive to “selfish, halfhearted, or disinterested players” (p. 40), any incapability of authentic other-centeredness in the present human condition does not therefore exclude all people from any play experience. Such a proposition is too idealistic and fails to capture the multiplicity of play forms.

Relationship with God

As described in Chapter 1, Huizinga (1950) utilized Plato’s perception of play as the ultimate way of living to associate play with a non-materialistic, spiritual quality which brings people closer to realizing their humanity than using play for functional, instrumental ends. While Huizinga’s ‘play’ carried sacred and spiritual dimensions, Rahner (1964) further connected play directly to the spiritual life, suggesting that human play enables one to connect with God. Likewise, Sing (2011) noted that people are hardwired to play, proposing that through play people are united with God. Play, then, was viewed as a means to relate with God.

Encountering God

Robert Johnston’s (1997) *Christians at Play*, first published in 1983, is amongst the most comprehensive reviews of the theology of play literature. Johnston developed a biblical account of play by utilizing Berger’s (1970) *Rumour of Angels* and C.S. Lewis’ (1955) *Surprised by Joy*.

Berger (1970) famously called play “signals of transcendence” experiences that seem to point to a reality beyond physical reality (p. 52). For Berger, transcendent joyful experiences of play are accessible to all people, however because these are personal human experiences, whether these moments of transcendence indicate the presence of God is one of speculation and hypothesis. To Berger, play ultimately awakens in the player a desire for an explanation and understanding of the meaning of playful experience.

Lewis (1955) understood the transcendent joy of play in light of his relationship to God through Jesus Christ. In play, Lewis noted that players may enjoy themselves, gaining an awareness of meaning beyond the constraints of “normal modes of consciousness,” while also experiencing God’s expression of joy towards them (p. 220). Lewis described his early play experiences of transcendent moments of joy as holy once he discovered the joy found in his relationship with Jesus. Johnston (1997) thus remarked that for Lewis, “the Spirit heard in play and the Spirit of Christ are seen to be one and the same” (p. 79).

From here, Johnston (1997) suggested that play provides opportunities to encounter God, where “play can become the avenue through which God communes with us” (p. 80). This “spirit of joy” which can permeate all of existence, said Johnston, recognizes “life’s fundamental sacredness” and the “external value [of play] that reaches far beyond the boundary of the play world” (pp. 48-49). Likewise, Ellis (2014) noticed the natural human desire for self-transcendence is also a searching for God, though limited that pursuit to sport rather than all play. While seeming to recognize the risk of giving play a purpose beyond itself, Johnston regularly reaffirmed his stance that such external value is only possible when play is pursued for its intrinsic value, adding that play does not necessarily lead to encounters with God. Nevertheless, “play *can* [emphasis added] become an encounter with the Holy” and “God *can* [emphasis added], and often does, meet us and commune with us” (p. 80).

Despite Johnston’s (1997) awareness that the church has historically been prone to instrumentalize everything, including play, his declaration that players can hope to be “surprised by the Joy of God” provides added incentive for entering play experiences (p. 81). Despite his best efforts to avoid the pitfall, Johnston gives play a purpose beyond itself, for play becomes “a servant of revelation” whose function is “to enable us to meet with God” (Harvey, 2014, p. 91).

While Johnston (2020) recently conceded this critique, Harvey (2014) goes to the other extreme of attempting to compartmentalize play from encountering God.

Secular Circle?

In challenging Johnston's (1997) utilitarian approach to play, Harvey (2014) developed his theology of sport from his characterization of play as 'unnecessary-but-meaningful.' Harvey asserted that both sport and worship share similar identities by containing their own intrinsic meaning and value, void of actual purpose beyond themselves. Sport and worship are forms of liturgy, choreographed and ordered physical activities each with distinguished foci for celebration. Liturgical worship is meant to celebrate who God is in relation to us, while sport is "the liturgical celebration of who we are by ourselves" (p. 94). Due to this position, Harvey separated sport from the glory of God. God is present in worship while in sport God maintains his distance allowing human creatures to be "as they are," to be "simply the graceful creature" where "we are miraculously being ourselves" while God steps back and "enjoys watching us being ourselves as we pivot freely between himself and nothingness" (pp. 95-96). Harvey concluded that while worship determines everything that people do, sport is considered the one and only human activity that is not worship and is not dedicated to God's glory.

The secular position Harvey (2014) gives sport is misguided for at least two reasons: first, his framework rests on a theology of play, not sport, and secondly, he minimizes the omnipresence of God, a critique shared by Johnston (2020). Harvey distinguished sport from play by suggesting that sport is simply regulated, physical forms of play. Sport is therefore a special kind of contested play, though meant to be characterized by play's common features (i.e., unnecessary, yet meaningful). That being the case, if we are never more human than when we play, why would that 'celebration of human identity' be limited to one play-context? Does dance

not also ‘chime with our own being’? When a musician picks up a violin and plays it out of the sheer joy of playing, for no other purpose than to play, is that also not worship? It cannot be accepted that, in contrast to Kuyper (1998), Jesus’ supremacy is limited and he thus says, ‘This is Mine. Except sport. That’s yours.’ If something falls outside the providential rule of God, it means that God is not really God, and it would suggest that some creatures have the power to resist the Creator’s purpose. While Harvey rightly integrates worship into understanding how humans relate to God, he limits God’s capacity to relate to humans.

Worship

If acknowledging that play experiences for some people are moments of transcendence to a higher divine reality (e.g., Berger, 1970; Ellis, 2014; Johnston, 1997), then “play can point towards worship” (Twietmeyer, 2015, p. 326). Even though some have warned against associating play and worship, arguing that play is autotelic and worship is not (e.g., Suits, 1977), the purposelessness of play can remain intact when worship is understood as meaningful; worship is for people to ‘be as they are’ and take delight in the presence of God (Guardini, 1994; Twietmeyer, 2015). For many Christians, worship is an act of serving God in a way that is glorifying. Acts of worship and service are not meant to earn anything beyond themselves, for “no heavenly air miles” are awarded (Harvey, 2014, p. 93). Worship does not earn God’s grace. Instead, through worship, prayer and spiritual disciplines humans feast on God’s grace which is already present. Through this feasting and exposure to the grace of God, people are able to experience joy and a greater love for God and others. Play offers that same delight when pursued with an attitude of meaningful existence rather than necessity.

Worship and ‘taking delight’ need to be understood within the broader Christian life. Worship is understood as the communication of people with God, including listening and

speaking to God, as commonly done through Scriptural reading, prayer and praise. Worship is relating to God, something not confined to liturgy or play. The Protestant Christian tradition discarded many of the symbols and ritualistic practices of its Catholic roots, emphasizing that people are to worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23-24). Worship *in spirit* engages the whole heart, while worship *in truth* requires a properly informed knowledge of God. The *how* and *whom* of worship becomes more important than where; worship is not restricted to certain boundaries of time and space (Douma, 1996). The worship style that fits the era after Christ is a style that does not cling to symbols and rituals but that lifts its heart to heaven (Van Vliet, 2016). The worship of Hebrews 12, for example, which called Christians to worship God in reverence and awe, broadens to include all of life. Similarly, Paul called Christians to sacrifice their whole lives, body and soul, as their spiritual act of worship (Romans 12). Everything Christians do is an act of worship, and so worship is not confined to liturgy but instead permeates all of life.

It can be agreed that worship is not play and play is not worship, but the difference is not that one involves attentional focus on God while the other on ourselves (e.g., Harvey, 2014); nor is the difference that worship is not naturally autotelic, while play naturally is (e.g., Suits, 1977). The difference is that worship, and by extension *all* of life, is for God (Douma, 1996; Treat, 2015). Worship is understood as not being any specific activities in and of themselves, but instead, “everything serves worship” (Harvey, 2014, p. 96), but only when done “in Spirit and truth” (John 4). So, even though play occurs within its own space and time, it is not secluded off from God’s presence, as in Harvey’s (2014) argument, nor is play a parallel universe where God magically resides awaiting your encounter, as in Johnston’s (1997) perspective. These perspectives undermine God’s sovereignty and His spiritual nature existing outside of space and time. Play does not happen in a social vacuum; neither does it happen in a God or spiritual

vacuum. Play, like worship, does not earn God's grace; it is not the act itself which enables one to draw closer to God, but instead the existing relationship that one has with God through Jesus Christ which permeates through all of life.

Relationship with Nature

A spiritual relationship with nature is often reduced to emphasizing an aesthetic appreciation and amazement for the natural world, commonly identified as a sense of awe and wonder (Jirásek, 2015). While play can certainly include aesthetic amazement, relating to nature is not simply an invitation to spend more time outdoors. An important dimension of a person's relationship with nature is revealed in humanity's responsibility to steward creation (Sproul & Mathison, 2005). Christians confess that the cultural mandate is for people to be stewards of the earth, protecting and subduing it to both preserve all creation and produce from it (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012). This mandate reflects Robinson's (2007b) spiritual emphasis on the awareness of the environment in that it reveals mutual reciprocity, where humans depend on the environment for sustenance, and the environment depends on people for protection and stewardship.

Sabbath and Play

Several theologies of play point to the history and institution of the Sabbath, the God-ordained day of rest, as the climax of God's act of creation (e.g., Johnston, 1997; Smedes, 1975). In calling the seventh day of the week a day of rest, God established a complementary rhythm of work and rest that human beings reenact, which led Smedes (1975) to suggest that people are "destined for playfulness" (p. 59). To the ancient Israelites, the Sabbath was not just about ceasing work and making time for rest and recreation; the Sabbath was a signal of their dependence on the Creator (Johnston, 1997). The Sabbath served as a reminder that humans are creatures, and with a call to work and produce, people are also called to cease work and rely on

God. Aside from reminding humans to trust God, the Sabbath also served as an obligatory call to celebrate freedom and enjoy the world in thankfulness through rest, leisure and play (Naugle, 2012). The Sabbath is a call for celebration and festival, a foretaste of the eternal rest of humankind (Smedes, 1975). Though the Sabbath rest can foreshadow God's covenantal promise of eternal rest, Johnston (1997) emphasized that this eschatological interpretation ought not to prevent humans from a present appreciation for God's goodness in creation.

Describing creation as *tob* ('good') connotes joy and delight and also expresses God's pleasure in creation (Lowery, 1993). The goodness of creation can be seen as an expression of God's delight, freedom and joy (Matthews, 1996). In pointing to the goodness and joy that is God, Moltmann (1972) suggested that the entire creation account is an indication of God's play:

God is free. But he does not act capriciously. When he creates something that is not god but also not nothing, then this must have its ground not in itself but in God's good will or pleasure. Hence the creation is God's play, a play of his groundless and inscrutable wisdom. It is the realm in which God displays his glory. (p. 17)

Work has always been understood as creating something out of the material world; *homo faber* changes and reshapes substances into new form. In contrast, in creating *ex nihilo*, creation springs forth directly out of God, based on who God is: God is the God of Joy. Moltmann suggested that moments of play capture a foretaste of an eternal destiny of joy. Existing outside the realms of time and space, God exists in all-summed-up spontaneity. Likewise, in play we step into the 'magic circle' and experience freedom from constraints of time and find ourselves immersed in the moment. Given God's joyful and spiritual identity, several scholars have viewed play as an opportunity to meet God (e.g., Berger, 1970; Johnston, 1997; Lewis, 1955).

Integrating Play and Work

However, accepting God's creation as 'play' ignores the enjoyment found in work and contrasts with an integrative approach to work and play. A Protestant work ethic and industrial, capitalist culture results in valuing work over leisure, resulting in leisure and play serving a utilitarian means of revitalizing one's capability for work (Hunnicut, 2006). Despite Pieper's (1952) presentation of holistic personhood, advocating for a classical understanding of leisure as the primary means for people to fully express their humanity meant he followed Greek patterns in devaluing work. Likewise, Schiller's (1965) view that genuine creativity is found in play where "[Man] is only wholly man when he is playing" (p. 80) would cast work as a vacuum for full human expression. Play and leisure would be viewed as a means of experiencing freedom from a person's bondage to work, with the ultimate highest good being a life of leisure and play.

However, positioning work as superior to play or play as superior to work risks creating a dichotomy which limits human expression all together. Importantly, a one-sided work obsession ought not be replaced with a one-sided play obsession. A life of only work becomes heavy and too serious, while a life of only play is trivial and inconsistent; people can both produce and delight (Treat, 2015). Instead, presenting work and play as complementary rather than dichotomous captures their essences most accurately (Johnston, 1997; Kretchmar, 2011). Kretchmar (2011) suggested an infinite continuum of work and play-like experiences, and Johnston (1997) noted that Christians ought to view work and play as integrated and interwoven in rhythmic harmony. Neither work nor play should be pitted against the other nor fused together, but rather "Christians are created and called to consecrate both their work and their play" (Johnston, p. 134). Play and work are both viewed as gifts from God. To cast play as holy and work unholy would dichotomize life in an irregular and indefensible pattern.

Viewing play in light of the Genesis creation account with the inclusion of a day of rest suggests that God did not create people simply to engage in work and labour, to produce or perform. In viewing the Sabbath as the pinnacle of the creation account, work, culture and productivity are not the final purpose of creation (Renner, 1981). Instead, the goal of creation is God's delight in creation and humanity's delight in God. The goal of creation is not to make more things or extend the days of creation; the goal is the Sabbath, a time for reciprocal and relational delight. The Sabbath is a reminder that mastering life or a craft is not where someone finds meaning, but in celebrating and remembering their relationship with God (Harvey, 2014; Johnston, 1997). Sabbath is about centering on one's relationship with God and with others.

Empirical Research: Community and Relationship

In a chapter entitled *Looking Deeper: Play and the Spiritual Dimension*, Harrison and Robinson (2017) reviewed childhood education literature, predominantly historical and philosophical with trace empirical research integration, and concluded that play provides opportunity for exploring spirituality, specifically in connectedness with self, others, and nature. The concept of *relational consciousness* is a core component within studies exploring how play relates to and facilitates the spiritual wellbeing of children (Hay & Nye, 2006). Relational consciousness has been identified as an awareness of connections with the self, others, the world, and a transcendent power which allows "individuals of all ages to...develop identity, a feeling of worth and find meaning and purpose in life" which facilitates overall wellbeing (Minor & Grant, 2014, p. 214). Through a series of interviews with children exploring relational consciousness, Moriarty (2013) found that sport provided participants with "inner spiritual resources" that enabled them to connect with nature and other people (p. 107).

Apart from relational consciousness, research has found that music provides a way to connect with others and one's own experiences (Hays & Minichiello, 2005). Music provided enthusiasts with "transcendent experiences through their ability to connect to themselves, the music and others in a manner most participants regarded as spiritual" (Harmon & Dox, 2016, p. 279). Van der Merwe and Habron's (2015) integrated relational interaction (connection, meaning) and spatiality (awareness, awe and wonder, transcendence) into their empirically supported model on music education and spirituality. Dance was also identified as a way to experience community and connection with others (McGuire, 2007), and as a way to experience psychic and holistic integration (Leseho & Maxwell, 2010). A sense of friendship and community as well as the opportunity for self and emotive expression were identified as primary themes of children's expressions of spirituality (Trousdale et al., 2010). A sense of community and belonging was also shared by sport spectators and participants (Ellis, 2012).

Along with music, feelings of transcendence have been experienced in creative dance (Broadbent, 2004) and elite sport (Ronkainen et al., 2013). Transcendent experiences in nature or wilderness contexts have been associated with spirituality (Watson & Parker, 2015). Several scholars have warned against identifying transcendent, psychological experiences as "mystical, occult or religious" (Murphy & White, 1995, p. 4) or as moments of divine encounter (e.g., Higgs & Braswell, 2004; Hoffman, 1992; Watson, 2007). From a theological perspective, these natural mystical experiences can be conceived of as moments of deep play (Ackerman, 1997) or "spiritual expression in an aesthetic, creative sense that provides opportunities for meaningful, therapeutic and exhilarating activities in the wilderness" (Watson, 2007, p. 113). Peak emotional experiences may be better associated with psychological experiences rather than spiritual experiences (Esfahani et al., 2014; Heintzman, 2020; Jarratt & Sharpley, 2017).

In addition to relating with other people, studies have explored the role of play in relating with God. Studies specially examining the lives of Christians have predominantly focused on the intersection between prayer and sport (Hoffmann, 2011; Price, 2009), though studies have also identified that dance is used as prayer (Wuthnow, 2001, 2003). Prayer in sport is useful in coping with stress or injury (Czech et al., 2004; Watson & Nesti, 2005), developing group cohesion (Murray et al., 2005), and enhancing performance and meaningful experience (Park, 2000; Vernacchia et al., 2000; Watson & Czech, 2005). Egli et al. (2014) discovered that Christian coaches prayed to express their trust in God's guidance for wisdom, and to reaffirm their purpose of reflecting Jesus Christ in the coach-athlete relationship. Within a study of marathon runners, prayer was found to be a means of expressing gratitude, and facilitative of perspective adjustment, performance enhancement, and relationship building (Huffman & Etnier, 2020).

Examining the broader sporting experience, Mosley et al. (2015) noted that five Christian athletes viewed their opportunity to play as a gift from God, and participants sought to represent God well by "working-hard...having faith...and staying humble" (p. 381). A similar study investigating how Christianity influenced the culture of a collegiate athletic department found that spiritual beliefs significantly influenced coach and athlete attitudes towards modeling Christian ethics and playing to "honor and glorify God" (Schroeder & Scribner, 2006, p. 47). Christian elite athletes recognized that their sense of identity is not rooted in on-field performance, but rather in their relationship to God and other people (Bickley, 2014).

Regarding relating with nature, studies have identified being in nature and nature-based recreation as facilitative of spiritual experiences and well-being (Heintzman, 2010). New Paradigm Christians viewed solitary leisure as spiritual, considered activities with Christian and non-Christian's as spiritual, and valued leisure for the opportunity to be in nature (Livengood,

2009). Livengood identified “walking, knitting, playing music, being quiet, socializing and activities in natural environments” as spiritual activities (Livengood, p. 407). Similarly, Berkers (2012) found that Christians associated spirituality with their relationships, specifically through visiting natural environments and socializing with others. Play has also been utilized by childhood educators as a way to nurture children’s spirituality and development of a sense of awe, wonder and joy in relation to the world around them (Mata-McMahan, 2019).

Despite its appeal to Christian scholars, few empirical studies have utilized Buber’s (1958) notion of relational encounter. In a series of interviews with professional and collegiate athletes, DeSensi (1980, 1981) observed both subjective (e.g., accepting an opponent as they are rather than in relation to their ability) and objective (e.g., an opponent was viewed as an object to be overcome) encounters, and professional athletes expressed greater appreciation for others than collegiate athletes. In DeSensi’s (1982) third study comparing sport, dance and musical performers, objective encounters were more noticeable in practice and rehearsal settings, while subjective encounters were more evident in performance environments. Qualitative case studies comparing three childhood learning environments discovered a theme of spiritual ‘witness’ which highlights the intersubjectivity of relational spaces as “when the I/Thou or self/Other merge [and] the spiritual is realized as a sense of deep connectedness” (Bone, 2008, p. 355). While focusing on the relationship with other people and environmental playthings, these studies clearly highlighted the unique relationship between subjects in play settings.

Feature Four: Creativity

A creative dimension of play can be seen in Plato’s writings (Gallop, 1975), where he pitched the expressive creative capacity of play to be the most virtuous activity, prompting Huizinga’s (1950) position that play’s imaginative capacity is central to its spirit. Ancient Greeks

realized their human function through applying their mind in free and virtuous activities, which functioned as the basis of the liberal arts (Hunnicut, 1990). The highest of those liberal arts, philosophy, was practiced through the freedom of *paidia*, or play. Play, afforded by leisure, is largely credited as the power behind invention and ingenuity (Goodale & Godbey, 1988).

The majority of play research focuses on the relationship between educative play and cognitive development, with many theories suggesting a strong link between play and creativity (Mellou, 1994). Both Bruner (1972) and Sutton-Smith (1967) argued that the flexibility and variability of play prepares children for adulthood. The experimental and flexible properties of play contribute to creative development, and so a rhetoric of adaptive variability harnesses the potentiality of human creativity (Sutton-Smith, 2001). Playfulness is characterized as a positive mood where creative and playful attitudes are central to the development of novel ideas and behaviours (Bateson & Martin, 2013). Teismann and Weber (2020) noted how play encompasses “creativity, power, love and joy” and so approaches the spiritual dimension life (p. 7).

Play and Artistic Expression

As a spiritual practice, art-making and artistic expression explore meaning, relate to imagination and mystery, and facilitate personal transformation (Painter, 2007). Play’s capacity for discovery, possibility and creative expression enables people to fully realize themselves (Schiller, 1965). Sutton-Smith (2001) argued that the *imaginary* is more inclusive of the creative and transformational breadth seen in play. Within imaginary play exists flexibility, creativity and innovation, the central features of play for many artistic and literary expressions. Imagination covers a broad range of ‘higher’ and ‘lower’ kinds of play, prompting Sutton-Smith’s critique of the conflation of play and art, which seem to share features of freedom, autonomy and individual originality, uniquely expressed through the innocence of children. Equating children’s play and

art has led many educators to label all free expressions of children as play, which ignores childhood expressions of “exploration, practice, manipulation, mastery, experimentation, reading and listening, making music, painting, [and] dancing” (Sutton-Smith, 2001, p. 134). These activities resemble expressions of creativity, though their relationship to play is ambiguous.

Huizinga (1950) suggested that qualities of play, especially rhythm and harmony, are found in poetic creation, music and various art forms. In playing with words and language, poetry functions as the most natural form of expression for ‘higher’ things. While poetry can move into ideation and judgment, Huizinga argued that music never escapes the play-sphere and dance is the purest form of play that exists. However, Huizinga admitted less direct affinity between play and the plastic arts (sculptures, paintings, etc.). Music, for example, must be executed to be enjoyed, while plastic arts serve as a static product in themselves. Though traces of play can be found in the creative expression and craftsmanship of a plastic art, the craftsman often works with serious intent, and once the object is left for viewing and appreciation there is less “visible action, there [is] no play” (p. 166).

Guttman’s (2004) distinction between play and art resembles Huizinga’s (1950) distinction between the creation of music and plastic arts. Guttman argued that the difference between art and play is in how they are expressed: art requires an audience. Art is a communicable expression, especially literature, so artists need an audience; play has nothing that needs to be communicated to anyone else. This does not mean that play *cannot* communicate anything to others, just that it does not need to. Similarly, Gadmaer (1975) suggested that, “[Games] are not aimed at an audience...Indeed, contests are in danger of losing their real play character precisely by becoming shows” (p. 113). In contrast, even if musicians are making music for themselves, their aim is for it to “sound good,” and therefore “artistic presentation, by

its nature, exists for someone” (p. 114). When children twinkle the ivory and their musical production is simply the outpouring of exploration and curiosity, such activity presents as playful though not necessarily artistic. In capturing its mixed-motivations, ambiguity and flexibility, play is understood as an activity where something may be produced (e.g., development, learning, pleasure) though does not need to, while art can be a product in itself.

Creativity, Play and Flow

Play, along with art, pageantry and sports are clear examples of activities that are by design conducive to flow experiences, with “play [being] the flow experience *par excellence*” (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975b, p. 37). While ‘flow’ and ‘play’ describe different phenomenon, it is difficult to conclude that they are unrelated. While flow is a state of mind, and play a state of activity according to Huizinga (1950), one experiences flow while playing, and one continues to play because one experiences flow. Flow and play reaffirm each other; one is a state of existence, a myriad of psychological and emotional states, and one is an action, something people do.

In his recent book exploring the neuroscience of flow, Steven Kotler (2014) summarized two mechanisms involved in the creative process. The first mechanism is an element of risk taking, for if creative products are to be of value, they must withstand the scrutiny of personal and societal evaluation – the audience. The second mechanism is pattern recognition, the brain’s process of establishing connections between new stimuli and stored memories. Both risk taking and pattern recognition heighten engagement, fuel curiosity, and enable full absorption to the task at hand, opening up the door to flow states. Once there, prefrontal cortex deactivation quiets the inner critic, enabling a liberated openness to new ideas while minimizing personal inhibitions. For many writers, musicians, painters and others, creative engagement and the accompanying activation of implicit brain systems serves to both enable flow states as well as

enhance creativity, imagination and innovation found within flow itself. Fundamentally, flow enhances the creative process during an activity.

Kotler (2014) highlighted the flourishing ‘freeriding’ culture of action and adventure sports, where creativity and innovation have replaced past cultural currencies of winning. Skiers, surfers, bikers and other freeriders are free to interpret the terrain and rules thereby expressing themselves in ever-increasingly creative ways. The adoption of a playful attitude does not minimize the level of risk in these activities, but instead enables innovation and freedom of creative expression, the basis for judgment and success. Flow facilitates the creative impulse of play in action-adventure sports, the liberal arts and elsewhere. What is unique about artistic expression is its potential for ‘creating play,’ which is naturally rewarded through deep concentration and a commitment to persist when faced with real or perceived risks.

Creation and Play

The creation account in Genesis 1 presents God as creative, and as image-bearers humans reflect that creative capacity (Sproul & Mathison, 2005). Creation represents God’s creativity and artistic expression (Hendry, 1980). As an artist reveals themselves in their art forms, so too God’s character is revealed in creation. This creative expression and outflow of God’s character through creation led Moltmann (1972) to call all creation God’s play. In both Hendry (1980) and Moltmann’s accounts, creativity and play share elements of spontaneity, goodness and freedom of expression.

However, Moltmann’s (1972) perspective risks dichotomizing work with play and casts work as a joyless vacuum for creative expression. If human play alone is a creative act, and if play truly enables humans to ‘chime with their own being,’ play would be the only platform for full human expressions of creativity. However, this perspective is inconsistent with the innate

creative impulse characteristic of image-bearing creatures. In stark contrast to *homo ludens* and Huizinga's (1950) assertion that humans realize their full human potential through free, playful activity, Marx suggested that as *homo faber*, humanity's deepest need is to create and produce (Marx & Engels, 1959; Fairchild, 1978). According to Marx, a human's creativity is expressed through labour, which affirms how humans relate to nature. Through the exchange between maker and material world, "creativity is an attempt at personal and social self-realization, a step toward a more harmonious and engaged state of being" (Henricks, 2006, p. 50). Within the cultural context of utilitarian capitalism and work obsession, play participants experience freedom to creatively express themselves apart from social processes while also affirming cultural values. Playful, creative expressions have the potential to function as antidotes to the disconnection and alienation that occurs in play-spheres (Sadler, 1977). Though play does not occur in a social vacuum, it does occur in a magic circle and so play awakens a creative impulse for self-expression. 'Creating play' or 'creative brilliance' need not be strictly limited to artistic expressions, though it is in the arts that greater depths of creativity are often experienced.

Empirical Research: Creativity

Empirical research has found connections between spirituality and children's creativity and imagination (Champagne, 2001; Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004). These empirical findings have identified relational, reflective, transcendent and creative dimensions of behaviour, though few studies have actually examined how children express that spirituality and creativity (Goodliff, 2013), especially during middle childhood years (Adams et al., 2015). Through an ethnographic study of young children engaged in imaginative play, Goodliff (2013) concluded that children express their own spirituality and make meaning of their world through play. A group of adults related their "spiritual experiences to creativity...in painting, sculpture,

composing or playing music, or gardening...they were a 'medium' for the transcendent spirit that seemed to be operating within them" (Rothman, 2009, p. 178). Elsewhere, various artists identified a sense of dissolution of boundaries, connection beyond the self and a "purer form of being" as enhancing their creative experience (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007, p. 245). Studies have shown that music, in particular, provided older people with a way of expressing and understanding their personal spirituality, and a means of engaging in imaginative play (Hays & Minichiello, 2005; Seifert, 2011). Aside from temporality, relationality and spatiality, corporeality (embodiment, sensory experience, creativity) has been identified as a primary theme in music and spirituality (Nortje & van der Merwe, 2016; van der Merwe & Habron, 2015).

Feature Five: Transformation

The spiritual journey of any individual is dynamic and reflective and therefore includes learning and growth, where beliefs are challenged and changed over time (Robinson, 2007c). Robinson noted that even in traditional religions there is no sense of spiritual arrival, only "traveling and the constant searching, learning and development" (p. 39). Since spirituality is relational, and others can never be *fully* known, the continuing journey is inevitable.

Spirituality is interactive and evolving, and so too play captures that development and transformation. Transformation is not meant to affirm Huizinga's (1950) primary tenet that culture developed through play, nor is it entirely limited to the cognitive or biological development as repeatedly demonstrated by educational and positive psychology. While play serves as a mode of learning itself, play experiences change people and groups as well.

Development and Competence

Despite their tendency towards individualistic orientation and neglect of the prominent relational components of play, most psychological theories explaining play behaviour focus on

learning and development (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ellis, 1973; Piaget, 1962). These theories have included: Piaget's (1962) proposition that play contributes to cognitive development; Erikson's (1963) psychodynamic emphasis on auto, micro and macrocosmic mastery; White's (1963) thesis that people intrinsically seek mastery and control; and Harter's (1978) empirically supported theory that people are innately driven to be competent. Likewise, by incorporating the shaping influence of social and cultural forces, Vygotsky (1967) encouraged that children play with competent mentors. Social learning, reinforcement, early socialization and parental support influence drives for optimal challenges, a necessary feature of play experience (Pellegrini, 2009).

The human tendency for competence-elevating experiences is central to intrinsic motivation (Iso-Ahola, 1999), and so theories of competency are generally utilized to explain play behaviour, further popularized by Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination framework. By assuming that humans are naturally growth-oriented, Deci and Ryan incorporated White's (1963) and Harter's (1978) theses by including the basic need for competency alongside needs for relatedness and autonomy. From birth, humans are oriented towards engaging their own capacities and interests, seeking optimal challenges and striving to master and integrate new experiences (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2017). Thus, desires to play develop from within us, grounded in basic human needs to develop skills and capacities, to act of one's own accord, and to connect with others and the environment. Intrinsic motivation increases when these basic needs are met, and their satisfaction promotes optimal functioning, well-being and development, as well as enhanced creativity and performance (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2002). As the need for competency drives the impulse to act, people strive to learn and master skills and abilities. When the environment presents optimal challenge, competency can be developed and a person may

experience increased well-being; that growth is disrupted when an environment presents non-optimal challenges, as when a task is too easy or too difficult.

Play as Adaptive Variability

Comparable with psychological theories that position play as facilitative of growth and mastery, Sutton-Smith (2001) offered an evolutionary and biological conceptualization of play as the potentiation for adaptive variability. The retention of play as a selective trait renders it as useful or helpful. Sutton-Smith argued that human potentiation, or variability, is harnessed through play's unpredictable and quirky properties. Similarly, Henricks (2006) asserted that all forms of play cultivate flexibility of creatures as preparation to respond to ever-changing challenges. Play is characterized by its quiriness, redundancy and flexibility, the very core of adaptation (Sutton-Smith). Play's flexibility and ability to renew neural connectivity exemplifies play's variability and capacity to enable humans to adapt to ever changing environmental conditions. The potentiation of play to harness the complexity of the human person seems foundational to the infatuation of utilizing play to serve instrumental ends.

Flow and the Increasing Complexity of the Self

Attempting to fulfill the natural need for competence, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) suggested that people pursue optimal challenges to maximize positive affect (including perceived competence) and minimize negative states, such as anxiety and boredom. By experiencing harmony between challenge and ability, Csikszentmihalyi demonstrated that flow experiences, in both work and play, are critical for increasing the complexity and strength of the self. Self-growth and personal development are touted as "the key to flow activities" (p. 74). There is an optimal range where the self-development is possible, falling below the boundary of challenge overload while still generating sufficient levels of arousal so as to progress along a scale of

complexity. With experience, an individual adapts to a context and becomes more capable of meeting the demands of increased complexity and challenge. When the novelty of stimuli dissipates through the process of habituation, people look for new experiences to maintain optimal levels of arousal and competency development (Iso-Ahola, 1999).

This seems to suggest that play's purpose is transformation or self-development, which contrasts with play being voluntary and unproductive, and perhaps the quest for improvement is a distinguishing feature of different play activities (Ellis, 2014). Suits (1977) argued that when activities are pursued to improve a person because they are "good for us," this negates the autotelicity they may have had, instead transforming them into instrumental tools (p. 129). However, a paradox of play is that it is simultaneously useful and useless (Kretchmar & Watson, 2020). Even if an activity is initially pursued with alternative agendas, it can become internally rewarding depending on whether attention is directed towards the end product or the activity itself. In this way, sports, art, music, dance, and work can all either be autotelic and autocharactic experiences, or not. Generally, activities include a range of motivations and combined autotelic and exotelic experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Ellis, 2014; Schmid, 2011). Children and adults alike often demonstrate reluctance to participate in play, perhaps due to cultural concerns of wasting time in trivial activity; yet, once dragged to the playground their initial resistance gives way to joy. Similarly, many activities may not begin as autocharactic or as flow, but as challenge and skill align and the activity becomes internalized as valuable, they become more enjoyable and promote individual and collective transformation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

It is the flow of play that makes play intrinsically rewarding and internally absorbing, and it is that same flow which facilitates growth and development. That play closely resembles the state of flow is no coincidence, and many have noted their similarity (e.g., Csikszentmihalyi,

1990; Nesti, 2007a). In his investigation into the state of flow, Kotler (2014) noticed irony in the number of adults who have abandoned their naturally enjoyable activities – “playing guitar, writing poetry, or painting watercolors” (p. 161) – while simultaneously praising flow as a “radical and alternative path to mastery” (p. 162). Kotler suggested that the recent infatuation with flow states coincides with the cultural tendency to view play as a waste of time rather than as “an activity fundamental to survival, tied to the greatest neurochemical rewards the brain can produce, and flat out necessary for achieving peak performance, creative brilliance, and overall life satisfaction” (p. 162). A rationalistic and utilitarian worldview desiring to hijack flow could be displaced by play’s properties of innovation and novelty. Play, like flow, facilitates freedom, creativity and connection, and this play makes transformation possible (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). The absorption of a person in play enables a self-forgetfulness where both the subject and object are changed. Both the players and the playground are transformed, and so the self grows.

Transcendence

By their very nature of being creatures, humans are temporal and finite. While an eternal God does not change (Malachi 3:6; Hebrews 13:8), that creatures are subject to the passage of time automatically submits them to variance and transformation. In being created with the capacity for growth and potential, rather than as static and complete, humans reach beyond themselves, transcending towards a more authentic true self (Ellis, 2014; Jirásek, 2015).

Rather than limiting transcendent experiences to mystical moments, Ellis (2014) proposed an understanding of transcendence as “moments of striving and reaching ‘beyond’ the present and its achievements” (p. 236). Drawing on Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs and Novak’s (1976) remark of the ‘longing for perfection’ in sporting experiences, Ellis described transcendence as a desire to reach for something beyond the temporary state of self. In perfecting

abilities of the pianist, dancer or sportsperson, people experience a feeling of deficiency and desire for growth. Though accomplishment may be realized, the hunger is insatiable and people long to transcend beyond the need of actualization. In play we see the quest for potentiation where people go beyond themselves “to be/come a newer, more authentic self, ‘existing’ in a richer way and actualizing the genuine possibilities that are before us” (Ellis, 2014, p. 241).

People can transcend their own self-limitations and, much like the Greek’s pursued *areté*, pursue their human potential through the testing and evolution of their own limitations.

Spirituality and play are relational, and so the human experience of transcendence is not about disconnection with others but is signaled by a relational need for others (Hyland, 1978; Robinson, 2007c). Through engagement with others and in activity, we reach beyond ourselves and the present moment, prompting awareness of the potential for growth (Robinson, 2007c).

Empirical Research: Transformation

The concept of spiritual well-being has been identified as a transformative benefit of leisure (Heintzman, 2016a), with significant relationships found between spiritual well-being and frequency of participation in personal development, outdoor activities and cultural activities (Heintzman, 1999, 2009). Personal development and active leisure styles are connected to greater degrees of spiritual well-being (Heintzman, 2016a). Play can augment a leisure activity (Stebbins, 2016), and so play’s self-expression and self-discovery can facilitate the transformative benefits of spiritual well-being.

In a study conducted with young children, spirituality and connectedness in group music classes yielded a theme of transformation with others and self (Nortke & van der Merwe, 2016). Music enthusiasts have also been shown to utilize expressions of spirituality and experience personal discovery through associating with specific music cultures (Harmon & Dox, 2016).

These transformative and self-transcendent experiences are often associated with flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), which has been empirically verified as related to spirituality (Dillon & Tait, 2000; Foster, 2012). Studies with rock climbers (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975b; Pond, 2013), ultra-marathon runners (Acevedo et al., 1992), martial artists (Cooper, 1998), ballet dancers (Flower, 2016, 2019) and Christian athletes (Mosley et al., 2015) have also acknowledged the spiritual dimension associated with flow and peak experiences.

Feature Six: Meaning

Spirituality is ultimately concerned with the pursuit of life purpose and meaning (Jirásek, 2015; Robinson, 2007b). As the spiritual journey signals no sense of arrival, it is understandable that questioning the meaning of one's life may be unanswerable; however, it is the questioning, exploration and discovery itself which contributes to spiritual meaning. Likewise, though the meaning of play is difficult to bottle and package, its meaning is ultimately unraveled through a process of curiosity, exploration and discovery. In other words, the meaning of play is best understood by playing. While play is often cast as non-utilitarian and purposeless, its internal value is upheld with repeated appeals to its meaning (e.g., Harvey, 2014). Therefore, perhaps it would make sense to speak less of the purpose of play and more of the meaning of play: "Play reminds us that the highest things are; they have no need for justification. Existence is not, in the end, about purposes but rather meaning" (Twietmeyer, 2015, p. 325).

For Christians meaning is found within the context of their relationship with God through Jesus Christ. While some Christian scholars have viewed the nature of play as being a foreshadowing of eternal life and others have partitioned it off from God's presence, whichever conceptual beliefs one holds will ultimately guide and determine how one views playful activity. Overall, given the prolific abandonment of traditional faith and belief systems, the making of

meaning has become an ever-increasing concern for philosophers, sociologists and psychologists. The nihilistic acceptance that life is meaningless prompts the popular attitude that life meaning is derivative of personal choice. What is considered ‘ultimate’ and ‘meaningful’ has become relative, and the gap is typically filled by individual or collective goals.

Exploring Meaning with Robinson and Csikszentmihalyi

It was the pursuit of understanding life meaning that served as the impetus for Csikszentmihalyi’s (1975b, 1990) famous flow research. The directive power of goal discovery led Csikszentmihalyi (1990) to clarify three qualities which unify life and create meaning.

A unified *purpose* gives meaning to life by establishing order and significance to one’s actions. Cultivating that purpose is alternately reflective and relational: meaning evolves through self-preservation, community conformity, self-actualization and connection and integration to a greater other (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Robinson, 2007b). Planning a goal, and so deriving purpose, and actually expressing or implementing those intentions distinguishes a second quality of meaning: *resolution* (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Discovering purpose is not enough; striving to meet those challenges demands an actionable response. Not only must an individual have the *capacity* to respond to the other, but one must take up one’s calling in response, thereby embodying spirituality, “for it is not possible to fully understand any life meaning other than in and through the practical testing and outworking of it” (Robinson, 2007b, p. 29). Living a life with purpose and resolution gives way to *harmony*, a condition of inner congruence between thoughts, feelings and actions, a similar interconnectivity found in existential holistic meaning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Robinson, 2007b). If meaning is tied to themes of purpose, resolution and harmony, then these qualities also inform the meaning of play.

Sense of Purpose

The debate surrounding the *purpose of play* is well-established, having received considerable attention in the previously discussed features of play. That play is meaningful is typically held in balance or in contrast to play as unnecessary, nonutilitarian, unproductive or autotelic, and it is these qualities that give play its intrinsic meaning (e.g., Guardini, 1994; Harvey, 2014; Huizinga, 1950). That play is pursued without outside purpose is precisely the source of its meaning, especially in a serious, materialistic world seeking to instrumentalize everything. Play is understood as an activity which is intrinsically rewarding and meaningful, where players play for the experience in and of itself (Huizinga, 1950; Johnston 1997).

Praise of the purposelessness of play would seem to suggest that a discussion on the benefits of play is self-contradicting. However, it has been established that play need not intend to serve a purpose for an outcome to nevertheless appear. Even in work, the cultural epitome of necessity-driven activity, autotelic, intrinsically rewarding and liberating experiences are regular occurrences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Dahl, 1972; Joblin, 2009). When a worker submits to means and not ends, immersion, engagement and connection ensue. Perhaps the benefits of play arise in similar fashion to that of happiness and success, as observed by Victor Frankl (1959):

For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself. Happiness must happen, and the same holds for success: you have to let it happen by not caring about it. (pp. xv)

Play's action is typically viewed as purposeless in the sense that it does not contribute directly to needs of self-preservation or meeting needs of subsistence. But it is action nonetheless, and through action neuronal connectivity wires and rewires; learning and change is unavoidable. As

meaning can be found in every moment of living, immersing oneself in play means immersion in the moment, and given play's propensity for freedom, enjoyment, community, creativity, and mastery, it must be granted that a sense of purpose can be experienced through play.

Sense of Purpose: Meaning is Seen in Who People Are

The sense of purpose experienced in play provides meaning by affirming individual identity as playful, embodied beings within the context of the other (Robinson, 2007b). Existence is about meaning, and things being as they are (Twietmeyer, 2015). Play reflects something of the human condition; play is meaningful because it echoes humanity's very existence (Harvey, 2014). The reflection of humanity in play is distinguished from everyday life in granting players the opportunity to devote purposeless time to themselves (Jirásek, 2010). Understanding the meaning of play is not seen in what someone does; play's meaning is seen in who people are.

Several iterations of 'who people are' have been offered. First, Huizinga (1950) rooted the meaning of play in its non-materialistic quality, a spiritual essence central to the generative capacity of play. As people disconnect from material reality and submit to the 'unreal' purposelessness of play, the closer they are to realizing their full humanity. If the play-world becomes overtly functional, the further we are away from realizing our humanity. Second, Harvey (2014) viewed both play and humans as "unnecessary-yet-meaningful" (p. 69) and therefore posited that play enables humans to "chime with their own being" (p. 84). Third, according to Fink (1960, 1968), play reminds people of their existence in the world, and their relation to it as a totality, for "human play is the symbolic act of representing the meaning of the world and of life" (Fink, 1968, p. 28). Humans exist in relation to the totality of the world, and play serves as a symbol that represents that totality (Alvis, 2019). According to Fink, play is a symbol through which we interpret or detect how the world functions. In play, people freely

choose to create worlds of meaning, often times reflecting personal values, other human activity and anything one may imagine. In this way, human play can relate, interpret and refer to anything in existence. Fink's view of play as a representation of the totality of the world presents as similar to Harvey's 'unnecessary-yet-meaningful' characterization of people and play, for in chiming with our own being we experience the world as it is.

For Christians, meaning is also about being who they are: identity is grounded as image-bearers and disciples of Jesus. Yet, heeding the warnings that play is not divine (e.g., Higgs, 1992; Watson, 2007) nor to be turned into an idol (e.g., Treat, 2015), it can be appreciated that if an individual grounds their personal meaning solely in their relationship with God, play can provide meaning, shape personal identity and foster awareness and appreciation for humanity.

Action and Resolution

While the meaning of play is seen through a sense of internal purpose, it is also seen in action and resolution. Play enables life meaning in action, for any meaning created through play demands "practical testing and the outworking of it" (Robinson, 2007b, p. 29). The capacity to play is not enough; the capacity for meaning is not enough either. The play-world must be entered to experience its riches. This is not coerced play, but a simple recognition that play is an activity and therefore playing demands resolution to participate. A spectator can passively observe play, but meaning is experienced through the active response and call to play itself.

In his memoir *Man's Search for Meaning*, Frankl (1959) concluded that the meaning of life is found in every moment of living. Freedom to choose one's attitude in any situation highlighted the importance of responsibility in those moments. He ultimately asserted that meaning in life is less about searching than it is about engaging. So, life meaning demands an

actionable response, a resolution to engage, participate and discover. There is no spirituality without connection, no meaning without resolution, and no play without action.

Play is marked by uncertainty (Caillois, 1961; Huizinga, 1950), and since any spiritual journey is marked by questioning (Robinson, 2007c), play's uncertainty develops meaning through the resolution to explore one's relationship with self or others. Play's meaning through actionable resolve does not preclude play from being challenging (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Reflecting play as fun, the resolution to persist in the face of challenge and difficulty gives way to heightened arousal and competency, ultimately culminating in significant life meaning (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 43). If play maintains adaptive variability, then it invites persistence in the face of adversity (Sutton-Smith, 2001). When players appreciate and accept that uncertainty enables the actualization of potential and meaningful experience, a player may resolve to continue despite tensions and uncertainties (Dweck, 2006; Kotler, 2014). Play presents tensions between "hope and despair, joy and desolation" (Harvey, 2014, p. 111), and the resolve to endure these tensions and disappointments does not attest to an irresponsible spirit, but a testimony to play's power and captivation (Ellis, 2014).

Meaning is found in actual experiences - it is not some abstraction hovering over the field of play, but is as rich and varied as there are play experiences (Anderson, 2012). Ultimately, the meaning of play is best understood by playing. Where spirituality and play meet is in the invitation for individuals and communities to be captivated and immersed in action.

Preoccupation with conceptual and intellectual gymnastics, though itself may be play, requires complete corporeal accompaniment, for the meaning of play demands that it be experienced.

This is not forced play, as ironical coercion could negate the activity as enjoyable and free.

Instead, it is a yarn-string dangled in front of the kitten, laughter emanating from the hidiers and seekers, or the internal desire to be better.

Restoration of Inner and Communal Harmony

Games, contests or sports, among many uncertain play activities, need not temporarily suspend peace while players persist towards a resolution. Peace and struggle are not necessarily incompatible, for when purpose is set and pursued with intentionality, harmony can be cultivated and recovered (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Harmonious living could refer to a synchronization of psychic and emotional energy, balance between ability and challenge, body and soul holism, or stability where play needs to be valued within a broader framework of human existence and activity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Johnston, 1997; Kretchmar, 2011; Pieper, 1952).

Huizinga (1950) repeatedly appealed to play's noble qualities of "rhythm and harmony" (p. 10) in various play-forms, especially in music and poetry, acknowledging play's ability to establish order in chaos. In the beauty of play, like "great music, architecture, art, poetry, drama, dance, philosophy and religion" is the ability for these well-ordered cultural artifacts to impose harmony in chaos (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990, p. 235). While play's quirkiness and flexibility may seem to promote greater chaos than well-ordered information, the play world has a propensity for order and governance (Caillois, 1961; Huizinga, 1950). Even if rules are arbitrary and confuse the new player, to the activity itself they simply exist as they are. While rules may adapt and evolve over time, nevertheless the player rejects chaos and necessarily submits to the unnecessary conditions of play (Harvey, 2014).

Through the increased awareness and appreciation of the other within a broader cultural environment, an individual recognizes that they are both the same and different from the world around them (Robinson, 2007b). While humans recognize the distinction of the self from others,

this reflective nature needs to be held in balance with the relational nature to appreciate the commonalities shared between each other and the world as totality. Value-based meaning seeks to contribute something to that greater whole, and play especially offers a shared experience where people may sense harmony that makes life meaningful (Twietmeyer, 2007).

Despite appreciating the universal and innate impulse to play, there are limitations in understanding the complexity and meaning of the play experiences of others. This grants the freedom to express meaning in varied ways for even though “the experience of play indicates strongly that we live in a meaningful world, the implications of that experience are open to interpretation” (Twietmeyer, 2015, p. 325). Though play may not prove the existence of God, it certainly allows for it, ultimately demanding the flexibility for varied meanings and motives for play. What has been seen is that play tends to be meaningful because it meets a sense of purpose, demands action and resolution, and ultimately seeks to restore inner and communal harmony in chaos. Play’s relational capacity, value affirmation, and inclusion of adversity and uncertainty all serve to enhance the development of meaning. Fink (1960) and Huizinga (1950) were right; play is universally known and its meanings are as numerous as the people who experience it. What is shared, at least, is that play has power precisely because it has meaning.

Empirical Research: Meaning

A survey study indicated that sport spectators and participants found meaning through a sense of belonging to a larger community, a sense of identity, character formation, feelings and appreciation for aesthetic pleasure and an existential perspective on the impact of winning and losing (Ellis, 2012). Similarly, Mosley et al. (2015) discovered that sport provided meaning for participants, with several participants viewing suffering, pain, and adversity as a source of significant meaning. Regarding more artistic play forms, though some studies acknowledged the

spiritual benefits of passive listening (e.g., Joseph, 2014), research suggested that “active engagement with music within social settings...has the greatest potential to contribute...to fulfillment of basic psychological needs” including control, autonomy, and a sense of purpose (Creech et al., 2013, p. 98). Further, music fans have identified clearer life meaning through their association to a specific musical culture (Harmon & Dox, 2016). A group of musicians associated spirituality with beauty and a sense of harmony (Hays & Minichiello, 2005).

Importantly, a distinction can be drawn between engaging in meaningful activities and expressing meaning through activity (Drewe, 2003). As such, given its deep embodiment and sensual experience, empirical studies have examined how a variety of dance forms, including ballet, belly dance, raves, country and African dance, seek to express spiritual meaning (Kraus, 2014). While more experienced belly dancers viewed their activity as spiritual (Kraus, 2009), the spiritual meaning of artistic experiences was grounded in individual value systems and attitudes towards spirituality (Kraus, 2012).

Summary

In sum, having explored empirical, historical, contemporary and some Christian theological literature, it seems that several features describe the relationship between spirituality and play. First, play is bounded-but-free; play expresses human autonomy and freedom while submitting to the contingent order of play and an awareness and appreciation of others. Second, play is a spiritual source of enjoyment and wonder, though at times involves discomfort.

Third, play is shared and collaborative, and is oriented in relation to oneself, God, other people, or creation, thereby confronting human predispositions to look inwards. In relation to the self, players proceed in confident-humility while recognizing their deepest identities and authentic selves. Like any human activity, play functions as an act of worship in which people,

as image-bearers, relate to God. Though play enables expressions of individuality, spirituality is marked by love, cooperation and inclusivity where others are met as Thou, valuable, personal and authentic beings, and not as It, objects to use or overcome. While humanity's relationship with creation is balanced both by pragmatic development and environmental protection, nature further provides playful opportunity for awe, wonder and an awareness of the totality of the universe, as well as an invitation for playful attitudes to enter the work place.

Fourth, play's power is in its freedom of expression and its impulse for creativity, novelty and imagination, as predominantly seen in artistic play-worlds. Fifth, the spiritual element of any human experience is dynamic and changing, and play's persistence in inviting repeated encounters establishes optimal conditions for the actualization of potentiality and an increased desire and longing for transcendence. Sixth, play is meaningful because it fulfills a sense of purpose, invites actionable engagement, and establishes rhythm and harmony in chaos.

Already pointing to the retreat of play in the 19th century, Huizinga (1950) seemed to suggest that our culture is over-serious, and thus the play-character is at risk of receding permanently into the background. The play-spirit, which Huizinga argued as essential in early culture, is being lost in various dimensions of civilization. Having identified the core spiritual characteristics of play, this thesis proposes to find evidence of those features in people at play. What remains to be seen is whether all of the above features are prerequisites for identifying an experience as play, or whether they can occur in varying degrees.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter provides the details and approach utilized for this thesis, including study design, epistemological paradigm, and the procedures of sampling, instrumentation, data collection and analysis for each of the three phases involved in this mixed methods research.

Mixed Methods Research

To maximize the breadth of exploration of the research questions, a mixed methodological approach was utilized for this study (Grbich, 2013). Combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies strengthens the research by addressing research questions with multiple approaches and provides opportunity to detail individual experiences that corroborate, inform and illustrate statistical findings (Grbich, 2013). Additionally, a mixed methods approach is useful when developing new measures, such as the development and refinement of the Play Experience Scale (PES) (Grbich, 2013). Mixed methods research accommodates both inductive and deductive inquiries. Simply, the polarization between quantitative and qualitative paradigms is best reconciled as a both/and rather than an either/or (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

This mixed methods study utilized an exploratory sequential design comprised of three different, but related, phases. The first phase consisted of in-depth interviews with Christians to explore the relationship between spirituality and play and to specifically explore the primary features of play. The second phase was a large-scale quantitative study designed to investigate the presence of features of play in Christians and those who do not identify as Christians. The third phase involved interviewing Christian pastors to explore how play could be integrated into church practice. An exploratory sequential design was preferable for this study given that qualitative themes informed the development of a particular measure (the PES) utilized in Phase

2. Additionally, results from the quantitative study informed the in-depth semi-structured interviews that occurred in Phase 3.

Epistemology

Though debate ensues regarding mixed methods research and corresponding epistemological approaches, the flexible paradigm of pragmatism is typically adopted (Grbich, 2013). As quantitative and qualitative paradigms have historically been polarized, a pragmatic approach offers primary emphasis on addressing the research questions through creative methodological design (Florczak, 2014). While pragmatism prioritizes ‘what works,’ its limitation in overemphasizing utility and underemphasizing truth and permanence renders it inadequate (Parvais et al., 2016). While the pursuit of pure objectivity is a commendable and accepted pursuit, I agree with Smith (2009) that no methods will result in absolute objectivity. The researcher’s existing predispositions, values and fallibility renders absolute objectivity unattainable. However, that does not imply that objective reality does not exist, for what can be empirically known is differentiated from all events and mechanisms that exist (Bhaskar, 1989). Therefore, a post-positivistic worldview was adopted for this thesis.

The post-positivist epistemological approach adopted in this study is critical realism which combines ontological realism with epistemological interpretivism and asserts that ontology (i.e., what is real) cannot be reduced to epistemology (i.e., what we know) (Bhaskar, 1989; Fletcher, 2014; O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). While holding the view that an objective reality exists independent of personal experience, critical realists also appreciate subjective experience and interpretations. Though positivists are typically more aligned with quantitative research, the denial of metaphysical realities by strict positivism provides an inadequate paradigm to explore matters of spirituality, which positivism tends to render unobservable and

therefore unknowable (Blaikie, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). Further, though constructionists are typically more aligned with qualitative research, their social deterministic and anti-naturalistic stance tends to deny both individual agency and objective reality, even if poorly known or accessible (Leung & Chung, 2019; O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Therefore, a post-positivistic critical realist rejects this dichotomy and accepts the limitations and fallibility of all measurement approaches and thus emphasizes the importance of engaging in multiple methods (O'Mahoney & Vincent, 2014). Unlike the polarized quantitative / positivism versus qualitative / interpretivism paradigms, critical realism embraces a methodological approach that suits the purpose of a given study (Hurrell, 2014).

In exploring varying features of a phenomena, critical realism renders a mixed method approach as “necessary to reveal different features of the same layered reality” (Downward & Mearman, 2007, p. 16). Critical realism especially advocates for mixed methodology for the purposes of expansion, compensation and complementarity (Zacharaidis et al., 2013). First, mixed methods can be used to expand explanations obtained in previous research or guide the implementation of qualitative or quantitative methods. Second, an integration of multiple methods can compensate for the aforementioned weaknesses inherent to individual methodological approaches. Finally, for mixed methods research, Sayer (2000) described the complementary benefit of both *extensive* and *intensive* research methods. The integration of the Phase 2 quantitative study provides an extensive observation useful in identifying significant relationships, while intensive methods in Phases 1 and 3 examine the nuances within contextual experience by specifically exploring the interactions between spirituality and play.

Validity and Trustworthiness

While accepting that critical realism recognizes that theories, research and researcher are fallible, and even though critical realism generally discards the validity procedural methods employed by positivists and constructivists (Ronkainen & Wiltshire, 2019), some measures were employed to increase the credibility of the research within both the quantitative and qualitative phases. For the two qualitative phases, participants signed a consent form assuring participants of privacy and confidentiality. As well, participants were reminded that they were under no obligation to participate and were free to refuse to answer questions or withdraw from the study. Combined, these ethical checkpoints improve research trustworthiness (Rallis & Rossman, 2009). Additionally, member checks were performed to confirm accuracy of transcriptions (Patton, 2015). Regarding the quantitative phase of this study, while one instrument was generated for the purposes of this study, validated measures to assess motivation, flow and sources of spirituality were utilized.

Even though critical realism accepts the presence of existing theories and attitudes within the research process, a bracketing interview occurred prior to data collection and analysis in order to explore researcher attitudes towards thesis themes (Tong et al., 2007; Grbich, 2013). During the bracketing interview, a graduate student specialized in qualitative research interviewed the primary researcher using a preliminary interview guide that explored the researcher's own perspectives on play and spirituality and how those perceptions may influence the research process. While bracketing interviews are typically associated with phenomenological research, the purpose of bracketing within critical realism is to temporarily suspend personal assumptions during the interview process while recognizing that some social and cultural mechanisms cannot be fully bracketed (Gearing, 2004). This process also provided

opportunity to clarify the primary research questions and construction of the in-depth interview guide utilized in Phase 1. As the primary researcher was trained in both qualitative methodology and general counselling skills as a mental performance consultant, and given the value and theory-driven approaches associated with critical realism, it was appropriate to ensure heightened awareness regarding researcher bias and perception. The primary themes that emerged from the bracketing process included perceiving genuine love and competition as incompatible and a general uncertainty regarding spirituality and the value of play.

Phase 1: In-Depth Interviews and the Features of Play

The first study involved in-depth interviews with a small Christian sample to explore the spiritual features of play, with primary emphasis on how relational and spiritual perspectives influence playful experience.

Sample

A purposeful sampling technique was employed to select eight to 12 Christian individuals who have an expressed interest in spirituality and play, as indicated by the participants' regular participation in play or any playful activities, including games, sports, music, dance or artistic activities (Patton, 2015). Fewer, information-rich participants were appropriate for this sample because the aim of this study was generally narrow (i.e., explore the relationships between spirituality and play), participants were recruited specific to that aim, the researcher is experienced in interview dialogue and the interview questions were supported by theory and literature (Malterud et al., 2016). Christian seminaries (e.g., Canadian Reformed Theological Seminary, Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary Canada), universities (e.g., Redeemer University College, Trinity Western University, Columbia Bible College), secondary schools (local Christian elementary, middle and high schools), and broader church denominations (e.g.,

Reformed Churches, Anglican Church of Canada, Mennonite Brethren Churches) and organizations (e.g., Athletes in Action, Christian Dance Fellowship of Canada) were contacted to facilitate the recruitment of participants. One of the ten participants was recruited through snowball sampling as this person was viewed as an information-rich participant. After interviewing eight participants, no new features of play were being identified by participants. Two additional interviews were conducted to ensure data saturation.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview guide was developed to explore the relationships between spirituality and play. Given that a critical realist approach to research recognizes the value of existing theories and ideas (Bhaskar, 1989; Fletcher, 2014), the interview guide was developed from the literature review, specifically exploring the varying features of play. A semi-structured guide was preferred in order to explore the presence or absence of various features of play discerned through the literature. The interview schedule (see Appendix B) consisted primarily of open-ended how and why questions which explored the relationships between spirituality and play as well as investigated the experience of individual participants. Specifically, participants were invited to describe in detail an occasion in which they most enjoyed how they were playing. Probing questions and statements were utilized to obtain a thorough and informative account of the participants' perspectives on spirituality and play. Prior to administering the interviews, the researcher utilized the semi-structured interview guide in a pilot interview, and some re-ordering of prompts and questions was performed.

Data Collection

With participant consent, in-depth interviews were audio recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The researcher performed transcription, which provided a reflective

opportunity given the dualistic nature of transcriber and analyzer. Member checking occurred by sending transcripts to participants to confirm accuracy of the transcription (Patton, 2015).

Subsequently, transcripts were uploaded to NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2012) for analysis.

Data Analysis

As a critical realist approach tends to utilize thematic and content analysis (Ronkainen et al., 2019), thematic analysis was utilized in order to consolidate meaning and identify themes in the interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Grbich, 2013). According to processes outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), inductive and deductive thematic analysis was employed, ultimately accepting with Braun and Clarke that analysis tends to be more cyclical than linear. As existing theory and literature is valued within critical realist analysis, flexible and deductive coding processes are accepted (Fletcher, 2014). As such, similar codes as found in the literature were initially utilized, though modified or eliminated during analysis as additional themes emerged through inductive analysis

Transcript data was read and reread so the researcher gained familiarity with the data. Given that the social world consists of open, complex and interacting systems, a critical realist seeks to uncover tendencies and semi-predictable patterns within data (Danermark et al., 2002). So, after gaining initial familiarity with the data, initial codes were clustered into a series of themes that revealed patterns within participant experiences. Once clustered themes were generated, themes were reviewed to assess internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given the nuances between themes and ambiguity of both spirituality and play, some duplicate meanings and overlapping themes were identified, though such interaction is assumed within critical realism. At this stage, and to increase credibility of data interpretation, a rough preliminary presentation of results was generated and shared with the

thesis supervisor for review. Feedback confirmed the need for further thematic reduction to ensure identifiable distinction between themes. This reduction led to a theme related to defining spirituality, a theme related to defining play, and five themes which reflected intersection of play and spirituality. Themes were named and a final presentation of results was produced.

Themes from this phase helped shape the final design and instrument of the quantitative phase. Additionally, findings from these interviews contributed to addressing the primary research questions regarding how play is evident in the lives of Christians.

Phase 2: Survey Questionnaire

The second phase involved a large-scale quantitative study designed to investigate the extent to which the sample reflected the features of play as described in the literature review and as informed by the in-depth interviews.

Sample

Purposeful sampling was employed to recruit participants who associate with either Christian or other spiritual traditions. To ensure Christian participants were recruited, a great number of Christian churches, schools and organizations were contacted concerning the recruitment and distribution of the survey questionnaire, primarily consisting of those organizations contacted during the in-depth interviews. Further, to ensure those of other religions or no religion were recruited to participate in the survey, numerous organizations affiliated with other religions or ideologies were also contacted. These included: Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, and Sikh faith communities (e.g., Buddhist Meditation Centres, Jewish synagogues, Muslim mosques, Sikh and Buddhist temples); various religious associations (e.g., Muslim Student Associations at the University of Ottawa and the University of British Columbia, International Buddhist Society, Jewish Federation of Ottawa); humanist and secular organizations (e.g.,

Humanist Canada, Ontario Humanist society, BC Humanist Association); and some play-based organizations affiliated with various religions (e.g., Brotherhood Soccer League, The Azrieli Foundation Music Festival, Sikh dance studios). Finally, to ensure that participants with a breadth of play activities were recruited, a variety of organizations were contacted. These included university theatre, music, dance and sport departments (e.g., University of British Columbia, University of Ottawa, Redeemer University College, Trinity Western University) and a variety of community-based organizations (e.g., local dance studios, music schools such as The Sarah McLachlan School of Music, sport organizations).

Snowball sampling was used in all samples if respondents suggested the names of other people that had an interest in completing the questionnaire. Each organization disseminated invitations to participate via their own internal communication channels (e.g., email, Facebook posts), as well as invited the researcher to directly post recruitment announcements to online community forums. Additionally, some organizations invited the researcher to attend group gatherings to distribute paper copies of the survey.

It was evident that the online survey was opened 695 times and 324 participants completed the survey. As well, 22 of 30 paper distributed surveys were returned. Together this accounts for a 48% response rate. Given the common recommendation to ensure a sample of 300 participants when conducting factor analysis (Field, 2009), sample size was judged sufficient once more than 300 responses were collected.

Variables and Instrumentation

The primary variables that were investigated were the features of play based on the developed and refined Play Experience Scale (PES). Playful activities and motivation were also measured. As the connections between flow, spirituality and play remained unclear (Adams et

al., 2015; Dillon & Tait, 2000; Watson & Parker, 2014), flow was included as an additional variable to measure. Given that the features of play were examined within the play lives of Christian and additional populations, sources of spirituality were also measured. Additionally, socio-demographic information, including religious affiliation, was collected.

Playful Activities

Playful activity was measured with an activity participation scale developed for this study (see Appendix F, Part 1), and informed by Guttmann's (2004) classification of play, games, contest and sport, Caillois' (1961) categorization of play, and Stebbins' (2016) serious leisure perspective. Five categories of activities were included: spontaneous and casual play, organized play and games, physical contests and sports, dance, and creative and artistic activities. Respondents were requested to identify their frequency of participation ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (Very Often), indicate whether they participate in those activities alone or with others, and rate their enjoyment of their play activities ranging from 1 (Hate a lot) to 5 (Enjoy a lot).

Motivation

As play is often characterized as an intrinsically motivated behaviour, motivation was assessed based on Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination framework. A motivation scale developed from the SDT framework and found to have high validity in sport and exercise contexts is the Behavioural Regulation in Exercise Questionnaire 3 (BREQ-3) (Markland & Tobin, 2004; Wilson et al., 2006). The scale assessed six forms of regulation: amotivation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, integration regulation and intrinsic regulation. Each regulatory form has shown adequate reliability (Cronbach alpha > .70) and strong test-retest reliability (> .70) (Markland & Tobin, 2004; Wilson et al., 2006). Analysis also utilized the dichotomy of controlled (external and introjected) and autonomous (intrinsic,

identified, and integrated) regulations (Phillips & Johnson, 2017). The BREQ-3 (see Appendix F, Part 2) was adapted to meet the broader spectrum of play activities in the present study.

Play Experience Scale

The Play Experience Scale (PES) is an exploratory 36-item questionnaire intended to evaluate the features of play as identified through theological, conceptual and empirical research, and subsequently as modified by participant responses from Phase 1. Six key features were primarily drawn from Huizinga's (1950) description of play and Watson and Parker's (2013) more recent synthesis of the theologies of play, as well as historical, contemporary and biblical literature: freedom, enjoyment, community/relationship, creativity, transformation and meaning. Additionally, developed from Robinson's (2007a) working definition of spirituality as well as Davis et al.'s (2015) Sources of Spirituality (SOS) Scale, one of the six features represents four different relational encounters: relations to self, others, God and the natural world. Altogether, the 36-item questionnaire included nine sub-scales each containing four items. Creswell (2015) acknowledged the difficulty that exploratory sequential mixed methods have utilizing qualitative data to construct instruments that are valid and reliable. Therefore, some original scale items were adapted or modified from the Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989). Chapter 5 details revisions performed to this scale following Phase 1.

Dispositional Flow

When assessing why play is so enjoyable, Csikszentmihalyi's (1975a) early research led him to connect the intrinsic rewards of play to the state of flow, specifically to the elements of total concentration, balanced ratio of challenges and skills, and clear feedback. Although the Experience Sampling Method (ESM) has been suggested to be the preferred instrument when assessing flow states as they occur (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014b), in this present study it was not

possible to interrupt people during their playful activities. Though the Flow State Scale 2 (FSS-2) and Dispositional Flow Scale 2 (DFS-2) scales were considered for this study (Jackson & Eklund, 2002), similar and reliable but brief scales have been developed which are consistent with the flow construct and more suitable for studies assessing a number of constructs (Jackson et al., 2008). As the dispositional short flow scale was assessed to be more reliable and valid in assessing flow than the Flow State Scale 2 (Jackson et al., 2008), and since the tendency to experience flow was assessed rather than specific flow experiences, the Short Dispositional Flow Scale (SDFS-2) was used to assess flow for this study (see Appendix F, Part 4).

Sources of Spirituality

Since there is a greater tendency for people to associate with spirituality rather than a traditional religion (Angus Reid Institute, 2015), sources of spirituality were measured to assess whether it is correlated with the features of play. Robinson's (2007a) working definition for spirituality has never been operationalized into a measurable scale, so Davis et al.'s (2015) Sources of Spirituality (SOS) Scale was utilized for this study (see Appendix F, Part 5). The SOS scale assumes an inclusive relational spirituality and strongly emphasizes a sense of closeness or connection, which aligns with Robinson's emphasis on a dynamic, inclusive, relational and active spirituality and further corresponds with the conception of relational consciousness (Hay & Nye, 2006). The SOS scale recognizes five sources of spirituality:

1. *Theistic spirituality*: closeness or connection with God or a higher, personal being
2. *Nature spirituality*: closeness or connection with nature or the environment
3. *Human spirituality*: closeness or connection with other people or all of humanity
4. *Transcendent spirituality*: closeness or connection "with something that seems completely outside the physical order" (Davis et al., 2015, p. 505).

5. *Self spirituality*: a sense of connection and integrity “with one’s deepest or authentic sense of self” (Davis et al., 2015, p. 505).

Initial construct evidence and test-retest reliability for the SOS scale is high, though discriminant validity requires more work, especially for the transcendent, humanistic and self subscales (Davis et al., 2015).

Socio-demographic Information

Collected socio-demographic information included gender, current age, religious affiliation, education level, occupation, household income and marital status. Along with identifying religious affiliation, participants were also requested to indicate the frequency in which they are involved in their respective current religious practice, ranging from Once a Day to Never. To maximize inclusivity of participants from a variety of religious/spiritual traditions, participants were invited to either select or express their own religious/spiritual affiliation.

Data Collection

Data was collected by a survey questionnaire. The survey was predominately distributed and completed online via the LimeSurvey platform, though paper copies were also available. A recruitment text and consent form preceded the initiation of survey participation. This consent form assured participant anonymity and voluntary participation, stating that participants could skip questions or withdraw from the survey at any time.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis, using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, including both descriptive (e.g., mean, variance, standard deviation) and parametric (e.g., Pearson product-moment correlation, t-tests) were conducted on the data to answer the research questions. Initially, data was screened for missing values which were imputed utilizing subscale means or

expectation maximum. Pearson product-moment correlations were used to determine if there were statistically significant relationships between the features of play and measures of playful activity, play motivation, flow, and sources of spirituality as well as whether there are statistically significant relationships between these variables and socio-demographic variables. In addition, t-tests were used to determine if there were statistically significant differences between Christians and non-Christians as well as between sport participants and non-participants based on the above listed variables. A Bonferroni adjusted alpha level was utilized when conducting multiple analyses on the same dependent variable. In addition, exploratory factor analysis, utilizing a principal component analysis method of extraction, was conducted with the Play Experience Scale to determine the main factors of the scale.

Phase 3: In-Depth Interviews and Church Practice

The third study consisted of in-depth interviews with pastors and explored the relationship between spirituality and play, and specifically explored how play could be integrated into church practice.

Sample

As with Phase 1, a purposeful sampling technique was employed to recruit Christian pastors willing to explore how play could be integrated into church life. Similar churches and seminaries as in Phase 1 were contacted to recruit participants. Among these included Reformed churches, Anglican churches, Mennonite Brethren churches, and Baptist churches. The response rate to recruitment invitations was very poor, with only Canadian Reformed Church pastors initially responding to invitations to participate. This may be due to the history the researcher had with the Canadian Reformed Churches, though the pastors that responded were generally unfamiliar to the researcher. Despite repeated attempts to recruit additional pastors, the response

rate remained poor, likely due to unfamiliarity, poor recruitment texts and pastoral time constraints. Therefore, due to response rate, availability and willingness, interviews commenced with the Reformed pastors that responded to recruitment invitations (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Upon conducting two interviews with initial participants it was recognized that pursuing a more homogenous sample was advantageous and therefore it was decided to accept additional Reformed pastors as participants. Given that church practice significantly varies between Christian denominations, reducing variation and simplifying application might be achieved through homogeneity (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2015). A homogeneous sample enhanced an understanding of prevailing church practices related to play within one Christian tradition rather than of the nuances between different Christian traditions. Therefore, continuing with the sample of Reformed pastors provided opportunities to clarify the value and purpose of play within a specific Christian tradition. After interviewing seven Reformed pastors, the research question was sufficiently answered and therefore no additional pastors were recruited.

Instrumentation

A semi-structured interview guide (see Appendix H) was developed to explore how play can be integrated into church life. Pilot and bracketing interviews were not included given that the Phase 3 semi-structured interview guide consisted of similar questions as with the interview guide utilized within Phase 1. Additional questions explored the relationship between Christianity and how people play, as well as asked questions related to the quantitative results from Phase 2. The interview schedule consisted primarily of open-ended how and why questions with a primary emphasis on addressing the research question, “How can playful activities be integrated into church practice?” Probing questions and statements were utilized to obtain a rich and informative account of the pastors’ perspectives on spirituality and play.

Data Collection

In this study, the researcher conducted personal in-depth interviews that were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Member checking occurred where participants were sent transcripts to confirm accuracy of the data (Patton, 2015). Feedback indicated the transcripts accurately reflected the interviews and participant perspectives. Subsequently, transcripts were uploaded to NVivo 10 (QSR International, 2012) for analysis.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed in a similar way as for Phase 1 with a primary focus on answering the fifth research question. Given the exploratory nature of this phase to identify new patterns related to integrating play into church life, an inductive thematic analysis process was utilized to identify themes according to the stages outlined by Grbich (2013). First, familiarity with the data was achieved by moving through the transcripts with successive readings. Next, while remaining aware of the primary research question addressed in Phase 3, key segments of data which represented participant attitudes, beliefs, ideologies and behavioural recommendations were identified and highlighted. Following this identification, segments containing similar data were consolidated into groups. Once groups were formed, preliminary labels were attached and relevant sub-groups were identified and named. As with Phase 1, a preliminary draft of thematic results and corresponding data was shared with the thesis supervisor for review. Feedback suggested sufficient distinction between themes. Overall analysis resulted in four dominant themes along with several corresponding sub-themes. Specifically, four sub-themes responded to the central research question regarding integrating play into church life. Findings from these interviews also contributed to addressing the primary research questions regarding how play is evident in the lives of Christians.

Chapter 4: Results of Phase 1 In-Depth Interviews

One of the primary purposes of this phase of the study was to examine how play is evident in the lives of Christians. An additional purpose was to identify and explore the spiritual features of play within sport and non-sport environments. To achieve these purposes, in-depth interviews were held with individuals who expressed an interest in Christianity and play. The exploration of the spiritual features of play focused on how relationships and spirituality influence playful experience. Ten participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and thematic analysis was used to consolidate meaning and identify themes within the data. Participants' responses assisted in addressing the primary research questions of this study.

Demographics of Participants

The results of this qualitative study are based on interview responses from ten participants who responded to invitations to participate. Five of the participants were female and five were male, and participant ages ranged from 21 to 52 years old. Recruitment minimally required that participants self-identify as Christians, and so several Christian traditions were represented in the sample. Although participants from some Christian traditions did not respond to recruitment invitations (e.g., Orthodox, Catholic), a variety of Christian perspectives are represented within the sample, including Baptist, Mennonite, Pentecostal, and Reformed branches. All participants were active in their religious practice to varying degrees. Nine participants adhered to various Christian traditions all through their life, while one participant recently converted to Christianity from a strict Muslim upbringing. Three participants were students completing undergraduate degrees, while the remaining participants represented a

variety of occupations (musician, teacher, sports director, coach, school principal, public administrator, youth programmer, undergraduate student).

Aside from spiritual tradition, it was also required that participants express a general interest in play and playful activities. This purposeful sampling strategy resulted in participants eager to express their experiences with play. Nine of the participants indicated that they currently or previously engaged in sport, and a variety of other playful pursuits were also described by the participants, including music playing, music composition, dance, aerial arts, photography, bird watching, painting, outdoor play (e.g., hiking, skiing, running) and recreational play (e.g., puzzling, reading). Further, most participants expressed a strong interest in the relationships between play and spirituality, which resulted in open and candid conversations.

All interviews took place during the months of February, March and April, 2017. Interview duration varied from forty-five to seventy-five minutes. Each participant was interviewed in-person, with five interviews occurring at participant workplaces, four occurring at the researcher's university office, and one occurring within a municipal park. Interviews were transcribed within a few weeks of occurrence, and participants were provided opportunities to review, change and verify their responses. Once the content of interviews was confirmed, the data was uploaded to NVivo software for thematic analysis. Pseudonyms are utilized to protect participant identity.

Defining Spirituality: Ambiguity and Relationship

Despite a generally consistent Christian background amongst the participants, a variety of perspectives and definitions for spirituality were shared. Two common perceptions of spirituality shared by the participants were the ambiguity of the term as well as understanding it as a personal relationship with God.

For some, spirituality was described as a new or ambiguous term that they would not traditionally associate with their religious practice. “Doug” described spirituality as a “very vague” term that he would not associate with his religious faith, instead suggesting it serves to facilitate conversations about meaning and purpose: “Everyone says they're spiritual. Everyone's spiritual. Everyone has deeper beliefs, but spiritual can mean so many different things.” In an attempt to contrast spirituality with religion, “Keith” described a pictogram demonstrating the relationships between these terms:

When I think of spirituality, I automatically think of the word religion. And then I think of the Venn diagram. Religion in one, spirituality in the other. And I think there is a lot of overlap there. So, things that both religion and spirituality have in common is that they are not limited to the physical world as we observe it using our senses. It involves something beyond what we can sense. It implies that there's a presence, something, that exists beyond what we might call the material world.

Similarly, others viewed religion as an organized activity oriented around a group or community engaged in common behaviours and liturgical practices, and those forms of religion were viewed as secondary apart from relationship with God: “I think that you can be spiritual without believing in God as a supreme being. But, for me, in the Christian context you cannot be a Christian without believing in that supreme deity” (Keith).

In expressing that sense of relationship, spirituality was described as a “connection to Jesus” (Doug) and as a “relationship with God...my walk with Him...just trusting in Him, depending on Him” (“Sarah”). Likewise, “Ray” described that trust and dependence as mirroring the relationship someone would have with a parent:

The world is much bigger than I am, and to me it's easy to see the Lord at work in all aspects of the world. So, as a result I'm also called to live a life of obedience, of thankfulness even more to the Lord for calling me to be one of His children.

That identity of being a child of God was also captured when "Jenn" described her innate need to create as reflective of her relationship with God:

I believe that as a person I'm innately spiritual. That I was created that way. So, for example, for me, I believe that God created the world and the universe, and if He's the ultimate creator, and I'm made in His image, then that automatically makes me creative. And so I think spirituality, for me, is just expressing that.

Understanding spirituality as mildly ambiguous, as a relationship with God, and as reflective of one's personal identity were common themes that further emerged within the participants' perspectives on play.

Defining Play: Degrees of Purity

A unifying concept clearly shared by each participant is that there are varying degrees or depths of play, or as Keith stated: "there could be varying degrees of truth or purity in a term." While "Vicky" associated play with "an action," and Sarah viewed play as an active rather than passive experience, most participants suggested that play was not restricted to certain activities or pastimes. "Amy" suggested that play could be found in any activity: "Everything is play for me...I go to the park and play and swing, or I'll go rock climbing, and that's play for me as well...I think play could literally be anything." Similarly, "Dale" shared an emerging and broader attitude towards play:

I think the way I view play is changing also in the way that, hopefully, I'm mellowing out a bit. That it's not all about, you know so boxed...now we're working, and now we're

doing chores, and when all that's done, now we're going to play. (laughs) Play can be dispersed through it.

Likewise, while viewing some family activities of beach-going and hiking as leisure, Ray added that “if you think deeper about it, I guess it is an element of play,” later remarking that he finds “an element of play within coaching” as well as in playing with photography.

Clearly captured within these participants’ perspectives is that attitudes towards the depths and degrees of play are impacted by personality and interests. For example, Sarah suggested that while she views household chores as her duty, “for some people, maybe cooking is play.” A self-described introvert, Doug suggested that his perspective on whether an experience was playful is dependent on how many other people might be participating in the activity: “Things may not feel like play even within the contexts that I shared before.... Things where there's a large group of people, and where you're around a large group for a long period of time...for me, [that] would be very stressful.”

While an introvert may find group experiences less playful, Keith suggested the opposite when it comes to music composition:

If you want pure play, then I think you're approaching it more when you're with other people. The aspect of being with other people I think is important....I would say that the purist form of play would be a group situation.

In groups or in isolation, the purity of play was viewed as contingent on personal interests and expressions: “I think depending on who you are and what you enjoy, I think you can find an element of play in a lot of things” (“Robin”).

Given the degrees in which play may be experienced, it follows that some activities were viewed as diminished versions of play. When an activity was viewed as a chore or a burden, it

was often viewed as less playful. Robin suggested that her sport became less playful on account of the stresses imposed within her program: “I struggled with soccer not being play. I had a really tough coach, and a tough university experience, that made it very hard to be a goal keeper.” For “John”, while “sport has play elements in it,” the addition of the formal structures of score-keeping, uniforms, teams and competition “adds a whole other level” that leads to a less playful experience, though not void of play completely. Despite there being less play in some activities, Robin adamantly maintained that play persists even if an activity is temporarily viewed as burdensome:

You know there's...there's still...you never quite lose the play. Some people do, though. I have kids where I can tell, this has moved from play to work, you know, and it's going to be a process helping them experience the play.

Further, although participants suggested that motive (e.g., growth, duty) for engagement in an activity could distort how play is experienced, activities could still emerge as more or less playful. For example, Sarah felt that a sense of duty does not limit the capacity to experience play: “I’ll go play with my kids because I should do this, but it becomes play.” Jenn viewed the play of children as a purer form of play, especially within activities that were impacted by external motives:

I think [children and kids] naturally have a very innocent form of play and creativity...and they're just able to go in and enjoy the activity for itself, I guess. So that mindset, I think, as an adult you try to achieve that but you don't always. I think a lot of other things can invade on that or corrupt that, whether that's pressure or expectation. I think that that childish view, that innocence, is...when you're playing with those kids you

really feel that's it's freeing and it's fun, and I'm not trying to necessarily win, because they're five years old. But I'm just playing because I love play.

Keith associated the purity of play with the pursuit of fun, which can manifest itself outside the boundaries of expected behaviour:

If you're talking about a professional athlete, and you talk about play, I would almost say that the times in between the games, where they can actually just play around with their sport...you're doing it simply for the fun of it. That to me is a more pure form of play.

Or, when you're in a group of musicians and you're simply improvising. And you're there not necessarily for the audience...but you're just playing with each other...that's got to be the most purest form of play there is.

In summary, degrees or purity of play were often attributed to personal interests, character, and the motive or expectation associated with a behaviour. Play was described as unconstrained to specific activities, though activity itself was assumed for play to be experienced. In this fluidity and depth, several characteristics or features emerged as representative of purer play.

Play and Spirituality Themes

Given the extensive breadth of the data and the nuanced understandings that are intrinsic to play itself, many overlapping themes concerning play and spirituality emerged from the data. In fact, a broad summary of the data is that, despite the categorization represented in Table 4.1, in-depth comprehension is gained by appreciating the interconnectivity of various themes. For example, though enjoyment emerged as a dominant theme, joy was occasionally expressed as a sense of freedom, as a result of self-expression, as dependent on the presence of others, or as resulting from connection and gratitude to God. Despite the flexible properties that play

exhibited, five overarching themes emerged from data analysis: (a) enjoyment, (b) freedom, (c) connection, (d) transformation, and (e) meaning.

Table 4.1

Major Themes and Subthemes of Play and Spirituality

Themes	Subthemes
Enjoyment	Enjoyment and Freedom Enjoyment and Challenge Enjoyment and Skill
Freedom	Free for Creative Expression Free from Expectations and Obligations
Connection	Connection with God Connection with Nature Connection with People <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tension with Others • Love and Inclusivity of Others
Transformation	Skill Development Character Development
Meaning	Congruency with Self Purpose & Motivation Balanced Life

Definitions of spirituality and play share themes of ambiguity and degrees of purity. The exploration of the intersection between spirituality and play further resulted in the emergence of several primary themes, or features, of play associated with spirituality. While the primary features are captured within the themes of enjoyment, freedom, connection, transformation and meaning, briefly reflecting on participants' general perspective on the features of play will establish context for more in-depth exploration of these elements.

Participants expressed that differentiating spiritual from unspiritual features of play was redundant, as spirituality was life-encompassing, and so distinguishing some features of play as spiritual and others as unspiritual was not consistent with their primary belief structures. For

example, when asked if spiritual features of play could be identified, Doug responded that such a distinction was misaligned with his worldview:

My initial response is I don't think of things in that way. For me, my hope and my desire is that they all meld into one. That I'm not trying to compartmentalize...I think that the natural and the spiritual are all together. There's not...one's not good, one's not bad.

In light of that, Doug associated enjoyment, relationship building, rejuvenation, and freedom as the primary elements experienced in play. Similarly, though recognizing enjoyment, the presence of others, vulnerability and agency as essential elements for purer play, Keith suggested that his Christian motivation to live for God in all areas of life meant that all things are spiritual by nature: "I really do believe that the very bedrock of why [Christians] do things is to glorify God. And that goes way beyond play."

Participants identified inextricable similarities between their own spirituality and play. To Amy, a recent Christian convert, play was associated with her emerging sense of Christian spirituality and a sense of freedom, self-expression, creativity, enjoyment and relationship building. The primary features of enjoyment, creativity and relationships were echoed by every participant, perhaps best summarized by Jenn who explained how she is growing in her understanding of how her spirituality and play intersect:

I think the innate qualities of imagination, creativity, connection, relationship, freedom, purpose...I think those are all the same. I'm just able to articulate them now. Whereas as a child I experienced them and I know that it's giving me satisfaction in some way but I couldn't necessarily connect that to my Creator, or God.

While acknowledging some ambiguity in differentiating spiritual from unspiritual, that each participant clearly identified personal spirituality as saturating their lives suggests that their

attitudes towards play were infused with how they understood their spiritual selves. Thus, given the brief overview here, the primary interconnections between spirituality and play can be summarized into the themes of enjoyment, freedom, connection, transformation, and meaning.

Enjoyment

As participants were prompted to describe their most enjoyable playful experiences, descriptions of joy within sport, music, casual play, dance and other activities were evident. It became clear through the experiential narratives shared that enjoyable play was deeply personal and related to individual interests and abilities. In all the variability of play, enjoyment persisted as embodying the deepest and most important element of play, often viewed as synonymous with play: “At the end of the day, I think they have to enjoy it, or it's not play” (Sarah). This natural association between enjoyment and play was identified by all participants. Robin expressed that play “feeds that part of your heart that just needs fun.” This same sentiment was expressed by other participants who simply stated that, “I play because I love it.” Generally, enjoyment was viewed as the primary value of play, and all other elements of play, including skill and ability, capacity for imaginative expression, and even the presence of others were all aimed to further the enjoyment of an activity. Within this feature of play emerged three primary factors that further facilitate enjoyment: enjoyment was described as being related to freedom, challenge and skill.

Enjoyment and Freedom

Participants emphasized that the joy experienced in their play was directly related to the sense of freedom found either in the activity itself or through their relationship with God. For John, freedom to choose an activity leads to the pleasure and enjoyment of participation: “Play generally involves your choosing it because you enjoy doing it. No one is forcing you to do it, you just do it....There's an element of pleasure that comes out of being involved in an activity

that brings you joy.” Sarah shared that a sense of freedom and natural pleasure is experienced while playing soccer:

I can't wait until I get out there...with soccer, I mean rules or no rules, there is a lot of running. So, for me, if I make a big sprint up the field, I just feel like I'm free and I'm a wild horse running on the field, and like a million bucks. That's all it takes.

Amy experienced similar enjoyment through freedom while running down the basketball court:

There's no better feeling. I've had a lot of experiences, but there's no better feeling. You can fly me wherever in the world or do whatever, but that feeling on the court when you're...I'm just picturing this specific time at the gym, and stealing the ball and you feel like, you know, good bye, and you're just going. Yeah, there's no better high.

Robin summarized the relationship between enjoyment and freedom succinctly: “Freedom and joy go hand and hand for me when I play. Like, if I'm experiencing joy, I'm often experiencing freedom.” Similarly, in relaying a profound sporting experience, John described the experience “when you find the freedom to just play and not be worried about all these other things” as central to enjoyment and better play.

The freedom to experience joy through play was described in relationship to personal spirituality. Vicky associated her spirituality with freedom and enjoyment: “I always feel the most free when I can enjoy myself and know that I'm doing exactly what God wants me to do at that moment.” Poignantly, Doug identified that same interconnection between spirituality, freedom and joy while reflecting on his bird watching experiences: “Play for me is just a way that I can experience God, where I'm reminded that God delights in me. And I'm reminded that He's a good God. And that I can just have fun and there's freedom in play.” Doug further expanded on how the freedom found in his spirituality liberated him to simply enjoy play:

You can do something enjoyable just for the sake of doing something enjoyable. It doesn't need to be for anything. But just because you like something, go ahead and do it. There's such freedom in our relationship with Christ that God has wired us in certain ways where we can just do things that we enjoy. We don't have to think about it. We don't have to get something from this. We just enjoy it.

Enjoyment, then, was deeply associated with perceptions of freedom, whether freedom was experienced within play itself or contingent on one's personal spirituality.

Enjoyment and Challenge

Participants described how sensations of challenge, struggle and uncertainty facilitated more enjoyable play. Robin summarized her artistic aerial activities as a blend of enjoyment and challenge: "The key word is fun, and joy. I think when you're playing it has an element of challenge, fun and joy to it." The anticipation of searching for birds in unknown territory to find rare and unique species led Doug to recall the experience as filled with "a sense of excitement...where the whole team celebrates." Though challenged by terrain and fatigue, Sarah shared a feeling of accomplishment that transcended any feelings of struggle experienced through recreational running. While battling through a round of golf, Ray recalled that even with mixed results, enjoyment permeated the experience as a whole:

I would say I enjoyed it...even when I shoot a bad shot, absolutely I enjoyed it. But there's this emotional roller-coaster attached to that, where these expectations aren't met. So, there's valleys and mountains of emotion as you go through it. But absolutely enjoyed it the whole time.

Similarly, Doug recounted a recent soccer game where "there was fun...but then our team played terribly." Upon detailing the events of the game, he reflected that, despite the loss and team

struggles, “there’s an element of stress and frustration...but it’s just in the nature of play. It’s still enjoyable.” Likewise, Robin emphasized the impact her spirituality has on the joy she experiences even through struggles are associated with play:

Part of spirituality is that joy overflows into the way that I play when things go...when things are hard, I still keep that, it's not lost. You know, just because maybe we're losing a game, or maybe we're struggling up a hill, we can still have a joy in the process.

Keith’s recollection of enjoyment and challenge was association with the culmination of risk and vulnerability experienced within a string quartet. Though describing the process of creating and playing music as occasionally painful and frustrating, he attributed his most profound and enjoyable playful experiences to moments where he felt the most vulnerable:

When we are our most alive, when we are fulfilling God's cultural mandate to the fullest, it's when we have ultimate agency, when we are in control, but also ultimate vulnerability, when there's a possibility of failure. Those are the times when we are going to really feel the moment....There's a group of four. You have a pile of agency because you are responsible for your own part, and also have a pile of vulnerability, because if you mess up your own part, nobody is going to cover it up for you. And not only are you messing up your own part, you might be messing up everybody else too. And then again, the audience is there, and so, the vulnerability...the risk, was increased. So, high agency, high vulnerability, that to me was a prime example of play.

Despite the nervousness and anxiety experienced, he remarked that, “If I could do that every day and have that kind of experience...that would be the ideal.” Keith’s experience outlines the requisite competence or skill associated with enjoyment and challenge.

Enjoyment and Skill

While the presence of challenge was described as facilitative of more enjoyment, participants also shared how increased facility or skill can lead to increased enjoyment, especially when that ability coincides with desirable goals. Keith described the role of facility in enhancing enjoyment: “I think the most playful experiences involve a certain level of skill...it's the instruments that I have a certain level of skill at that I play for the reason of enjoyment.”

Similarly, Vicky noticed that her enjoyment increases when dancing with others of similar skill:

Swing dancing is really fun, but it's the most fun when I'm dancing with someone who's around the same level as me or better. I still love it with new people, but it's that much more exciting when you can do all the cool moves.

After recounting a most memorable and enjoyable basketball game, Amy reflected that “the only thing that would've made it more joyful is just being in peak, peak shape.” The possibility that increased facility could enhance opportunity to engage in playful activity motivated Dale to ensure his pupils develop physical literacy:

Who are the people that run out and play? Well, it's usually those that have a little bit of background that can actually use some skills. If you have to be the one that has to sit in your lawn chair and watch all this enjoyment going on...to me, that's kind of sad.

Lastly, the impact of freedom, challenge and skill on enjoyment are evident in Doug's description of downhill skiing:

If I'm doing a really severe black diamond run, I'm more focused on not wiping out, and I'm less able to focus on creation around me, feeling free in that activity. When I'm less competent, I would say, that takes away from my overall freedom or my ability to be spiritual or bringing God into that activity. It's like in sports too. When I'm new at sport,

and I'm less competent, I'm more focused on just that. It's harder for me to bring in this freedom around me.

Even though play was described as enjoyable when free from the constraints of expectations and outcomes, and occasionally enjoyment was challenged by mixed emotions and struggle, enjoyment persisted especially when individuals possessed the competency to participate.

Experiences of deep satisfaction and engagement revealed deeper experiences of enjoyable play, often heightened by vulnerability, adequate degrees of challenge and competency. Much enjoyment was due to participating in freely chosen activities or experienced through the freedom provided by spirituality. Though some participants would caution against compartmentalizing freedom and enjoyment, given its predominance when exploring the relationship between spirituality and play, freedom surfaced as a theme on its own.

Freedom

While a sense of freedom has been associated with increased enjoyment, the freedom described by the participants extends beyond joy. For Sarah, a central feature to play was simply that it is freely chosen: "It's something I choose to do in my free time. So, if I'm choosing to do it, then I think it's play." Or, as succinctly identified by John, "Play would be free." Freedom was also described as a sensation by Robin while playing in aerials:

There's a calmness and a peace that comes when you can just enjoy...like when a piece of music speaks to you....There's a freedom in a fall, or you're doing a drop, that's just, you're like, how did I get here? Why am I doing this? What's going on? It's just fun. And I think that comes out even sometimes you just turn your heart back to God.

Similarly, Amy experienced feelings of freedom while playing basketball: "I just felt free. There was not a thought going through my head. I wasn't overthinking anything. I was fully present."

Freedom was also expressed within the context of rules or restrictions inherent to some play activities. Despite the geographic and regulatory constraints that come with bird-watching events, Doug experienced heightened freedom: “I mean, you know what not to do. It actually brings you more freedom than knowing what to do.” Within a music ensemble, Keith described his capacity to act freely:

You still have a lot of agency. Now, interesting playing in a string quartet, you don't have ultimate freedom because you have to reflect the ideas of the others...[but] you'll do something during the performance and [others will] reflect that. Whether that's playing a little louder, or a little softer, or playing a phrase in a particular way.

When challenged on whether he was still required to play within the bounds of the music, Keith explained that this did not limit his sense of freedom:

There's still a lot of agency there where you have to interpret that piece of music. And of course, the more you gained facility in a musical instrument, the more you learn how to interpret a piece of music, and the more you learn all the different things you can do to make that piece of music your own, even if you're playing every single note on that page.

Similarly, despite the constraints imposed by golfing rules, Ray emphasized the ability to make choices in how to play the game:

It's just choice. You are allowed to do whatever you want to do within those rules. So, the choice of club, the choice of ball. How high do you tee the ball? What line do you want to putt that thing on? Do you really want to use your lob wedge, or do you want to use your 8-iron and run up to the green? There's all that freedom within that sport.

Within these narratives, freedom is expressed as a capacity to make creative choice, which every participant described as a key feature of play. Two dominant subthemes emerged within

participants' descriptions of freedom: freedom for and freedom from. In describing their most enjoyable play experiences, participants described freedom as the opportunity to create and express themselves. On the other hand, freedom was also described as an escape from expectations and obligations.

Freedom for Creative Expression

A variety of terms were used to describe the freedom for creativity experienced in play: improvisation, imagination, make-believe, exploration, and expression. The freedom for creativity was expressed through shot-making during a round of golf: "You can choose what you want to do with that ball. If you want to fade it, draw it...inevitably you are going to have some creative freedom as to how do you want to move this ball from point A to point B" (Ray). Vicky, associating play with young children, viewed creativity as a defining characteristic of play:

[Play] depends on whether it's make-believe or not. I guess on one hand it's something you do for fun, and on the other hand you could say it's just something where you're...pretending something, like pretending to do kitchen, or pretending to be a race car driver.

Vicky also noted that same 'make-believe' within her own play pursuits: "I do love theatre and acting...and I would say that's definitely play. One of the reasons why I love it is because I love reading so much. You can just put yourself into a character."

Reflecting on education, Keith viewed creative expression as a clear element of play: I think one other aspect of play is also imagination. (pause) I think that's why sport and music and drama would be considered play, whereas something like mathematics...once you know the subject, you have a certain sense of facility in it, then you can also use your imagination, and go outside the box a little bit. And I think that's where it becomes play.

Similarly, the creativity within photography was explained by Ray as being dependent on some basic appreciation for the angles, technology and environment. Jenn described the process of ‘thinking outside the box’ while creating a game for children: “When I was making the activity, I was using my create mindset, stretching the limits a little bit. Just the way that I was expressing myself and articulating words and connecting was all creative.” For Doug, technological applications, bird calls, team cooperation and bush exploration were all identified as creative approaches employed to locate and identify birds.

The freedom for creative expression was directly connected to participant’s spirituality. Robin identified creativity as the foremost feature of play when exploring the relationship between spirituality and play:

Creativity comes out. But some of that is tied in with freedom and risk taking and the chance to try new things...when a piece of music speaks to you, and then in your head you start thinking about, how can you choreograph here, your moves to that music. You know, what would it look like to just let that love for God pour into the routine.

Likewise, when asked how spirituality impacts play, Vicky linked her identity to creative expression in music and dance:

It makes me, well it makes me want to be more creative, because I know that's a gift from God....I know that He created us to be in His image, which means we're in a sense, smaller creators. And we can work with what He gave us, and create more things.

Robin shared a similar perspective linking creativity and freedom to play: “I think that's a spark of the way God has designed us. The Bible talks about being made in the image of God - it's a spark of that image coming out when people are free to play.” Similarly, for Jenn the connections between freedom, creativity and play are clearly grounded in her spirituality:

I believe that God created the world and the universe, and if He's the ultimate creator, and I'm made in His image, then that automatically makes me creative. And so, I think spirituality, for me, is just expressing that. And also, there's two pieces of this. Also, spirituality, for me, is based on the concept of Jesus Christ coming to earth, dying for my sins, the whole gospel. And then freeing me from any worldly expectation. So, if I'm no longer defined by the world or expectation or pressure or my own faults, then I think spirituality, for me, means freedom. Just being able to not be defined by those things, and have my identity in what Christ did and not what I can do. So, in that, play becomes more free. It's not bound by expectation or result.

Explaining her spirituality as a sense of *freedom for creativity* as a well as *freedom from expectation* illustrates the multi-dimensional nature of freedom. Or, as succinctly described by Amy who wrestled with viewing her play as an escape: “I knew I'm not going to be able to get back on the court until it's not an escape and it's a way to express myself.” The relationship between spirituality and freedom from expectation and obligation is explored in the next section.

Freedom from Expectations and Obligations

While themes of freedom for enjoyment and creative expression emerged from the data, an additional subtheme was freedom from concerns about outcome, obligations, expectations and duties. The collective pressures of expectation caused Jenn to experience compromised play: “I think that takes that play, or that power of play, away from me.” Expectations, outcomes and formalities of sport were especially identified as restrictive of experiencing freedom and enjoyment of play. Doug noted that, “there were a lot of days where my joy or enjoyment was tied to the win.” Amy expressed a similar contrast between enjoyment and outcome: “When I

stop having fun is when I lose...and I kind of get angry and just focus on winning.” For John, the pursuit of performance in elite volleyball also displaced freedom and enjoyment:

There are elements of play within the sport, but you've formalized it so much that the sheer joy of play is probably [pause] lost to some degree. And there comes an element of practice and, now I have to do this, and my coach is telling you what to do, or your parents are telling you what to do. So rather than just complete freedom of choice...I do this, and "oh now it's not fun anymore," so I'm going to stop.

Describing a memorable experience with children, Jenn recounted how enjoyment was present because there was no concern for outcome: “I wasn't bound by my own thoughts or expectation of winning or losing. Or my own mistakes. It wasn't about that...that's how I know I was free.”

Within predominantly sport contexts, increased expectations for performance were identified as a result of increased competency within an activity and the ‘professionalization’ of play. For Keith, this was true for both professional sport and professional orchestra:

Once that gets taken to an extreme, I think it almost stops becoming play and becomes more of a task....I wonder if it almost loses a certain aspect of play....You still enjoy it, and when it really works, it's the best feeling in the world. But I think on the whole, you lose a certain aspect of enjoyment of it.

Similarly, when describing gladiatorial sport, John pondered whether financially compensating sport diminishes the play spirit:

I think that, for me, is always trying to keep that nugget of play alive wherever you find yourself. That's important for me, because I think at the base level, if you lose that, then I think you've lost an inherently good piece of sport, which is when you lose the element of play in there.

In contrast, some participants viewed play as the means to re-capture freedom. John said, “When you find the freedom to just play and not be worried about all these other things, you generally play better.” Similarly, Jenn identified reconnecting to play as the means to mitigate the anxiety that arises when a playful spirit is disconnected from the sport: “A lot of times...you have to choose to have that play mindset. Because otherwise, at a competitive level, it can become very much about results or your own shortcomings, or pressure or expectation.” Jenn added that finding the freedom to play was a result of her spirituality and embracing the belief that her individual worth is not contingent on performance outcomes:

[I’m] the best athlete that I can be because I'm free. Because I'm not bound by this competitive environment that says you win by the sword. The biggest, fastest, strongest, you have to prove yourself constantly. You have to do this, you have to earn this. I've been able to be free because I'm already valuable. So, in that I can play the hardest I can possibly play because it's not contingent on an outcome.

Robin relayed a similar attitude towards integrating spirituality into understanding her freedom from external pressures:

Are we so hung up on whether I'm going to look good or not in this moment, or can I just be free?...There's a freedom to play well and not be concerned about, you know, how you appear to others, or not being concerned about, whether you are a success or a failure so much as knowing that your worth is already set in who God says that you are, and you can go out and play to the best of your ability.

Especially within sport contexts that exhibit increasing demands and expectations, play was identified as the antidote to experience freedom from expectations for performance.

While play was associated with freedom from outcomes and results, it was also viewed as an escape from obligations. For Amy, play became an escape from a sheltered life of strict cultural constraints:

But play, was, I guess, it was my escape for me...my family is Muslim and from Iraq, so coming here they tried to really shelter us. So, me, trying to find a medium between that and fitting into a new culture here, basketball, I would say, was my only happy time. So, it was my escape.

Vicky stated that dance provided time away from the repetition of school work: "When I get home from university, my mind is...you know you need to take breaks every now and then. So, what I'll do is tap dance for a while." Doug described bird watching as an activity that "gets me away from all the chaos of life." Sarah's play activities were described as "an escape from work." While play was viewed as freedom from daily obligations, play was also viewed as the means to free someone from the mundanity of daily tasks. Jenn described how she found creative ways to incorporate play into her part-time role as a grocery store cashier. Ray emphasized the value of incorporating a playful attitude into his interactions at school with children: "Play must integrate. If I'm on the playground kicking a soccer ball with kids or climbing on monkey bars with kids, their play is also building a relationship with me." Even in public administrative duties, play was an essential component of the workplace for Robin: "If you can bring play into your work, you'll have a whole lot more fun. And it becomes less like work...we look to engage with play in the way we do a lot of our work...spontaneous play will break out." Collectively, play was described as facilitating freedom from everyday obligations, either by providing opportunity to pursue alternative interests, or by incorporating playful attitudes into daily tasks.

Connection

Every participant associated their spirituality with relationship and highlighted the relational nature of play within the multiplicity of play contexts. Together, therefore, a strong theme of relational connectivity emerged from interview data. While the primary orientation of the relational nature of play was directed towards other people, additional themes of connection with God and connection with nature also emerged.

Connection with God

Nuanced perspectives on spirituality and Christian beliefs impacted how individuals expressed connection with God. For example, Doug reflected on a personal encounter with God through bird-watching: “Play for me is just a way that I can experience God, where I'm reminded that God delights in me. And I'm reminded that He's a good God.” Vicky remarked that moments of deep joy while dancing brought her to reflect on God's character: “When you have moments like that, it reminds you God is the most important and He's really wonderful...sort of like a peek into God's character, and every time you get that it feels amazing.” Connecting with God was further expressed as reflecting God's character and as an extension of worship.

Play was viewed as a means of exploring the character of God, be it as “smaller creators” (Vicky) or as individuals who are innately wired to play: “I think God delights when we enjoy and when we play, I think God delights in that. I think he's wired us a certain way, with certain spiritual pathways, and [play] is one of the languages we would use” (Doug). According to Robin, that built-in disposition to play was especially transparent in children: “Really seeing kids faces light up when they play drives me back to just that there's something so inherently wired in us, in our reflection of who God is.”

Even though reflecting God's image was identified as an innate quality, accurately embodying that character was often problematic. For example, Dale recognized intense emotions as obstacles in playing soccer with a Christ-like attitude: "I knew that I had to play for God's glory. And yet, there was that idol tugging at my heart just constantly overriding that idea...so my temper shouldn't have been there. It was totally at loggerheads with my belief system." Ray also recalled how difficult it was to reflect Christ when he was a teenager playing ice-hockey:

If I think back to when I was 18-19 playing hockey, I was not really reflecting what Christ-like behaviour was on the ice....The way I talked, the cockiness on the ice, the constant put downs of other players...arrogance really is what it was...and that could be a lack of understanding of what it means to be Christ-like. It could be that typical, you put on a pair of skates and you're a totally different person. So, in whatever we do, whether it is hockey or waterskiing or coaching or parenting or whatever it is, it should be mimicking what Christ would have been doing on earth.

Reflecting Christ's character was viewed as both an innate quality and as a worthy goal. Such a perception differed between those individuals that viewed their spirituality as an expression of identity (e.g., I am Christian) rather than an expression of behaviour (e.g., I act like a Christian).

Worship. Participants referred to varying dimensions of worship emanating from their play. Naturally, which activities or behaviours were viewed as 'worship' was contingent on individual perspectives on spirituality and Christianity. Keith's belief in the sovereignty of God shaped how he viewed all of life as worship, including what and how he plays:

If all of our lives are religious, then even our play, what we choose as play, is in a sense a sacrifice to God....I wonder if we select areas that we enjoy, that we also somehow at a gut level think, this is somehow more pleasing to God.

Vicky viewed her dance as a similar extension of God-glorifying activity:

God created everything and He wants us to serve Him. So, I need to serve Him through everything I do. So, I get to dance, but I need to realize it's a gift from God that I can do that, and be thankful for it. And hopefully I can use it to His glory.

This same attitude of worship was shared by others: running through the country was described by Sarah as a playful “act of worship;” John stated that “meaningful play would be God-honouring;” Robin saw “play as an opportunity to worship God, to celebrate the talents that He’s given us to use.” Jenn shared a similar perspective, indicating that her beliefs motivate her to offer up her talents and interests as an act of worship:

God created me to love certain things, or created my personality to gravitate towards play, and so with that I'm just meant to use my interests and my desires to worship God, whatever that is. Whether that's playing with kids in my summer job, or playing on my slow-pitch team. Playing those board games with my brothers...those are things I've been made to love. So, with that I can worship God.

Jenn further highlighted that individual play was used to “to express worship or express who God is,” whereas Robin described a team sport experience as a way to “build an environment that honours God.” For each participant, then, play was considered an act of worship.

Despite these intentions, it was also evident that participants experienced tension between their spirituality and their behaviour. Dale described a shift in how he views playful behaviour, from an attitude of egoism to one that emphasizes worship to God:

I understand that my heart is where my behaviour stems from...I've been created to worship, and the choice, if you like, is who am I going to worship. And often my heart is filled with idols that I serve over against the one true God. And that comes out in the way

that I play....But the other aspect is that, in whatever I do, or whatever I put my hand to, I want to do it for God's glory....We need to play in the right spirit.

Similarly, Robin suggested that the repeated engagement in play could be done to serve self or to serve God: "I think it looks really different in people's hearts....Who's being celebrated - the self, or the fact that God has given us the talents and opportunities and the ability to play." Within an intense soccer game, for example, Jenn experienced tension between worship and play:

In the middle of a soccer game, and you're losing your crap and you're tired, and you're a little bit grumpy, I think all of a sudden it doesn't become play. But I think it can change quickly...you say... 'we need to refocus here, invite God in again.'

Ray suggested that cultural influences impact the ability to maintain God-centered worship: "As Christians we want our kids to go out and play sports with humility, and yet mainstream media, even my son's own attitudes or my children's own attitudes, are saying 'I want to be first.'" Doug admitted that tensions between worshipping self or worshipping God were not always clear, but felt that "in your heart, you know what would be worshipful and what would be right."

Finally, relating to God through worship was expressed as an extension of gratitude. Reflecting on her enjoyment outdoors, Amy identified gratitude as a primary feature of play. Vicky shared that the opportunity to play was simply an expression of thankfulness: "I'm just happy afterwards...and I'm just so thankful for the opportunity." According to Sarah, playing soccer is an expression of gratitude for health and ability: "You play because you are thankful to God. You are thankful for two legs that work. That's enough of a reason to be thankful." Reflection on an enjoyable play experience led Robin to "turn [my] heart back to God. And just thanks, thanks that I can be here." Upon reflecting on the challenges of playing alongside others where difference in ability or talents persist, Ray emphasized the need for contentment: "There's

got to be an element of contentment that, the Lord gave you this skillset, and use that skillset to develop and further his kingdom in some way, and be that light of Christ.” Dale iterated a similar message, tying his thankfulness for play to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. After sharing the story of a memorable sporting experience, John reflected on his feelings of gratitude:

I just remember that you end that, and you are so thankful. It's just like you want to erupt in thanksgiving. Where you're so thankful that you've had that kind of experience. I mean you'd love to bottle it up and feel that way forever. But, that's probably for heaven...not here on earth.

Collectively these results demonstrate that play was strongly associated with connecting with God, especially as an expression of worship. Play was described as being an extension of a life of continual worship, as being a domain of tension between worshipping self and worshipping God, and as being an outlet for expressions of gratitude.

Connection with Nature

Apart from connecting to God, participants described how their play has a relational component with the world around them. When participants reflected on how their spirituality impacts their play, nature and objects such as musical instruments, aerial silks and sporting equipment were viewed with a sense of appreciation and recognition. Jenn identified play as a relational “two-sided” activity, describing skiing in the mountains as play given the relational encounter between skier and nature:

I would say [skiing] is a form of play...I'm still interacting with a living thing. For me, a huge piece of that is being out in nature. In the environment. I would say, that's living and breathing. And so, for me to interact with that, as I'm skiing and as I'm stimulating myself physically, that's play for me.

Sarah described a connection to nature while running as a feeling of being “on the ground...one with the earth...just you and this pavement.” Doug’s appreciation for the creativity of God was associated with the variety of birds in nature:

Nature is a huge spiritual pathway where I experience God through creation....We saw a barn owl, for example...so different from a chickadee or a sparrow. Even seeing that creativity of our Creator, and seeing the intricacies with which He created everything. And the interdependency of everything. And just me being in that place, it's just so restful. And I'm so aware of who God is in the midst of creation.

Robin described her connection with nature experienced while hiking: “Hiking is kind of play...because I feel like you are connecting with creation, you're exploring, you're learning, you're getting to see a different side of who you are, and who God is.” Amy shared that “nature is where I feel the most connected [to God].” Appreciation for nature prompted Dale to share his attitude towards appropriate stewardship while camping: “I believe strongly that we have to look after and care for the creation that we're playing in. So, to just start hacking at the field, or tearing up the grass because I'm bored or something, would be inappropriate.” Through these examples, we see a connection with nature associated with the relationship between spirituality and play. For some participants this related to a strengthened spiritual relationship with God, while for others it was simply a deep appreciation for the natural world.

Connection with Others

The most consistent and prevalent theme emerging from the qualitative data was the centrality of connecting with other people. Given that connection with others was captured within participant definitions for both spirituality and play, interpersonal connections were most paramount when participants described the relationships between spirituality and play. While

connections to others was identified as a key characteristic of play, these relationships signified the meaning of the experiences themselves.

According to Vicky, the significance of play is in the “opportunity to connect with other people. It's given me opportunity to glimpse into God's character and who He is.” Doug identified meaningful play in “the value it brings to others.” Play void of relationships with other people was less valuable to Ray: “I think if play did lack the relational piece, yeah it would lack meaning to me. It has to have some relational aspect to it, otherwise why are we doing it.”

Believing that people are naturally relational informed John's general attitude towards play:

God hasn't designed us to be lonely individuals. So, I think play often brings an element of community, and I think that speaks more to the perfection of how God has created us.

Not to say that we don't do things by our self, but I think ultimately heaven isn't a place where I hang out all by myself. Heaven is a place that's a community; it's a city.

Further, closer familiarity with others was identified as a key marker for enjoyable play. “I think the more comfortable you are with who you are, or with who you are playing with, I think it's more meaningful” (Sarah). Amy identified that the most valuable component of a memorable basketball game was “the people I was playing with...completely.” Even the depth of play was related to the presence of others: “If you want pure play, then I think you're approaching it more when you're with other people” (Keith). With this centrality of connecting with other people, two primary subthemes emerged from the data: tension with others and inclusivity with others.

Tension with Others. Participants identified tension between their spirituality and play, especially within the context of connecting with others. Sarah identified that her teenage children tend to think in terms of “us versus them” within their play and sporting lives, rather than viewing others “as people, knowing that they come from homes, they come here to play...they're

just people like us.” John viewed the tension between self and others when individuals “play for themselves and for their own stats,” while Dale experienced tension from “pushing other teammates down to make myself shine.” Dale added that, especially when he was younger, other play participants “weren't relevant at all. They were just seen as somebody else to beat... We just want another win... So, from that perspective there was no deeper connection. There was no relationship.” The tension between self and others was felt by an experienced volleyball player:

I almost always had a little bit of compassion on the other team...so, as much as I want to win and I want to do well and I want my team to do well, I always have a heart for the other team if we beat them or if they have a bad play experience. I always feel a little bit connected to that, or you know, a little bit sad about that. (Jenn)

Similarly, Doug could not resolve the disconnect between his desire to be compassionate and loving towards others while engaged in competitive play: “It's hard, man. In my heart, I know I love them, but on the field then, it's how do you love them? I don't know what that means. Extending grace to someone on the soccer field?...I still wrestle with that.” Sarah also had difficulty reconciling the tension between her spirituality and play: “How do you compete against someone with the goal to win and beat them, and yet love them and serve them along the way?...It's hard to put others first when you are trying to beat them.” Likewise, Amy shared that while she desires to “treat [others] the way I want to be treated,” she wrestled with living that out within play: “I don't think I have a full answer there as I'm trying to figure it out.”

The source of the tension with others was attributed to human nature, emotional intensity and spiritual immaturity. The aspiration of maintaining an appropriate play ethic was challenged by “a sinful nature that pulls us away from God” (Doug). John added that “the sinful nature just comes roaring out of some people more than others.” Sarah noted that this same human nature

leads to a “more natural desire to hate your opponent while you’re playing.” Sarah added that the breakdown of play was also attributed to the competitive and emotional elements, especially found in physical contests:

Some of it was just horrid. Last year was one of the worst years...people just yelling at each other, yelling at the ref, just nastiness....Why do these adults act so arrogant and mean in sports? I just think there has to be some better interaction there. We have to start doing things better. But I'm not sure exactly where, or how.

Ray even described how his mother stopped watching him play ice hockey due to his “acting like a clown on the ice,” rather than seeing him develop his God-given gifts. Doug noted that the intensity and competitiveness of a game impacted the enjoyment of play:

I won't be as focused on playing, per se, and I get lost and get angry....They've been hacking at your shins all game, taking some cheap shots. Knowing that I love these guys...in those moments I'm probably thinking, 'I don't love these guys'. They're being annoying, I don't love them, if I'm being honest in that moment.

Dale relayed his struggles of anger and “white line fever...as soon as I got across that white line, I was a different person on the field than what I was off...the mindset to win-win-win drove me to do things on the field that I shouldn't.” He emphasized that his growth in spiritual maturity has meant prioritizing enjoyment and appreciation for others as central to “playing in the right spirit...because [others] are not enemies...they too have been created by God, and they also have been created in His image, so who am I to say they are the enemy.” Similarly, John shared that as he has “come to a more mature understanding,” his attitude towards play has changed:

I had huge pieces of it in my life that I had to wrestle through to get to where it's not...where I'm not playing for pride, I'm not playing to show off, I'm not playing for the

wrong reasons. So, I've matured in that, and I'm certainly not perfect, but I have a far better understanding of the role of play in my life.

Collectively, human nature, emotional intensity and spiritual immaturity all contributed to experiencing tension with others in play. While participants cited difficulty in reconciling those tensions, they also emphasized more positive aspects in connecting with others through play.

Love and Inclusivity of Others. A second subtheme that emerged from responses describing connection with others was the centrality of how the Fruit of the Spirit characterize relationship building and inclusivity. Referencing Galatians 5:22-23, Sarah identified the qualities associated with the intersection between spirituality and play: “A bit of patience with the ref. A bit of gentleness when someone falls down. Kindness when a team walks in, before and after the game. All those Fruits of the Spirit.” Likewise, Robin emphasized that the fruit represent the spirit of play: “Love, joy, peace, patience...that's the presence of the Holy Spirit in people, and that's part of their spirituality in that joy overflows into the way that they play.”

Of those fruit, love was identified as the most important expression when connecting with others, which was described as “selflessness...putting others first” (Dale), to “show you value someone” (Robin), and as being able to “show the love of Christ in the way I play” (Jenn). Jesus was repeatedly identified as an example of loving others, as evidenced in Amy’s looking to the “characteristics of Jesus” and appreciating opponents’ mutual love for play while playing basketball. Jenn described her “whole purpose is to love others” and how she is “wired for relationships and connection,” which comes out in her play:

A huge reason why I do what I do, or play or do sports or whatever it is, I think huge reason is just to love other people. And just to show the love that I believe I've received from Christ to my teammates or my coaches or whatever.

Sarah echoed a similar sentiment, viewing other participants in soccer with concern and an attitude of care: “I want [others] to be experiencing the same things that I am. I want them to come through injury-free. I want them to experience the good things in it...and in some little way, see God in you.” Robin viewed the involvement of other people as such a pivotal component of play, that she questioned the merit of playing soccer in the absence of others:

I think people are the most important part of a game. If you take soccer and you boil it down, it always makes me laugh, you have twenty-two adults chasing a circle to put it in a box. And when they do it, they do it over again. If you don't care about the people involved, sport is pretty pointless. But when you care about every single person, there's things that they're experiencing, seeking to understand...they want something out of play.

In connecting to their spirituality, especially the virtue of love, participants emphasized the relational nature of themselves and play.

As an extension of love, participants also expressed a desire to experience inclusivity with others during their play. Vicky valued that “everybody has a good time,” so the desire for inclusivity sometimes meant deliberately losing games with siblings or friends: “Sometimes if I'm playing with people, and I know that they'll be really sad if they lose a game by a lot, I'll maybe lose on purpose just to make them feel better.” Ray viewed downhill skiing or spending time in a boat as “family-time” where everyone could be involved. Dale emphasized his desire to instruct youth to view sport as an opportunity to “serve others” by “bringing other players and teammates into the game, or into the play.” To him, this inclusion was viewed as exhibiting exemplary leadership, whereas the absence of such inclusion resulted in “a loss of play.”

Robin highlighted community over achievement when describing what makes play most enjoyable: “Maybe not accomplishing, but inclusion, I would say. You need to feel a valued part

of what's going on, I think, to enjoy your play.” Further, the potency of play to include and unite unfamiliar people was a further defining quality of inclusivity. Robin utilized board games as a means to bridge social gaps: “I try to pull from multiple circles...some people from my sports circles, some people from church, some people from the past...and its fun seeing different people connect with each other. And games just kind of unite you.” She praised the capacity of sport to function as a similar unifying activity: “People are mixed, they connect, they want to know one another. There's a care there because you've leveled the playing field, and now we're all soccer players. Now we're connected at the same level.” In a similar way, Jenn described her experience of establishing relationships through volleyball while visiting Haiti:

I don't know these Haitians, I don't speak their language, but I think my connection with them is still very real, and we have no verbal communication. We're just smiling, and you know, doing physical things, playing volleyball, but I still feel very connected to them.

And I still feel like I know them in some capacity.

In these encounters, the beauty of play to facilitate harmony and inclusion of others was expressed as an extension of how spirituality infuses play.

Play, be it with familiar or unfamiliar people, served as the primary vehicle in facilitating deeper relationships with others. According to Vicky, the enjoyment of play was tied to being with other people: “One big thing about [play] is you can be with other people, and you bring each other joy...play can really strengthen relationships.” Doug attributed the development of closeness to shared experiences with others. Despite difficulty in articulating the depth of a relational encounter, Robin identified a bungee jumping experience that deepened a relationship: “No one else who hasn't done it can quite understand. And I think all of our experiences...we want to share things at that deeper level with people. Because there's things you cannot put into

words.” In his work with youth, Ray viewed play as the best means to build relationships: “How better to build that relationship than within play. Whether it's on the playground, whether it's a soccer ball, or even in the hallway building whatever they're building.” In her family life, Sarah valued the primacy of play: “The significance of play is the relationship within our family, the relationship with others. You know, the community too... That's where you meet everybody. That's where the parents come together. So much community happens there.” When asked to describe the value of deepening relationships through play, Dale suggested that play was a foretaste for an eternal life in heaven: “Play is something that will be part of our experience in heaven. (pause) The communal nature of play and how that brings out the best in people.”

Overall, participants felt that the spirituality and play relationship is most transparent through inter-personal connection. While this connection included experiences of tensions with others, it also included positive aspects of inclusivity and relationship development.

Transformation

A fourth feature of play that emerged from the data was characterized by expressions of growth, indications of change, or aspirations for continued improvement. To some, play naturally exhibited these transformative qualities, while others highlighted that their spirituality directly leads them to seek growth or change in all areas of their lives, play included. Though one particular moment in time may not illustrate the growth experienced in play, transformation is nonetheless intrinsic to play and is further guided by spirituality. The subthemes of skill development and character development further emerged within this theme.

Skill Development

Improvement of skill was identified as an aim of play, as facilitative of better play experiences, and as a result of infusing play with spirituality. That individuals play in order to

develop a specific skill was identified by Ray in how his son plays basketball on his own in order to get better at the sport. Vicky stated that she plays music in order to improve: “I’m always trying to get better. When I practice violin, I always hope that I’m better when I’m done than when I started.” She reaffirmed that within her love of dance: “I always like to see how I’m improving myself every week, and learning how to do a new dance step that I couldn’t do before.” In reflecting on his tendency to play soccer in his backyard, Dale stated: “I genuinely enjoyed it...but to me, the overriding thing was I really had this drive and desire to improve my skills so that I could play better on the weekend.” Ray viewed unstructured playtime as an opportunity “to improve your own skillset.” Doug said he is naturally wired to find ways to improve his bird-finding skills: “I always think, how can this work better? That’s the way my brain always works. So, especially with bird watching, there’s got to be more species, there’s got to be a different way to find them.” Robin associated walking into the aerialist gym as an opportunity for play and improvement: “Every time I go to the gym, I find a place to just play. It’s creative, it’s challenging. You know, you get to grow in your skills.”

While participants associated a desire for skill development as intrinsic to play, participants emphasized that their spirituality further impacted their desire to seek growth in their play. When asked to articulate how his spirituality impacts his play, Ray immediately pointed to an intrinsic competitive ethic and the desire to improve: “Trying to grow within the element of that play...there is a growth mindset there somewhere, saying ‘I need to aspire to something better.’” For him, the desire to “persevere and continue to grow” was indicative of the spirit of play. Keith also attributed skill and character development to his spiritual background:

I think my spirituality adds another aspect to play, and that would be, does it improve yourself? I don't think that self-improvement is a necessary ingredient of play, per se,

[but] I do think that self-improvement, might be one ingredient, or one way that a spirituality affects play.

Several other participants shared a similar perspective, such as Sarah who referred to the values of hard work and perseverance as “Christian qualities that you would teach your kids.” Robin emphasized that such perseverance need not be absent of enjoyment:

Part of their spirituality is that joy overflows into the way that they play when things go...when things are hard.... You know, just because maybe we're losing a game, or maybe we're struggling up a hill, we can still have a joy in the process of persevering.

Spiritual attitudes led participants to highlight the value in persevering when the outcomes of playful pursuits were not immediately attainable.

Character Development

While not disconnected from skill development, participants also described how some play experiences refined their character or led to personal and spiritual development. Jenn described how playing with children broadened her perspectives on play and reminded her of “the innate qualities of imagination, creativity, connection, relationship, freedom, [and] purpose” that she seeks to experience in pure play. Doug emphasized learning through a rich and varied play life: “You can give me a textbook, and it won't do anything for me. But if I'm on a soccer field, if I'm in nature, if I'm travelling, whatever it is, I'll learn through that experience.” Amy turned to frequent painting to enable herself to integrate her spiritual background into her sense of self. Likewise, despite clear indications of skill improvement, Sarah emphasized a growth in her perspective towards sport that has led to a deeper enjoyment in playing.

A primary transformative feature of play was the spiritual development that contributed to overall character development. Ray detailed how his attitude towards playing sports has

shifted away from a “win-at-all-costs” mentality towards playing for enjoyment: “As I've grown spiritually and understood what it means to be a child of Christ, my passion to win is not near as strong...now I just play for enjoyment.” Doug shared that though he still wrestles with “those moments where [he] really wants to win [when] even playing urban rec soccer can get the better of you,” a character shift occurred in that his desire to win has been displaced by a desire to honour God through play. Robin also experienced character growth when questioning the value of a game while losing:

In that game to actually have that connection with God...to be like, if I don't stop anything, is this worth it? And it all gave new meaning to my sport again. To be like, why am I doing what I'm doing? Is it for me or can I honour God whether I'm successful or not? In the way that I play, is the game bigger than just me looking great? I think there was a big growth in that particular game.

A similar desire to emphasize character development over performance was emphasized by Dale who shared the growth he has experienced in appreciating the value of play:

I know where I've come from and how I had the wrong perspective on play and sports and competition...just the way I viewed it was wrong. So now, with my own kids...it's fun first. And then, play, enjoy it, and learn some skills along the way. And by all means try your best. But not win at all costs.

A consistent theme, therefore, was that playful experiences and reflection led to renewed appreciation in attitudes towards play. Spiritual maturity impacted attitudes towards play and the quality of the experience itself. Character development and skill development were both identified as primary features of the transformative capacity of play.

Meaning

The final feature of play, meaning, further addressed the relationship between spirituality and play. Though the meaning and significance derived from playful experience varied amongst the participants, several subthemes summarize the research findings. Broadly, meaning was found within (a) congruency with self, (b) purpose and motivation, and (c) balanced life.

Congruency with Self

Given that participants understood spirituality as reflective of their personal identity, and given the interconnectivity between identity and expressions of creativity, it is consistent that participants shared feelings of harmony and psychological congruence as meaningful elements of their play. In viewing themselves as image-bearers of God and subsequently as mini-creators, congruency was representative of a creative self emerging through play. Keith described his best experiences of play, especially creative play, as a sense of harmony between vulnerability and agency. Amy enjoyed exploring new playful activities as a way to “feel like myself” and “truly express myself.” Sarah suggested that playing soccer and running enabled her to reconnect with an “athletic identity” formed in her younger years, thus granting her “freedom in stepping onto the soccer field” and being “me, myself, and not just a mom.”

To further illustrate, Jenn described herself as being “wired...created to love certain things...to gravitate towards play.” This awareness of her natural gravitation towards play and spirituality infused all areas of her life:

Play has a huge significance because it helps me express who I am and who I was created to be. And then, whatever I'm doing, whether it's at work or if I'm cooking myself dinner, I think, the more I can parallel those to play, the more satisfaction I gain from that activity, the more joy I feel, the more connected to my purpose I feel.

Doug suggested that God has wired people with a sense of spiritual freedom to live “out of love” and pursue joy-filled activities: “God's wired us in a certain way where we can just do things that we enjoy. We don't have to think about it. We don't have to get something from this. We just enjoy it...God delights in that.” Robin described play as “a spark of the way God has designed us...it's a spark of that image coming out when people are free to play.” She viewed the impulse to play as a deep sense of congruency with how people are created:

If you look at God's heart, I think He's passionate about joy, He's passionate about creation. I don't think He had to make zebras and giraffes...to me, they just speak to play....You see the way the sky lights up, with colours and beauty, you know, I think it's a big reflection of God's heart, is that we are so drawn as people to play. You know, so I think it's a way of reconnecting with who God is, and I know we don't always see it, but I think that's part of the huge draw to play is that it connects us with that part of God's character and is reflected back in us.

Given that these deep qualities of joy and impulse to play are thought to be naturally wired within people, it is natural that meaning was found in living out those God-given inclinations. While play was expressed as part of a deep sense of identity, participants also stressed awareness that their spirituality meant grounding personal identity outside of performance or external expectations, and instead connecting with a sense of intrinsic worth and value.

Purpose and Motivation

Within the meaning ascribed to play, a subtheme of individual purpose and motivation also emerged. Keith pointed to purpose and motivation as the center of the relationship between spirituality and play: “At the core of the connection between spirituality and play is why you do it.” Similarly, Jenn affirmed the same feature of play: “I think [spirituality] innately changes your

whole motivation behind [play]...the way I approach a situation is completely different...my faith gives play meaning.” Keith added that, while play could manifest itself in identical forms from one person to the next, what separates its ultimate meaning is the motivations behind it:

What's the difference between the Christian and non-Christian?...They might do exactly the same thing. They might play exactly the same way. They might enjoy it the exact same amount...but if they're doing it for different reasons, then to me, fundamentally, it's different.... It will look exactly the same. But if one is saying, 'I'm doing this for the glory of God,' and one is saying, 'I'm doing this because it's just awesome,' it's fundamentally different. And that glory of God thing, might not even be conscious. In fact, I would almost hope that it's at such a deep level, that they're not even thinking, as they're going for the three-point shot, "I'm doing this for the glory of God." It might not be a conscious level. But I still think that it's fundamentally different.

The purposeful meaning of play was predicated on individual views of spirituality, be it as expressions of gratitude (Vicky), being “about something bigger than myself” (Ray), “to love other people” (Jenn), or being “motivated by the love that God has for me” (Doug). These demonstrate the common consensus that spirituality impacts motivations associated with play.

Despite the influence spirituality had on participant motivations to play, participants also described situations where they “lose purpose” (Robin) or “lose perspective” (Sarah). Emotionally-charged games were identified by Doug as situations in which motivation could be disoriented: “You lose track of perspective....You lose track of the big picture, what's actually important. You get so focused on what's going on in that moment that...your anger can get the best of you; fear can get the best of you.” Similarly, Sarah detailed that meaning is sapped from co-ed soccer and youth hockey when a love and concern for others is not prioritized:

If you're in a co-ed game and everyone goes home hating each other, and hating the ref, and ready to start a fight the next time they meet up in the next game, I would say that's not meaningful. I would say that's actually detrimental. When I hear about coaches being kicked out of a [youth] hockey game, grades two and three, because the coach is behaving so badly, and they get kicked out...I would say it's lost its meaning.

Sarah added that decreased perspective was associated with a less enjoyable experience; appreciating “health...opportunity” and global circumstances facilitated more meaningful play.

John claimed that sense of perspective improves the experience of play:

I think when you understand why you're actually playing something, and some of that behind the scenes stuff, then it gets rid of a lot of pressure. I often, frankly, talk to my kids about [how] this is not a life and death [matter]. Ok, here's a kid in a country in Africa who's barely finding enough food to stay alive. That's pressure. That's a life and death situation. These games that we play, it's a game....I think when you can keep things in proper context, it releases a lot of the pressure that's there, and you play for the right reasons, and you actually end up playing better than if you were playing for the wrong reasons and are focused on the wrong things, and creating something into something that it's way bigger than it really is in the context of life.

In situations where perspective or purpose is lost, Robin offered the solution of reconnecting to the gift or “opportunity to play...let's reorient ourselves with the way God's made play.” Extra meaning and purpose was established through intentionally integrating spirituality into play.

Primarily, purpose was expressed as a spiritual desire to enjoy play in and of itself. Dale described play as always meaningful given the broader infusion of spirituality into life: “Play, in the big picture, play is always meaningful, because in whatever we do, whatever I do, I want to

give glory to my Maker. So, when I play, of course when I work, but in play contexts, it has to be joyful.” Doug likewise suggested play’s purpose is an emphasis on enjoyment: “It’s only fundamentally understanding at a deeper level that God enjoys what I enjoy. (laughs). Forgetting that, that I don’t need to be doing something of deeper purpose.... God just delights in my...He wants me to enjoy life.”

According to Jenn, spirituality gave life meaning and purpose, and the impact that has on play is the freedom and capacity to “just enjoy the activity for what it is.” In recollecting a national championship experience, John stated that the best versions of play are associated with spirituality and a sense of purpose:

[The best versions of play] are when you see life for what it is. So, when you understand the why of why you’re playing, and play for the right reasons, then you’re going to have a better experience, than if you are playing for the wrong reasons....If just winning the championship is the reason you’re playing, then that’s very empty. So, when you’re playing for the right reasons, and with the right motives, you get to the end of that and you realize the championship is really extraneous. It’s like this tiny little cherry on top of the whole sundae, and the whole sundae is much more satisfying than that medal or championship or that banner that gets put up. They’re actually quite secondary in the end.

Altogether, an emphasis on maintaining perspective by infusing spirituality into playful encounters and viewing play as a domain of freedom and opportunity meant a richer, more enjoyable play experience.

Balanced Life

A final subtheme associated with the meaning of play is regarding the role that play serves within life. Participants described how the role of play in their lives has shifted through

the lifespan, and two overall contrasting perspectives emerged: play as subservient to other life domains and play as deserving of more attention in life.

Balancing the responsibilities of life, a “heightened sense of duty” (Doug), and the primacy of spirituality, de-emphasized the role of play within participant’s lives over time. In referencing the biblical creation account, Doug said he prioritized “first work, and then play.” Vicky’s worldview meant that life responsibilities deserved more of her attention and time:

[My spirituality] also makes me want to be careful, because in some ways I'd love to just dance all the time because I love it so much. But I wouldn't do that because I need to take time for my family, to help my mom around the house and stuff like that, and visit seniors from church. [Play] has to be a hobby, it can't be my whole life.

Her relationship to God was viewed as more important than spending time in play: “Dance can't be the number one thing in my life, and I wouldn't want it to be either.” Similarly, according to Ray, the relationship between spirituality and sport meant prioritizing God:

Spirituality must come before sport. We are called to live for Christ, so as a result that's what we must do first. And sport, it is a gift that God's given us, and yet we need to acknowledge it as a gift, and not a priority.

Dale believed that people are mandated to work and “haven’t been created first of all to play, play, play,” and therefore his work life “is more important than my enjoyment in play in sports and leisure.” Yet, regardless of the primacy work and obligatory behaviour held for him, Dale stated that he “holds play as a high priority.” With a similar view, Keith detailed how his busy schedule results in play having a fairly minor role in his life. Despite this, his view that “one activity is not more sacred than another” impacted his conclusion that spending less time in play

at his stage in life is not problematic: “If all of life is devoted to God, then you can't say one aspect is more important than the other.”

So, even though participants generally viewed their spirituality and other life duties as a priority, play was recognized as integral to a meaningful life. For Vicky, that meant integrating playful activities, such as games, dance and sport, into her weekly Sunday rest: “We try to do things that we wouldn't have time to do on other days....So, I'll have a friend over and we'll play games. Or I'll have a friend over [and] so we'll dance together.” Ray also prioritized play as an essential component in developing family relationships: “Play has affected my family, as a kid. I also want the same thing for my family. Whether it's boating, hockey, golfing...I want that stuff involved in my life.” Robin argued that a life void of play had less meaning: “When I don't have play in my life, my life feels pretty empty....A lot of my hobbies and my non-work time, and even realistically I ended up at this job partly because I found people who play like I do.” John shared a similar framework, stating that work, play and other life activities exist “side by side...I think they are just complementary pieces of our life.” Even within his duty-bound nature, Doug also viewed play as essential to a balanced life: “Play involves a release from the other side of life....I think if you have no play in your life, you would feel unbalanced.” Doug further lamented his inability to maintain an adequate perspective on play:

We don't play well....We buy into what culture tells us we should like. We buy into getting ahead, needing to live up to a certain standard. And when we get to that standard, then you realize, I need to work harder for this, so you can't play as much. Need to work 60 hours a week instead of 40. I think a lot of the times, even as Christians, we're influenced by culture...Busyness. Always on the go. Always doing something so that we don't do things that actually [pause] are enjoyable and are restful...People are always

tired these days. I think that's one of the reasons why - too much stuff on the go, too busy. Therefore, we don't play, we don't rest...if you don't have things within the mundane that you actually enjoy, that bring you rest, and that you look forward to, then your life's not going to be meaningful [laughs] [pause] even if you're a Christian or not.

The prevailing sentiment, then, was that play ought not be dismissed from life and does in fact contribute to a more meaningful life.

Overall, meaningful play was associated with congruency with self, purpose and motivation, and living a balanced life. Prevalent throughout these subthemes was shared language with the aforementioned features of play. Spirituality and the experience of enjoyment, freedom, vulnerability, creativity, the presence of others and transformation of skill and character all contributed to meaningful play experiences.

Summary

Ten participants were interviewed to share their perspectives on the relationship between spirituality and play. These interviews were conducted in order to determine how play is evident in the lives of Christians, to determine what the spiritual features of play may be, to explore how a spiritual and relational encounter influence playful experience, and to assess how play is experienced by Christians in organized and competitive sport. Primary themes included the ambiguity and relational nature of spirituality and the varying degrees or purities of play. Themes relating to play and spirituality included enjoyment, freedom and creative expression, connection, transformation and meaning. These themes and corresponding subthemes shared symmetry between spiritual attitudes and play experience.

Chapter 5: Results of Play and Spirituality Survey

Numerous statistical analyses were performed on data collected through the Play and Spirituality survey to explore: how play is evident in the lives of Christians (Research Question 1), what the spiritual features of play may be and how they manifest themselves in Christian and non-Christian populations (Research Question 2), relationships between spiritual features of play, motivation and subjective flow states (Research Question 2) and how various dimensions of play were experienced by sport participants and non-participants (Research Question 4). The aim of these analyses was to clarify the spiritual features of play and how they were experienced by the sample.

This chapter is divided into five sections based on the nature of statistical analyses performed. First, socio-demographic data of the sample is presented. Second, analysis of the Play Experience Scale is presented, as this scale is involved in subsequent analyses. Third, Pearson product-moment correlation findings on the relationships between the PES and measures of playful activity, play motivation, flow, religious affiliation and sources of spirituality are presented, along with inferential analysis findings on statistically significant relationships between these variables and socio-demographic variables (Research Question 2). The next two sections present inferential analysis findings on any significant differences between Christians and non-Christians as well as sport participants and sport non-participants regarding spiritual features of play, measures of playful activity, play motivation, flow, religious affiliation and sources of spirituality (Research Questions 2a and 4). Finally, results of factor analysis of the Play Experience Scale are presented, as well as results from additional tests conducted to determine the primary factors, and therefore spiritual features of play, relevant to this study.

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

In total, 346 complete survey responses were collected between June 2017 to June 2018. The sample used for statistical analyses included those 346 respondents who, by nature of completing the questionnaire, demonstrated their interest in playful experiences. Given that various religious and non-religious organizations were included in participant recruitment, diverse spiritual expressions and interests were captured and further clarified through measuring sources of spirituality and identifying personal religious affiliation.

Of the 346 respondents, 120 (34.7%) were male, 225 (65%) were female, and one (0.3%) participant identified as 'Other', stating that their gender "depends on context". Given that categorical options were provided to indicate age at time of survey completion, as demonstrated in Table 5.1, a mean age cannot be accurately determined. The majority (41.3%) of respondents were between the ages of 19-29, with the second largest group (19.4%) ranging between 30-39 years old. With regards to the highest educational level achieved, the majority of respondents either completed some university or college (29.5%) or were university graduates (24.6%). The range of household incomes is included in Table 5.1, where the largest concentration (24.6%) of the sample is in the \$75,000 to \$99,999 income category, and the smallest (13.3%) representation is the \$25,000 to \$49,999 category. Regarding marital status, the vast majority (89.3%) of participants indicated that they were either married (40.2%) or never married (49.1%). As participants were also requested to indicate their occupation, categorization of this data was based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO-08), with the additional categories of homemakers, students and retirees (International Labour Office, 2012). The three most common reported occupations were professionals (28%), students (18.2%) and technicians and associate professionals (13.9%).

Table 5.1*Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Characteristic	<i>n</i>	%
Age at time of survey (years)		
14-18	54	15.6
19-29	143	41.3
30-39	67	19.4
40-49	32	9.2
50-59	31	9.0
60-69	12	3.5
70+	7	2.0
Highest education level completed		
Some high school	36	10.4
High school completed	18	5.2
Some university or college	102	29.5
College graduate	31	9.0
University graduate	85	24.6
Some graduate school	26	7.5
Graduate school completed	48	13.9
Annual Household Income (\$)		
\$0-24,999	70	20.2
\$25,000-49,999	46	13.3
\$50,000-74,999	64	18.5
\$75,000-99,999	85	24.6
\$100,000+	68	19.7
No response	13	3.8
Marital Status		
Married	139	40.2
Widowed	2	0.6
Common law / Partnered	20	5.8
Separated / Divorced	11	3.2
Never Married	170	49.1
No response	4	1.2
Occupation		
Managers	16	4.6
Professionals	83	28
Technicians and Associate Professionals	48	13.9
Clerical Support Workers	20	5.8
Services and Sales Workers	18	5.2
Skilled Agricultural Workers	4	1.2
Craft and Related Trades Workers	9	2.6
Plant and Machine Operators	2	.6
Elementary Occupations	5	1.4
Students	63	18.2
Homemakers	17	4.9
Retired	11	3.2
No response	50	14.5

Note. *N* = 346

Table 5.2*Socio-Demographic Characteristics: Religious Affiliation and Practice Frequency*

Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Religious / Spiritual Affiliation		
Christian	187	54.0
Muslim	10	2.9
Sikhism	39	11.3
Buddhism	11	3.2
Jewish	1	.3
No religious/spiritual affiliation	71	20.5
Various worldview perspectives	27	7.8
How often are you currently actively involved in this religious practice?		
Once a day	185	53.5
Once a week	53	15.3
Once a month	10	2.9
Once every two months	8	2.3
Once every six months	6	1.7
Once a year	12	3.5
Never	72	20.8

Finally, participants were requested to indicate their religious/spiritual affiliation, including the frequency with which they practice their religion. The majority (54%) of respondents indicated a Christian affiliation, with the remaining citing a variety of religious affiliations as noted in Table 5.2. The 159 (46%) respondents that did not identify as Christian were categorized as ‘non-Christian’ for further statistical analyses. Non-Christians included those who indicated a variety of religious/spiritual affiliations (e.g., Muslim, Sikhism, Buddhism, etc.), no religious/spiritual affiliation, or worldview perspectives, such as atheistic, agnostic, humanistic, and ‘undecided.’

With regards to frequency of participation in a religious practice, the total sample distribution is included in Table 5.2, however crosstabulation was conducted to better understand how active participants were in their given religious affiliation. It was determined that 90% of

Christians ($n = 168$) indicated a weekly or daily religious practice, while 70% of areligious respondents indicated no active involvement in a religious or spiritual practice. While cultural heritage or familial upbringing may account for the remaining 10% of respondents indicating a Christian affiliation, the high frequency of participation suggests respondents were practicing Christians. Therefore, some analyses were conducted by differentiating between Christians ($n = 187$) and non-Christians ($n = 159$) as identified by religious / spiritual affiliation.

Analysis of Play Experience Scale

Development of Play Experience Scale

A preliminary draft of the Play Experience Scale (PES) was revised to reflect interview data from Study 1. Importantly, a significant revision was made to the name of the scale itself. Though initially intended to measure ‘spiritual features of play,’ interview data and emerging themes cautioned against perpetuating dualistic thinking where spiritual and unspiritual or material and immaterial are treated as opposing qualities. In response to this data, the scale title of “Spiritual Features of Play Scale” was renamed to the Play Experience Scale, which thus intended to evaluate the primary features and experiences associated with play as informed by theological, conceptual and empirical literature. In addition, while the nine subscales remained the same given qualitative data analysis, fourteen items from the 36-item questionnaire were revised to represent statements similar to those expressed in the interview data. For example, under the subscale of freedom, the statements “When I feel free, I play better” and “My best play experiences are when I feel in control” replaced statements that were more associated with rule-keeping. Similarly, qualitative data revealed gratitude as central to participants’ relation to God, and therefore the statement “My play is an expression of gratitude towards God” was included within the questionnaire. Finally, given that qualitative data demonstrated a relationship between

enjoyment and the purpose of participation, the statement “I experience more enjoyment when I remember why I’m playing” replaced “When I play with others, I care that others are enjoying themselves too.” The initial and revised PES are found in Appendices E and F.

Analysis of Play Experience Scale

Prior to correlation and reliability analyses of the PES, missing data analysis was conducted which revealed 0.61% missing values ($n = 76$) from the PES responses. Conduction of Little’s (1988) MCAR test revealed a non-significant result ($p > .05$), indicating the values were missing completely at random. The recommended process for imputing values was conducted by imputing pooled results from five imputations (Rezvan et al., 2015). Four variables (“Play is less important to my life than work,” “I feel God has little interest in what I play,” “It is more important that my play produces something than that it is enjoyable,” and “My play often seems trivial and unimportant to me”) were reverse coded for all analyses.

Following the analysis of descriptive statistics, participants’ responses to scale items on the PES underwent correlation and reliability analyses. The range of the correlation coefficients for each item of the nine features of play were as follows: (a) from .017 to .280 for freedom, (b) from -.265 to .302 for enjoyment, (c) from -.093 to .458 for relationship with self, (d) from .308 to .799 for relationship with God, (e) from .024 to .330 for relationship with others, (f) from -.203 to .267 for relationship with creation, (g) from .322 to .512 for creativity, (h) from .265 to .441 for transformation, and (i) from .204 to .427 for meaning. All correlations were significant at the .05 level for the enjoyment feature, and at the .01 level for four additional features: relationship to God, creativity, transformation and identity. For the freedom feature, all except one correlation were statistically significant at the .05 level. Two relational features (others and creation) were statistically significant at the .05 level for all correlations except two. Finally, for

the relationship to self feature, all correlations were statistically significant at the .01 level except for one scale item (Item 30) which did not correlate at all. These results were considered when modifying and trimming items during factor analysis.

To measure subscale reliability, Cronbach alphas were determined for each of the nine proposed subscales. Conducting this analysis was used in determining if elimination of some items would improve subscale reliability. The Cronbach alpha for the overall PES scale was .862, which provided a general indication that all 36 survey items measure a common phenomenon. The overall scale would not be improved if any items were removed based on this reliability measure.

Cronbach alphas computed for each component were .44 (freedom), .51 (enjoyment), .55 (relation to self), .85 (relation to God), .48 (relation to others), .25 (relation to creation), .73 (creativity), .71 (transformation), and .62 (meaning). Generally, Cronbach alpha scores of .7 to .8 demonstrate scale reliability, although in exploratory studies sub-scales with alphas of .50 can be retained (Field, 2009). No removal of any item for the relation to creation subscale improved reliability above an alpha of .50; removal of item 24 would result in a highest alpha level of .46. Removing item 19 would improve Freedom to .51, removing item 30 would improve Relation to Self to .70, and removing item 5 would improve Relation to Others to .53. Finally, removing items for Relation to God and Meaning resulted in marginally increased alpha values.

Based on these analyses, four sub-scales, that being Relation to Self (with item 30 removed), Relation to God, Creativity, and Transformation, would all be reliable at an alpha level of .70. Further, four sub-scales, that being Freedom (with item 19 removed), Enjoyment, Relation to Others (with item 5 removed), and Meaning, would all be reliable at an alpha level of .50. Problematic was the Relation to Creation sub-scale, which demonstrated overall poor

reliability, as well as poor correlation coefficients, likely due to instrument development and convoluted items. This sub-scale intended to measure a breadth of attitudes towards the material world. While this partly included nature itself, the sub-scale also included statements related to how people interact with nature, specifically through work. As a result of this intended breadth, two sub-scale items were retained to reflect attitudes towards creation. Item 6 (Playing in nature or the outdoors often inspires me with a sense of awe and wonder) was retained for analyzing ‘relating to nature’, and Item 15 (Play is less important to my life than my work) was retained for analyzing ‘relating to work’. This resulted in ten separate dimensions of the PES.

Descriptive Statistics of Play Experience Scale

Sub-scale scores for the ten dimensions of the PES were computed by calculating means using sub-scale items. The range of means varied from 4.14 (SD = .88) for the ‘Relate to nature’ dimension to 3.27 (SD = 1.12) for the ‘Relate to God’ dimension. Additionally, an overall PES score was computed by calculating means of each variable within the PES scale, which resulted in a mean of 3.67 (SD = .42). Full descriptive information is displayed in Table 5.3.

Table 5.3

Descriptive Statistics of the Play Experience Scale

Features of Play	<i>n</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Freedom	346	2.00	5.00	3.97	.57
Enjoyment	346	1.75	4.75	3.46	.52
Relate to Self	346	1.33	5.00	3.62	.75
Relate to God	346	1.00	5.00	3.27	1.12
Relate to Others	346	1.33	5.00	3.93	.65
Relate to Nature	346	1.00	5.00	4.14	.88
Relate to Work	346	1.00	5.00	3.12	1.06
Creativity	346	1.25	5.00	3.67	.68
Transformation	346	1.25	5.00	3.76	.69
Meaning	346	1.75	5.00	3.86	.61
Overall PES Score	346	2.45	4.86	3.67	.45

Aside from the quantitative data collected via the PES, participants were also invited to submit comments based on their reactions to the survey questions and themes. Altogether, twenty comments were received. The content of these responses can be categorized into three groups: definitional ambiguity, attitudes towards spirituality, and the subjective priority of play.

Regarding definitional ambiguity, one participant commented on the word-play dichotomy: "I don't always see play and work as two separate things. In fact, I aim not to have that divide." Another participant shared a similar thought: "My work and play (art) is often so much the same, so it's difficult to differentiate between the two. I guess it means that work often feels like play." For another participant, the survey created a shift in perspective about the nature of play: "I did not connect play with my spirituality until taking this survey. I thought play was more of a social activity rather than a spiritual one. These questions are most definitely interesting and mind-opening."

Several comments reacted to the terms 'spirituality' and 'God' that were included within survey items. The majority of these responses submitted by participants who did not identify as Christians provided critique regarding the references to God contained in the survey. Others offered their own interpretation of the words 'spirit' or 'spirituality.' As example, one atheist participant associated spirit with "manifestation of self," while another participant, who associated his 'religious' practice with humanism, chose not to differentiate between spiritual and unspiritual. In contrast, one Christian respondent emphasized a distinction in how she understood the role of theistic spirituality in her play: "I believe God is interested in how I play (action towards others, how I respond in situations) rather than what I play."

Finally, several comments referred to a general appreciation or disregard for play. For example, one participant iterated the importance of play: "Play is an absolute necessity in life to

get off the ADD American treadmill of success.” Lastly, a practicing Buddhist critiqued the relevance of play altogether:

For me, play is meaningless and a waste of my precious time. In part I [mention] hiking (which is to relax and keep fit) and writing (which I do for preparing and designing meditation courses), but in my experience as a Buddhist practitioner for 30 years, there is no relationship between spirituality and play.

Collectively, these comments provide additional perspective on how participants viewed the relationship between spirituality and play.

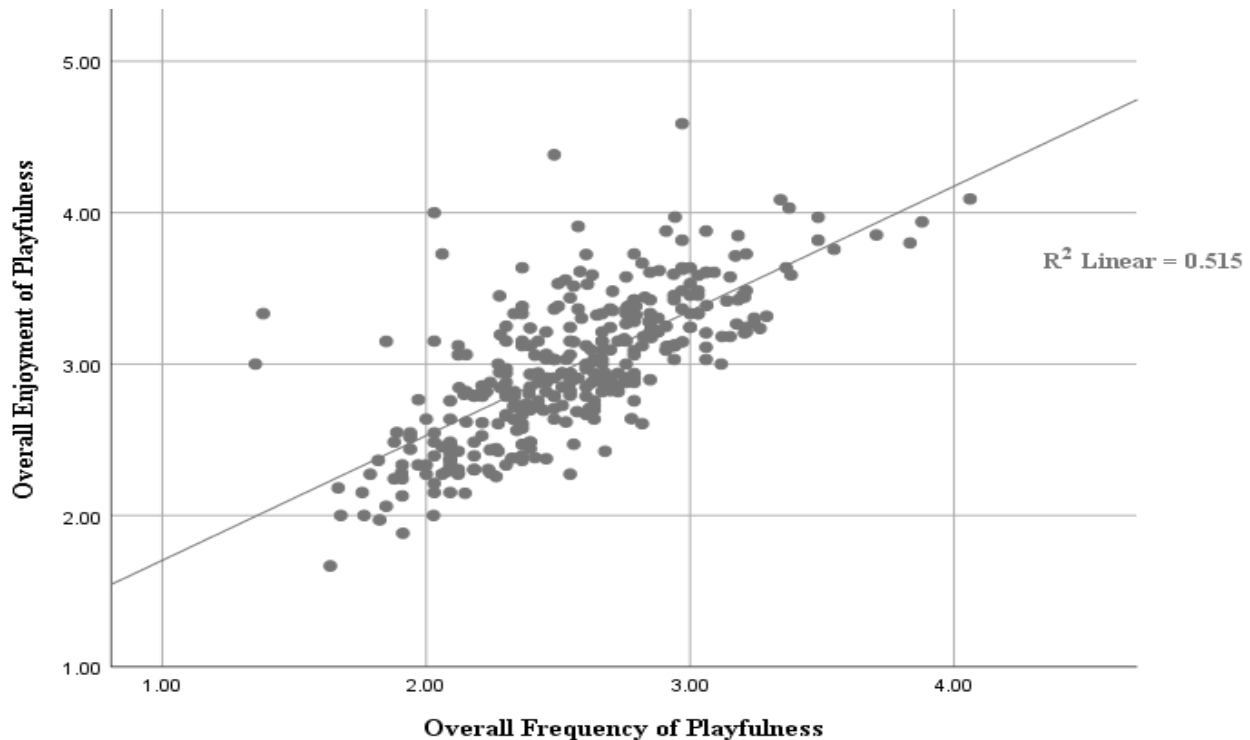
Analysis of Play Experience Scale and Measures of Playful Activity, Motivation, Flow, Sources of Spirituality and Socio-Demographic Variables

Playful Activity Participation and Play Experience Scale

The Playful Activities Scale required participants to indicate the frequency and level of enjoyment in which they experienced a range of playful activities. Five categories of activities were included: spontaneous and casual play, organized play and games, physical contests and sports, dance, and creative / artistic activities. Means for each of these categories were calculated and used for bivariate analysis along with the specific activities themselves. Finally, an overall ‘play frequency’ and ‘play enjoyment’ score was determined by calculating the mean of all playful activities. A paired samples t-test revealed that participants reported significantly higher degrees of enjoyment ($M = 2.99$, $SD = .47$) than frequency of participation ($M = 2.56$, $SD = .41$) in playful activities, $t(344) = 23.51$, $p < .000$. Further, overall enjoyment and overall frequency of play participation were found to be significantly and positively correlated ($r = .72$, $p < .001$) (see Figure 5.1). Complete descriptive statistics for the play categories and individual playful activities are displayed in Table 5.4.

Figure 5.1

Relationship between Overall Frequency and Overall Enjoyment of Participating in Playful Activity



Each activity category included opportunity for participants to indicate an ‘other’ activity that they play though that may not be listed within the scale. Within spontaneous and casual play, additional ($n = 42$) responses included social media (e.g., Twitter, online gaming), playing with grandchildren, wrestling / horsing around, and playing with pets. Under organized play and games, additional ($n = 26$) responses included specific board games (e.g., Cards Against Humanity, riddle games), shopping, ‘idea sharing’, and various outdoor activities (e.g., climbing, being active). For physical contests and sports, responses ($n = 28$) primarily referenced specific sports (e.g., soccer, hockey), outdoor activities (e.g., hiking, walking) and yoga. Within the dance category, additional responses ($n = 26$) primarily referenced dancing at home and bhangra. Finally, additional responses ($n = 22$) under the artistic and creative category included a range of creative pursuits such as cooking, crafting, singing, pottery and woodworking. Spontaneous and

Table 5.4
Descriptive Statistics of the Playful Activities Scale

Playful Activities	Frequency		Enjoyment	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Spontaneous / Casual Play	3.38	.55	3.33	.59
Childish Imitations	2.68	1.50	2.77	1.18
Dabble / Fiddle (e.g., fidget)	2.90	1.09	2.58	.96
Daydreaming	3.45	.99	3.29	1.00
Sociable Conversation	4.08	.83	4.07	.83
Web-surfing	3.92	.93	3.29	.94
Pleasurable Reading	3.22	1.15	3.85	1.14
Other	3.57	1.38	3.93	1.35
Organized Play / Games	2.41	.55	2.96	.62
Jigsaw Puzzles	1.95	.85	2.65	1.18
Word Games (e.g., crosswords)	2.50	1.04	3.02	1.11
Playground Games	2.01	.88	2.66	1.06
Board Games	2.89	.94	3.52	1.03
Card Games	3.14	1.02	3.65	1.05
Games of Chance	1.81	.88	2.18	1.10
Video Games	2.34	1.24	2.81	1.34
Interaction-Based Games	2.54	.96	3.20	1.09
Party Activities	2.40	1.17	2.82	1.36
Other	3.38	1.27	3.77	1.48
Physical Contests / Sports	2.87	.83	3.43	.90
Team Sports	3.00	1.52	3.65	1.42
Individual Sports	3.09	1.25	3.52	1.22
Dual Sports	2.06	1.03	2.91	1.26
Aquatic Sports	2.70	1.11	3.55	1.21
Fitness Activities	3.41	1.21	3.46	1.23
Other	3.57	1.29	3.61	1.47
Dance	1.59	.67	2.19	.96
Social Dancing	2.28	1.17	3.08	1.38
Folk / Square	1.58	1.02	2.29	1.35
Performance	1.42	1.02	1.86	1.30
Ballroom	1.24	.58	1.84	1.17
Liturgical	1.34	.87	1.61	1.11
Other	3.31	1.87	3.48	1.79
Creative / Artistic Activities	2.52	.66	2.97	.81
Drawing	2.42	1.10	2.75	1.29
Painting	2.00	1.06	2.60	1.31
Sculpting	1.47	.74	2.16	1.25
Writing	2.71	1.30	2.81	1.36
Theater	1.75	1.08	2.45	1.42
Music (playing)	2.46	1.44	3.11	1.47
Music (listening)	4.39	.88	4.48	.79
Photography	2.87	1.20	3.30	1.23
Other	3.73	1.39	3.95	1.36
Overall Playful Activity	2.56	.41	2.99	.47

Note. *N* = 346

casual play was the group of activities with the highest frequency of participation, while physical contests and sports were the more enjoyed group of activities. The collection of dance activities had the lowest frequency of participation and lowest level of enjoyment. Listening to music and sociable conversation had the highest frequency of participation and enjoyment.

Frequency of Participation in Specific Activities and Features of Play

Bivariate analyses were conducted to determine if a significant relationship existed between the frequency of participation in playful activities, play categories and overall playful participation and the ten features of play derived from the PES. Frequency of participation in twenty-one of the thirty-three specific playful activities were significantly correlated to the overall play experience score. Additionally, all activities classified as ‘other’ were significantly correlated to the play experience score except for the ‘other’ activities included under spontaneous and casual play. Only one activity, word games, had no significant relationship with any feature of play. All correlation coefficients are displayed in Table 5.5.

Frequency of participation for eighteen activities had a significant positive correlation with freedom. Only four of the possible fifteen activities from the spontaneous play and organized play categories were significantly correlated with freedom: childish imitations, dabbling, playground games and party activities. Conversely, frequency of participation of the majority (14 / 18) of activities included within the categories of sport, dance and creative activities has a significant positive correlation with freedom. Of these, the only significant correlation between frequency of participation in ballroom dance and the play experience subscales was with the feature of freedom.

The feature of enjoyment had a significant positive correlation with frequency of participation in eighteen playful activities. Within spontaneous play, this included two activities:

childish imitations and sociable conversation. Frequency of participation of five organized play and game activities was significantly correlated with freedom: jigsaw puzzles, playground games, card games, interaction-based games, and party activities. All physical contests and sports (except 'other'), four dance (social, folk, performance, 'other') and three creative and artistic (playing and listening to music, photography) activities has significant positive correlations with the feature of enjoyment.

The third feature of play, relationship to self, had significant positive correlations with participation frequency of two spontaneous playful activities: childish imitations and dabbling. While no organized play or game activities were significantly correlated with this feature, all creative and artistic activities, except painting, was significantly and positively correlated with the relationship to self feature. Frequency of participation of three physical contests (team sports, individual sports, and aquatic sports) and three dance activities (social dancing, folk and square, and performance) also had significant positive correlations with the relationship to self feature.

Frequency of participation of six specific activities significantly and negatively correlated with the relationship to God feature: dabbling, daydreaming, web-surfing, video games, party activities, and social dancing. Team, individual, and aquatic sports, as well as jigsaw puzzles, playground and card games had significantly positive correlations between frequency of participation and relationship to God. Relationship to God was the only feature that significantly correlated with liturgical dance. Finally, frequency of participation of only one creative activity, playing music, was significantly and positively correlated with the feature of relating to God.

As the fifth feature of play, relationship to others had significant positive correlations with frequently participating in fourteen specific activities. The only creative activity included in those correlations was listening to music. Conversely, many organized play and game activities

Table 5.5*Correlations for Frequency of Participation of Playful Activities and Features of Play*

Playful Activities	Freedom	Enjoyment	Relate Self	Relate God	Relate Others	Relate Nature	Relate Work	Creativity	Transform	Meaning	PES
Spontaneous / Casual Play											
Childish Imitations	.17**	.11*	.13*	.05	.11*	.04	.02	.23**	.09	.08	.17**
Dabble / Fiddle	.24**	.06	.15**	-.12*	.11	.09	.09	.21**	.14*	.12*	.15**
Daydreaming	.10	-.10	.06	-.11*	.01	.08	-.02	.17**	.00	.04	.02
Sociable Conversation	.14	.12*	.06	-.05	.17**	.09	.15**	.12*	.19**	.09	.14*
Web-surfing	.10	-.04	.06	-.15**	.03	-.01	.00	.07	.04	-.03	.00
Pleasurable Reading	-.03	.02	.00	.00	-.08	.13*	.04	.04	-.23**	.04	-.06
Other	.42**	.18	.28	-.04	.02	.05	.18	.26	.16	.36*	.25
Organized Play and Games											
Jigsaw Puzzles	.02	.11*	-.02	.12*	.01	.13*	.08	.10	-.05	.08	.09
Word Games	.06	.04	-.07	-.06	.02	.04	.03	.05	.10	.10	.04
Playground Games	.13*	.18**	.06	.11*	.17**	.13*	.11*	.16**	.09	.17**	.19**
Board Games	.01	.07	-.06	.05	.15**	.01	-.02	-.02	-.01	.06	.03
Card Games	.01	.12*	-.04	.11*	.15**	-.05	.01	-.01	.12*	.10	.11*
Games of Chance	-.01	.08	-.01	.05	.14**	-.09	-.01	.03	.12*	.05	.08
Video Games	.09	.02	.10	-.18**	.09	-.22**	.06	.05	.18**	-.04	.03
Interaction-Based Games	.05	.14**	.05	.08	.17*	-.10	.03	.08	.15**	.09	.14**
Party Activities	.27**	.12*	.10	-.19**	.22**	-.07	-.02	.19**	.24**	.11*	.16**
Other	.62**	.08	.67**	.11	-.03	.12	.16	.55**	.17	.29	.46*
Physical Contests / Sports											
Team Sports	.12*	.20**	.12*	.22**	.31**	-.00	-.03	-.01	.36**	.21**	.31**
Individual Sports	.16**	.20**	.12*	.03	.11	.23**	.13*	.11*	.19**	.27**	.23**

Dual Sports	.10	.21**	.05	.11*	.19**	.07	.02	.03	.15**	.15**	.18**
Aquatic Sports	.12*	.19**	.13*	.17**	.15**	.28**	.02	.16**	.15**	.19**	.24**
Fitness Activities	.10	.15**	.10	-.03	.09	.08	.06	.04	.24**	.21**	.18**
Other	.55**	.21	.58**	-.17	.40*	.36	.50**	.61**	.22	.45*	.51**
Dance											
Social Dancing	.33**	.18**	.20**	-.14**	.21**	.05	.03	.23**	.19**	.18**	.21**
Folk / Square	.15**	.15**	.14*	.01	.11*	-.03	-.01	.18**	.11*	.03	.17**
Performance	.16**	.11*	.17**	-.08	.07	-.02	-.05	.14*	.07	.04	.11*
Ballroom	.16**	.08	.10	.02	.06	.05	-.10	.09	-.01	.02	.09
Liturgical	.06	.08	.08	.17**	-.05	.04	-.02	.01	-.07	.06	.09
Other	.56**	.59**	.63**	-.23	.44*	-.11	.13	.67**	.44*	.49*	.55**
Creative / Artistic Activities											
Drawing	.11*	-.01	.15**	-.02	-.05	.07	.11*	.23**	.06	.11*	.12*
Painting	.07	.02	.10	.03	.03	.18**	.07	.24**	.03	.10	.13*
Sculpting	.16**	.04	.14*	-.01	-.00	.08	.06	.19**	.04	.14**	.12*
Writing	.12*	-.03	.14*	-.02	.01	.10	.07	.20**	-.01	.08	.08
Theater	.14**	-.03	.14**	-.06	.02	-.02	.05	.19**	-.00	.06	.08
Music (playing)	.13*	.11*	.11*	.11*	.10	.12*	.02	.19**	.08	.14*	.20**
Music (listening)	.20**	.13*	.16**	-.02	.15**	.06	.08	.19**	.20**	.16**	.21**
Photography	.12*	.13*	.14**	-.05	.07	.25**	.09	.21**	.02	.16**	.14**
Other	.68**	-.01	.77**	-.06	.22	.03	.35	.66**	.22	.52*	.58**

Note. PES = Overall Play Experience Scale Score.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

were significantly correlated with this fifth feature of play, including playground, board, card, interactive, and chance games, as well as party activities.

Reading was the only casual play activity that had a significant positive correlation between frequency of participation and relationship to nature. Greater frequency of participation of two organized games (puzzles and playground activities) and two physical contests (individual and aquatic sports) was significantly and positively correlated with a relationship to nature. Additionally, three creative activities, painting, photography and playing music, had a significant positive correlation with the relationship to nature feature. Conversely, the frequency of playing video games had a significant negative correlation with the relationship to nature feature.

Of all the features of play, relationship to work had the fewest significant correlations with the frequency of participation of any specific activities. The only four activities that had significant correlations between frequency of participation and relationship to work were sociable conversation, playground games, individual sports and drawing.

Nineteen of the thirty-three activities had a significant positive correlation between frequency of participation and the feature of creativity. Notably, greater frequency of participating in every creative and artistic activity had significant positive correlations with creativity. Additionally, participating in four casual play activities, two organized games, two sports and three dance activities were also significantly and positively correlated with creativity.

The ninth feature of play, transformation, had positive correlations with the frequency of participation of all physical contests, though only one creative activity: listening to music. With that, the feature of transformation was positively correlated with frequency of participating in half the casual play activities, five different organized play and game activities, and two dances: social dancing and folk and square dancing.

Similar to transformation, the feature of meaning had a significant positive correlation with the frequency of participation in all physical contests and sports, though only one causal play activity (dabbling), two organized games (playground and party activities) and social dancing. The frequency of participating in five creative activities (drawing, sculpting, music playing, music listening and photography) significantly correlated with the feature of meaning.

While the ‘other’ activities demonstrated the strongest significant relationships (ranging from $r = .36$ to $r = .77$) with the features of play, notable is that frequency of participation in personally selected activities was consistently and significantly correlated with the feature of freedom. Further, aside from ‘other’ activities within the spontaneous and casual play category, all personally identified playful activities significantly and positively correlated with three additional features of play: relation to self, creativity, and the overall PES score.

As originally stated, the frequency of participation of twenty-one of the thirty-three specific activities were significantly positively correlated with the overall play experience score. These specific activities included half the spontaneous and causal play (childish imitations, dabbling, sociable conversation), four organized play and game activities (playground games, card games, interaction-based games, party activities), all physical contests and sports, three dances (social dancing, folk / square dancing, performance dancing) and six of a possible eight creative activities (drawing, painting, sculpting, music playing, music listening, photography).

Enjoyment of Specific Activities and Features of Play

In addition to frequency of participation, participants indicated the degree to which they enjoyed participating in playful activities. Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between specific playful activities and the degree to which participants enjoyed participating in those activities (Table 5.6). The degree of enjoyment of participating in eighteen

Table 5.6*Correlations for Enjoyment of Participation of Playful Activities and Features of Play*

Playful Activities	Freedom	Enjoyment	Relate Self	Relate God	Relate Others	Relate Nature	Relate Work	Creativity	Transform	Meaning	PES
Spontaneous / Casual Play											
Childish Imitations	.13*	.05	.06	-.02	.11	.03	.02	.19**	.05	.05	.11*
Dabble / Fiddle	.19**	.07	.16**	-.09	.08	.10	.04	.23**	.10	.06	.13*
Daydreaming	.10	-.13*	.09	-.14*	.02	.09	-.00	.18**	-.04	.01	.01
Sociable Conversation	.08	.07	-.01	-.08	.18**	.04	.13*	.09	.10	.04	.06
Web-surfing	.01	-.09	-.04	-.15**	-.01	-.08	-.08	.02	.02	-.11	-.07
Pleasurable Reading	.05	.02	.01	-.03	-.00	.23**	.02	.10	-.11*	.06	-.02
Other	.39*	.29	.49**	.24	.03	.39*	.18	.57**	.06	.44**	.45**
Organized Play and Games											
Jigsaw Puzzles	.09	.06	.01	.05	-.02	.15**	.12*	.10	-.08	.02	.05
Word Games	.02	.00	-.07	-.10	.01	.06	-.01	.02	.05	.01	-.03
Playground Games	.07	.08	.04	-.01	.22**	-.01	.09	.13*	.06	.11	.11*
Board Games	.08	.02	-.02	-.10	.09	-.01	.00	-.00	.00	.04	-.01
Card Games	.03	.05	-.01	-.03	.12*	-.02	.03	-.01	.09	.06	.05
Games of Chance	.04	.09	-.03	-.02	.12*	-.13*	-.04	-.01	.13*	.03	.05
Video Games	.10	-.03	.10	-.18**	.09	-.22**	.07	-.02	.18**	-.04	.02
Interaction-Based Games	.09	.15**	.09	.10	.13*	-.11	.03	.13*	.15**	.08	.17**
Party Activities	.30**	.11*	.14**	-.18**	.27**	-.07	.03	.20**	.23**	.17**	.18**
Other	.47*	.02	.54**	-.04	.17	-.08	.22	.55**	.09	.30	.38
Physical Contests / Sports											
Team Sports	.06	.24**	.13*	.22**	.35**	.05	-.03	.02	.33**	.20**	.30**
Individual Sports	.12*	.25**	.14**	.11*	.10	.19**	.19**	.13*	.21**	.27**	.27**

Dual Sports	.08	.23**	.05	.12*	.23**	.05	.06	.06	.11*	.15**	.18**
Aquatic Sports	.09	.25**	.16**	.18**	.26**	.32**	.09	.22**	.11*	.15**	.27**
Fitness Activities	.10	.25**	.12*	.04	.13*	.11	.05	.09	.23**	.22**	.22**
Other	.53**	.25	.58**	.12	.29	.44*	.47*	.54**	.43*	.51**	.60**
Dance											
Social Dancing	.25**	.21**	.20**	-.10	.23**	.10	.07	.22**	.09	.15**	.19**
Folk / Square	.13*	.19**	.13*	.10	.13*	.07	.08	.21**	.11	.05	.21**
Performance	.20**	.09	.14*	-.10	.11	-.01	.01	.17**	.06	.07	.11*
Ballroom	.13*	.13*	.12*	.07	.10	.07	.03	.16**	-.02	.04	.12*
Liturgical	.10	.08	.15**	.18**	.01	.03	.00	.13*	-.02	.09	.16**
Other	.51**	.47**	.51*	-.36	.31	-.18	.16	.59**	.23	.29	.37
Creative / Artistic Activities											
Drawing	.16**	.01	.18**	-.06	-.01	.08	.10	.28**	.06	.13*	.13*
Painting	.13*	.03	.10	-.09	.04	.15**	.13**	.25**	.03	.13*	.10
Sculpting	.24**	.04	.15**	-.14*	.01	.08	.12*	.24**	-.00	.11*	.08
Writing	.13*	-.02	.18**	-.08	.04	.11*	.05	.27**	-.01	.10	.09
Theater	.20**	-.02	.16**	-.01	.10	.06	.04	.20**	-.06	.06	.10
Music (playing)	.16**	.12*	.13*	.06	.09	.08	.04	.20**	.08	.15**	.18**
Music (listening)	.12*	.12*	.13*	-.04	.16**	.01	.08	.17**	.16**	.13*	.16**
Photography	.10	.17**	.11*	-.06	.03	.20**	.11*	.21**	.01	.12*	.11
Other	.70**	.04	.78**	-.05	.25	.10	.53*	.65**	.29	.61**	.64**

Note. PES = Overall Play Experience Scale Score.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

specific activities significantly correlated to the overall PES score. While all physical contests, sports and dance were significantly correlated to the overall PES score, only eight additional activities shared that significance: childish imitations, dabbling, playground games, inter-action-based games, party activities, drawing, and music playing and listening.

From the list of specific activities, word games and board games were not significantly correlated with any feature of play. Conversely, the rate of enjoyment of four activities was significantly correlated with at least seven of the ten features of play: party activities, individual sports, aquatic sports and listening to music.

The feature of freedom was significantly correlated with the enjoyment of participating in most dance and creative activities (except liturgical dance and photography). Similarly, the features of relation to self and creativity were significantly and positively correlated with all dance and creative and artistic activities, with the only exception being that enjoyment of painting was not significantly correlated with relation to self.

The feature of enjoyment, while significantly and negatively correlated with the enjoyment of daydreaming, was significantly and positively correlated to the degree of enjoying all physical contests and sports. Similarly, analyses revealed significant relationships between all physical contests and sports and the features of transformation and meaning. Finally, meaning was also significantly correlated with the enjoyment of participating in six of the eight specific creative and artistic activities.

The relation to God feature showed significant negative relationships with the enjoyment of participating in five specific activities: daydreaming, web-surfing, video games, party activities, and sculpting. On the other hand, the degree of enjoying all physical contests (less fitness activities) had a significant positive correlation with the relation to God feature of play.

Regarding the other relational-oriented features of play, relation to others significantly correlated with the degree of enjoyment of thirteen specific activities, while relation to nature correlated with nine activities. Specifically, relation to nature exhibited significant negative associations with games of chance and video games, and significant positive associations with seven other activities: pleasurable reading, jigsaw puzzles, individual sports, aquatic sports, painting, writing and photography.

As with frequency of participation, the strongest (ranging from $r = .39$ to $r = .78$) correlations were between the 'other' specific play activities and the features of play. In this instance, too, all 'other' playful activities from each play category were significantly and positively correlated with three features of play: freedom, relation to self, and creativity.

Frequency of Play Categories and Features of Play

Aside from calculating Pearson product-moment correlations between the frequency of participation of specific activities and the dimensions of play, the playful activities were also analyzed within their respective groups (spontaneous and casual play, organized play and games, physical contests and sports, dance, and creative and artistic activities) (see Table 5.7). The features of freedom and meaning, as well as the overall PES score, were significantly correlated with all categories of play behaviour. The enjoyment feature was positively correlated with three play categories: organized play, physical contests and dance. Frequency of participation in physical contests and sports was correlated with all features of play except creativity and relationship to work; creativity correlated with all other categories of play. Three of five play categories had significant positive correlations with the transformation feature (less spontaneous play and creative and artistic activities).

Table 5.7

Correlations for the Relationship Between Frequency of Participation of Play Categories and the Features of Play

Features of Play	Spontaneous / Casual Play	Organized Play & Games	Physical Contests & Sports	Dance	Creative / Artistic
Freedom	.23**	.14**	.18**	.27**	.22**
Enjoyment	.06	.17**	.28**	.20**	.07
Relate to Self	.15**	.05	.16**	.22**	.23**
Relate to God	-.11*	-.00	.15**	-.03	-.00
Relate to Others	.10	.21**	.25**	.13*	.07
Relate to Nature	.13*	-.05	.19**	.02	.18**
Relate to Work	.09	.06	.09	-.03	.12*
Creativity	.26**	.13*	.10	.22**	.35**
Transformation	.06	.20**	.33**	.11*	.07
Meaning	.12*	.14**	.31**	.11*	.20**
Overall PES	.13*	.18**	.34**	.21**	.22**

Note. PES = Overall Play Experience Scale Score.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Five different relationship-based features of play showed significant correlations with varying play categories. Greater frequency of participation in four of five play categories (less organized play and games) had a significant positive correlation with the relationship to self feature. The relationship to God feature had a significant negative correlation with spontaneous and casual play and a significant positive correlation with physical contests and sports. Frequency of participation in three play categories had a significant positive correlation with both the relationship to others (i.e., organized play and games, physical contests, and dance) and the relationship to nature (i.e., spontaneous play, physical contests, and creative) features of play. Finally, the only significant correlation between relationship to work and frequency of participation was with creative and artistic activities.

Enjoyment of Play Categories and Features of Play

All play categories except physical contests and sports had significant positive correlations with the creativity feature. Three of five play categories had significant positive

correlations with the transformation feature (less spontaneous play and creative and artistic activities). The relationship between measures of enjoyment in participating in categories of play and the features of play was examined. A summary of these correlations is found in Table 5.8. All categories of playful activity were significantly correlated to the overall PES score except for spontaneous and casual play. While relation to work was only significantly correlated to the enjoyment of participating in creative and artistic activities, all other features of play were significantly correlated to at least two categories of playful activities. Creativity and relation to self, for example, were significantly correlated with the enjoyment of participating in all play categories except for organized play and games. The feature of enjoyment significantly and positively correlated with the enjoyment of physical contests and sports, dance and creative and artistic activities. The relationship between the creativity feature of play and enjoyment in

Table 5.8

Correlations for the Relationship Between Enjoyment of Participation in Play Categories and the Features of Play

Features of Play	Spontaneous / Casual Play	Organized Play & Games	Physical Contests & Sports	Dance	Creative / Artistic
Freedom	.19**	.16**	.10	.21**	.23**
Enjoyment	.03	.10	.33**	.20**	.06
Relate to Self	.11*	.05	.15**	.19**	.20**
Relate to God	-.12*	-.12*	.18**	.03	-.08
Relate to Others	.11*	.20**	.30**	.16**	.07
Relate to Nature	.19**	-.09	.19**	.08	.14*
Relate to Work	.07	.08	.10	.07	.12*
Creativity	.24**	.11	.13*	.26**	.35**
Transformation	.02	.17**	.27**	.07	.03
Meaning	.10	.09	.26**	.11*	.16*
Overall PES	.10	.11*	.33**	.22**	.16**

Note. PES = Overall Play Experience Scale Score.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

creative and artistic activities was the strongest correlation ($r = .35, p < .001$). Aside from that, most of the strongest correlations were found with the enjoyment of participating in physical contests and sports which correlated with all features of play except for freedom and relation to work. The only significant negative correlations occurred between relation to God and two play categories: spontaneous and casual play, and organized play and games.

Frequency and Enjoyment of Overall Play and Features of Play

Finally, relationships between frequency and enjoyment of overall participation in play activities and the features of play were analyzed. Overall 'play frequency' ($M = 2.56, SD = .41$) and 'play enjoyment' ($M = 2.99, SD = .47$) scores were derived by calculating the mean of frequency and enjoyment in participation from the Play Activity Scale. The overall PES score was positively correlated to overall frequency of participation ($r = .34, p = .00$) and overall enjoyment of participation ($r = .29, p = .00$). Overall frequency of participation was also significantly positively correlated with all features of play except relating to God and work (Table 5.9). Additionally, overall enjoyment of participation was positively correlated with all features of play except relating to God.

Motivation and Play Experience Scale

An adapted version of the Behavioural Regulation in Exercise Questionnaire 3 (BREQ-3), developed from the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), was utilized to assess play motivation. Prior to conducting bivariate analysis, missing data analysis revealed 0.28% missing values ($n = 23$) from the BREQ-3 responses. Conduction of Little's MCAR test revealed a non-significant result ($p > .05$), indicating that the missing values were completely random. Generally, when $< 5\%$ data points are missing at random, nearly any method can be utilized to impute missing values (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). In this case, expectation maximum was conducted to impute

Table 5.9

Correlations for the Relationship Between Frequency and Enjoyment of Participation of Overall Play and the Features of Play

Features of Play	Overall Play	
	Frequency of Participation	Enjoyment of Participation
Freedom	.31**	.29**
Enjoyment	.25**	.22**
Relate to Self	.25**	.23**
Relate to God	-.01	-.05
Relate to Others	.25**	.26**
Relate to Nature	.14**	.14**
Relate to Work	.10	.13*
Creativity	.33*	.36**
Transformation	.24**	.18**
Meaning	.28**	.22**
Overall PES	.34**	.29**

Note. PES = Overall Play Experience Scale Score.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

missing values. Following this procedure, the six subscale scores (amotivation, external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, integrated regulation and intrinsic regulation) were determined by calculating the means of subscale items. Though a composite score (i.e., the relative autonomy index) for the BREQ-3 can be computed, recent research provides theoretical and statistical arguments to discourage its usage (Chemolli & Gagne, 2014). Rather, controlled (external and introjected) and autonomous (intrinsic, identified, and integrated) motivations scores were computed (Phillips & Johnson, 2017). Therefore, bivariate analyses were conducted between the six dimensions of SDT and the dichotomy of controlled and autonomous motivation and the overall PES score, and the ten individual features of play.

In addition to the inclusion of the 24 item BREQ-3 survey, participants were also given opportunity to provide written comments in relation to their motivation. Some of these comments were regarding phrasing of the BREQ-3 instrument, while others took the opportunity to clarify

the types of activities they play. Examples included playing with children, theatre, hiking, “meeting friends for coffee to catch up on lives and intellectual discourse,” sport, and music, though one participant noted that “when play (music) becomes a profession, it becomes work.” One participant took the opportunity to critique the term ‘play’: “I recoil from the term ‘play.’ Seems infantile. Recreation would be more accurate for me and perhaps less loaded.” The remaining comments were related to the benefits of play and emotions associated with playing.

Several participants emphasized that their motivation for play was associated with the benefits that come with participating in certain activities. These benefits included “mind, body, social freedom,” as well as the social connections that can be formed through play: “I play to connect with family and friends. It is not the play itself that is important or holds my interest, but rather the people I do it with and the memories we make.” Another benefit one participant desired was to grow in the capacity to simply enjoy himself:

While, I usually don't experience much pleasure from playing, I feel that play is important for life because it develops skills, offers something else to focus on, and represents a value of freedom to be happy. So, I mostly play because I want to and I feel that I should because of the psychological benefits. I guess I play with the hope that I will get better at enjoying myself.

While the BREQ-3 does not specifically ask participants to identify the benefits associated with participation, these responses would be most closely associated with introjected and identified regulation, two components of the self-determination continuum.

Finally, a collection of responses explored the varying degrees of importance of play within participants lives. For one young participant, her play-activity was a reflection of a high degree of integrated regulation: “Theatre is my life. It is who I am as a person and if I didn't

make time for myself to do that, I wouldn't be true to myself." In contrast, a less self-determined motive was described by a young woman: "I feel guilty in playing. Feelings of adulting, responsibilities etc. can lead to guilt for me." Additional feelings of guilt were expressed by a participant who has since changed his prioritization of play:

Play is now a large part of my life as I have transitioned to retirement; however, it was a very small part of my life while working. Sad to think of what I missed by allowing myself to be consumed by work; not missing those opportunities now!

Finally, a participant expressed how his desire to engage in more play was restricted by his current social relationships:

I enjoy and love very social play like board games and team sports and would do it every chance I could...however, I have few friends interested in such things, so I only rarely get to do it, and am forced into much more solitary pursuits.

Collectively then, these additional responses provide additional perspective on participant motives to play, many of which can be closely associated with a dimension of self-determination.

Motivation and Overall Play Experience Scale Score

Correlations between the six SDT regulatory forms and controlled and autonomous categories and the overall PES score were analyzed. The results of these analyses are displayed in Table 5.10. All correlations were statistically significant, and while amotivation was negatively correlated with the overall PES score, all other motivational dimensions were positively correlated. Generally, correlation direction and strength increased along the SDT continuum, except the correlation between the overall PES score and intrinsic motivation ($r = .47, p = .00$) was slightly less compared to the other more self-determined dimensions.

Table 5.10

Correlations for the Relationship Between the Six Dimensions of Motivation and the Overall Play Experience Score

Dimension of Motivation	PES
Amotivation	-.24**
External Regulation	.13*
Introjected Regulation	.50**
Identified Regulation	.55**
Integrated Regulation	.57**
Intrinsic Motivation	.47**
Controlled	.38**
Autonomous	.60**

Note. PES = Overall Play Experience Scale Score.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Motivation and Features of Play

The relationships between self-determination and the ten features of play were also examined, and are displayed in Table 5.11. Generally, amotivation was significantly negatively correlated with eight features of play. External regulation was significantly negatively correlated with relating to work, and significantly positively correlated with transformation. Introjected regulation significantly correlated with all features of play except relation to work. Meanwhile, both identified and intrinsic regulation significantly and positively correlated with all features of play except relation to God, and integrated regulation significantly and positively correlated with all ten features of play. While all features of play significantly correlated with a dimension of motivation, relation to God significantly correlated with the fewest ($n = 2$) dimensions while transformation significantly correlated with all ($n = 6$) dimensions of motivation. While both controlled and autonomous motivation significantly correlated with most features of play, autonomous motivation exhibited more moderate to strong correlations.

Table 5.11*Correlations for the Relationship Between the Six Dimensions of Motivation and the Features of Play*

Features of Play	Amotivation	External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Integrated Regulation	Intrinsic Regulation	Controlled Motivation	Autonomous Motivation
Freedom	-.09	.07	.28**	.37**	.36**	.33**	.22**	.40**
Enjoyment	-.17**	.09	.30**	.36**	.39**	.40**	.24**	.43**
Relate to Self	-.13*	.07	.36**	.46**	.51**	.43**	.26**	.53**
Relate to God	-.06	.06	.16**	.09	.11*	.08	.14**	.11*
Relate to Others	-.15**	.07	.23**	.34**	.26**	.30**	.18**	.33**
Relate to Nature	-.14*	-.04	.19**	.23**	.18**	.20**	.10	.23**
Relate to Work	-.31**	-.20**	.08	.25**	.30**	.27**	-.06	.31**
Creativity	-.13*	.09	.32**	.42**	.43**	.37**	.25**	.46**
Transformation	-.20**	.16**	.43**	.44**	.41**	.30**	.36**	.44**
Meaning	-.41**	-.02	.44**	.55**	.60**	.50**	.26**	.62**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

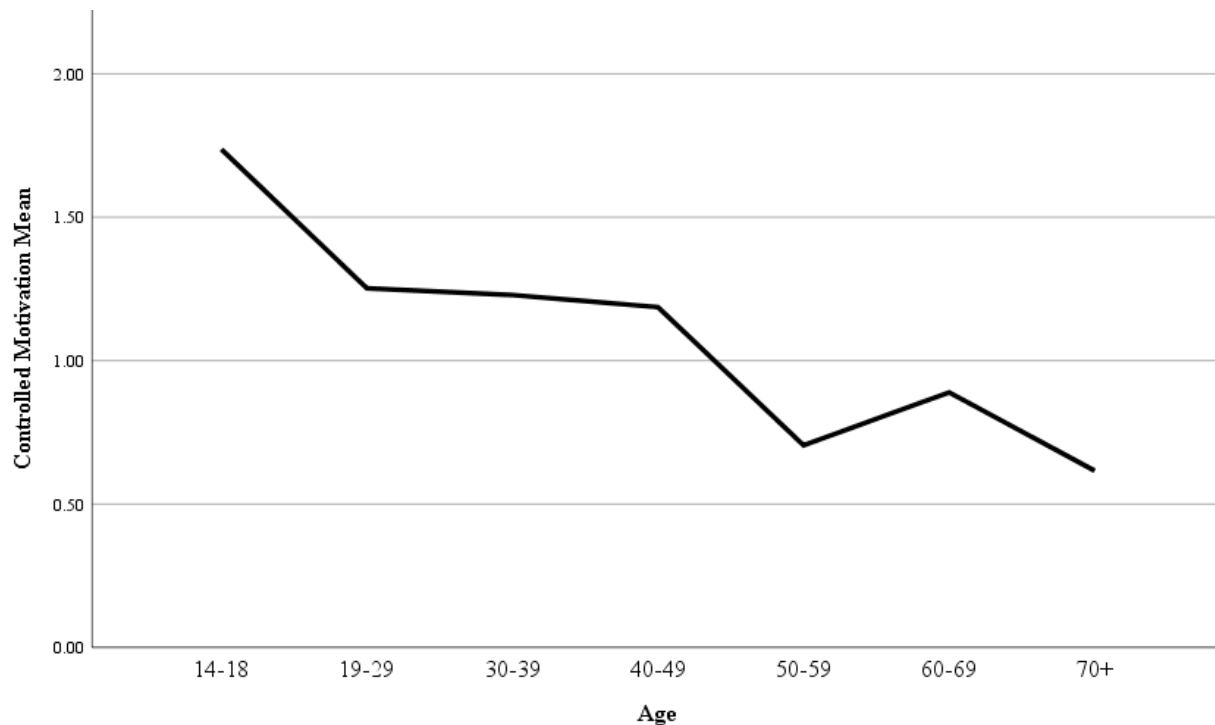
Motivation and Socio-Demographic Variables

Analyses were conducted to explore the relationships between socio-demographic variables and motivation against a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of .01 (0.05/5). An independent samples t-test indicated no significant difference between males and females in relation to the dimensions of motivation.

Analyses of variance indicated significant differences between age groups and levels of motivation on two dimensions of the SDT continuum: external regulation [$F(6,339) = 6.31, p < .001, h^2 = .10$] and introjected regulation [$F(6,339) = 4.84, p < .001, h^2 = .08$]. An additional significant difference was found between age group and controlled motivation [$F(6,339) = 7.70, p < .001, h^2 = .12$]. Overall, participants aged 14-18 expressed significantly more controlled motivation than all age groups (see Figure 5.2). Tukey post hoc tests demonstrated that youth

Figure 5.2

Participant Age and Controlled Motivation



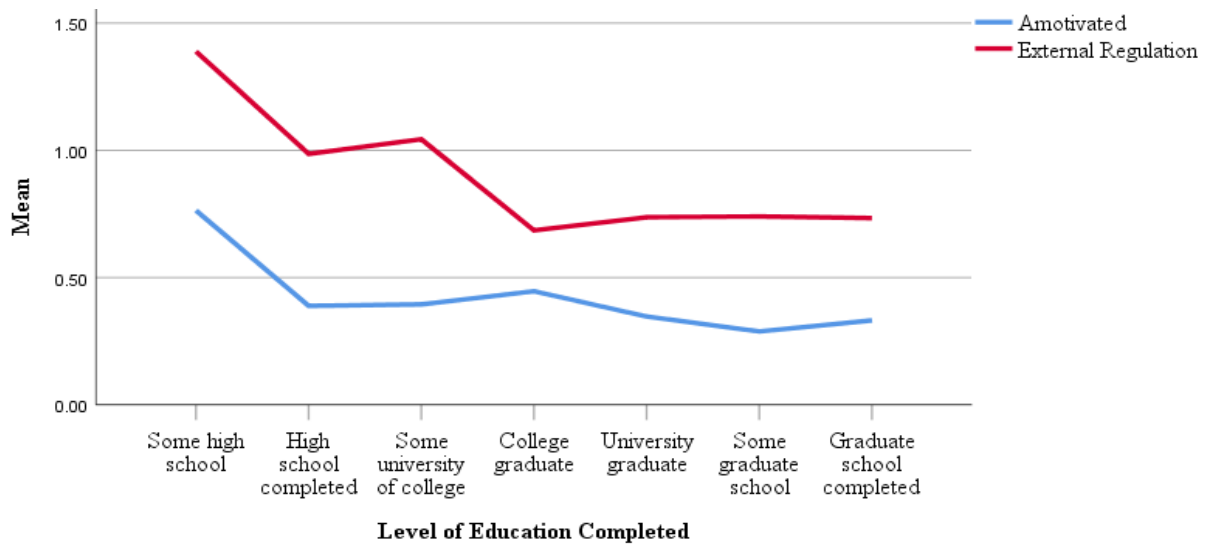
Note. Mean score based on scale (0 = Not True for Me, 4 = Very True for Me).

aged 14-18 reported more amotivation than those aged 30-39 ($M_{diff} = .38$, $SE = .11$, $p = .010$). Youth aged 14-18 also indicated more introjected motivation than those aged 50-59 ($M_{diff} = .1.03$, $SE = .22$, $p < .001$). Together, these results suggest that younger participants demonstrated significantly higher rates of less self-determined behaviour.

These findings were consistent with subsequent ANOVAs that demonstrated that participants' education had a significant impact on amotivation [$F(6,339) = 2.73$, $p = .010$, $h^2 = .04$], external regulation [$F(6,339) = 3.55$, $p = .002$, $h^2 = .06$], introjected regulation [$F(6,339) = 3.43$, $p = .003$, $h^2 = .06$] and controlled motivation [$F(6,339) = 4.711$, $p < .001$, $h^2 = .08$]. Specifically, Tukey post hoc tests demonstrated that those with some high school indicated significantly more amotivation and external regulation than all those with more educational experience (see Figure 5.3). Finally, ANOVAs were conducted to explore the between-group differences of income and marital status on motivation. There was one significant effect of income on motivation, specifically on identified regulation [$F(4,328) = 3.47$, $p = .009$, $h^2 = .04$].

Figure 5.3

Means of Amotivation and External Regulation and Level of Education Completed



Note. Mean score based on scale (0 = Not True for Me, 4 = Very True for Me).

In order to explore that effect, Tukey post hoc tests were conducted and showed that participants earning \$75,000 – 99,999 reported more identified regulation than those earning less than \$25,000 ($M_{diff} = .41$, $SE = .12$, $p = .006$). Lastly, there was a significant effect of marital status on external regulation [$F(3,336) = 5.13$, $p = .002$, $h^2 = .04$]. In this case, participants who have never been married reported significantly more external motivation than those that were married ($M_{diff} = .30$, $SE = .10$, $p = .019$) or separated or divorced ($M_{diff} = .75$, $SE = .28$, $p = .033$). Altogether, participants who have never married, participants aged 14-18, and participants with less educational experience all reported less self-determined motivation.

Dispositional Flow and Play Experience Scale

The tendency for participants to experience flow was assessed using the 9-item Short Dispositional Flow Scale (SDFS-2) (Jackson et al., 2008). Participant responses indicate the frequency with which flow is generally experienced in play. With only 0.03% missing values ($n = 1$), and according to the scale manual (Jackson et al., 2010), the single missing data entry was assigned by averaging participant responses to the remaining scale items. Aggregate Short Flow Scores (SFS) were computed by dividing the summed scale items by nine, resulting in a maximum possible respondent score of five.

The relationship between dispositional flow and the overall PES score and the ten features of play was examined (Table 5.12). The overall PES score was significantly correlated ($r = .45$, $p = .00$) to dispositional flow. The only feature of play that was not significantly correlated to dispositional flow was the relation to God feature. Of the others, the strongest correlation between dispositional flow and the features of play was relating to self ($r = .38$, $p = .00$) while the weakest was relating to nature ($r = .16$, $p = .00$).

Table 5.12*Correlations for the Relationship Between Dispositional Flow and the Features of Play*

Feature of Play	Short Flow Score
Freedom	.32**
Enjoyment	.35**
Relate to Self	.38**
Relate to God	.10
Relate to Others	.27**
Relate to Nature	.16**
Relate to Work	.17**
Creativity	.28**
Transformation	.35**
Meaning	.34**
Overall PES	.45**

Note. PES = Overall Play Experience Scale Score.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Flow and Play Frequency, Play Enjoyment, Socio-Demographic Variables, Motivation and Sources of Spirituality

Dispositional flow correlated with both overall frequency of participation ($r = .28, p < .001$) and enjoyment of participation ($r = .24, p < .001$) in play. While flow did not significantly correlate with frequency or enjoyment of participation in casual play or artistic activities, significant correlations were found between dispositional flow and frequency of participating in organized play and games ($r = .21, p < .001$), physical contests and sports ($r = .35, p < .001$) and dance ($r = .25, p < .001$). Similarly, significant correlations were found between dispositional flow and enjoyment of participating in organized play and games ($r = .17, p = .002$), physical contests and sports ($r = .36, p < .001$) and dance ($r = .20, p < .001$).

Additional tests using a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of .01 (0.05/5) were conducted to gauge variations in flow based on socio-demographic variables. A t-test revealed no significant difference between males and females. A between-group analysis demonstrated a significant effect of age on dispositional flow, $F(6,339) = 2.88, p = .01, h^2 = .05$. A Tukey post hoc test

indicated that youth aged 14-18 ($M = 3.94$, $SD = .49$) reported significantly more ($p = .007$) dispositional flow than participants age 30-39 ($M = 3.63$, $SD = .43$). While there was no significant differences in dispositional flow based on income or marital status, a between-groups ANOVA yielded a statistically significant effect of education levels on flow, $F(6,339) = 3.07$, $p = .006$, $h^2 = .05$. A Tukey post hoc test was used to conduct a post hoc test on the one-way ANOVA. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied based on Levene's F test, $F(6, 339) = .851$, $p = .531$. Specifically, those with some high school reported significantly higher levels of dispositional flow than those that had completed graduate school ($M_{diff} = .41$, $SE = .10$, $p = .001$).

Bivariate analysis was conducted to examine relationships between dispositional flow and motivation. Dispositional flow negatively correlated with amotivation ($r = -.14$, $p = .012$), and positively correlated with introjected ($r = .18$, $p = .001$), identified ($r = .35$, $p < .001$), integrated ($r = .40$, $p < .001$) and intrinsic ($r = .38$, $p < .001$) regulations. Moreover, dispositional flow correlated with autonomous motivation ($r = .42$, $p < .001$).

Finally, correlations between flow and sources of spirituality was examined. Significant positive correlations were found between dispositional flow and nature-spirituality ($r = .17$, $p = .001$) and self-spirituality ($r = .23$, $p < .001$).

Sources of Spirituality and Play Experience Scale

Sources of spirituality was measured using Davis et al.'s (2015) Sources of Spirituality (SOS) scale, which categorizes five sources of spirituality: theistic, nature, human, transcendent and self. Missing value analysis revealed 0.7% ($n = 44$) values were missing. Following Davis et al.'s recommendations, given that less than 5% of data were missing, subscale means were

utilized to impute missing values. Once missing values were imputed, subscale means were computed prior to bivariate analyses.

The relationship between sources of spirituality and the features of play was examined (see Table 5.13 for summary). The overall PES score was significantly and positively correlated with all dimensions of spirituality, with the strongest correlations occurring with transcendent and self-spirituality. The latter, self-spirituality, was significantly and positively correlated with all features of play, while nature spirituality with nine features, human spirituality with eight features, transcendent spirituality with seven features and theistic spirituality with five features of play. The only two significant negative correlations occurred between theistic spirituality and the features of freedom and relation to work.

The five sources of spirituality share common theoretical foundations as the relationship-oriented features of play. As such, theistic spirituality correlated most strongly with relation to

Table 5.13

Correlations for the Relationship Between Sources of Spirituality and the Features of Play

Features of Play	Theistic	Nature	Human	Transcend	Self
Freedom	-.14**	.28**	.23**	.11**	.22**
Enjoyment	.15**	.27**	.20**	.21**	.28**
Relate to Self	.01	.35**	.31**	.23**	.31**
Relate to God	.82**	.04	.01	.45**	.17**
Relate to Others	.03	.19**	.15**	.13*	.21**
Relate to Nature	.19**	.46**	.23**	.26**	.34**
Relate to Work	-.13*	.24**	.14**	.10	.10*
Creativity	.01	.40**	.36**	.33**	.32**
Transformation	.01	.13*	.07	.06	.18**
Meaning	-.07	.25**	.15**	.07	.22**
Overall PES Score	.28**	.37**	.28**	.38**	.38**

Note. PES = Play Experience Scale.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

God ($r = .82, p = .00$), as did transcendent spirituality ($r = .45, p = .00$). Likewise, nature spirituality correlated most strongly with the relation to nature feature of play ($r = .46, p = .00$). Human spirituality, which was described as closeness or connection to humanity, was most strongly positively correlated with creativity, followed by relation to self. Finally, self-spirituality, characterized as a sense of authenticity and integrity, most strongly positively correlated with relation to nature, creativity and relation to self.

Socio-demographic Variables and Play Experience Scale

A series of t-tests were conducted to examine the effects of six socio-demographic variables (religious affiliation, gender, age, income, marital status, and education) and the features of play. A Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of .008 was utilized to assess significance.

Religious Affiliation and Features of Play

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the effect of religious affiliation on the overall PES score. An analysis of variance showed that the effect of religious affiliation on the overall PES score was significant [$F(5, 339) = 5.02, p < .001, h^2 = .07$]. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied based on Levene's F test, $F(5, 339) = 1.27, p = .28$. In order to conduct post hoc tests, the single Jewish respondent was removed from analyses. A Tukey post hoc test revealed a significant difference ($p < .05$) in the overall PES score between Christians ($M = 3.73, SD = .42$) and Buddhists ($M = 3.30, SD = .57$) and those that indicated no religious affiliation ($M = 3.54, SD = .44$). Further, there was a significant difference between Sikhs ($M = 3.76, SD = .52$) and Buddhists ($p = .03$).

Additional one-way ANOVA tests revealed significant differences between religious affiliation and two features of play: relation to God and relation to nature. See Table 5.14 for summary of the data. Post hoc analyses using the Tukey post hoc criterion indicated that

Table 5.14*Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance for the Effects of Religious Affiliation on the Features of Play*

Features of Play	Christian		Muslim		Sikhism		Buddhism		No Religion		Other		F (5, 339)	p	h ²
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Freedom	3.87	.52	4.03	.51	4.08	.63	3.85	.75	4.15	.52	4.02	.77	3.01	.011	.04
Enjoyment	3.50	.46	3.63	.44	3.50	.60	3.20	.51	3.39	.56	3.34	.62	1.64	.150	.02
Relate to Self	3.56	.71	3.87	.92	3.75	.80	3.24	1.09	3.72	.71	3.62	.75	1.51	.185	.02
Relate to God	3.94	.74	3.73	.77	3.20	.64	2.31	.64	1.96	.73	2.36	1.00	86.05	< .001**	.56
Relate to Others	3.92	.67	3.90	.55	4.04	.60	3.27	.90	4.01	.64	3.87	.49	2.81	.017	.04
Relate to Nature	4.29	.73	4.60	.52	3.67	1.03	3.87	.84	4.04	.98	4.00	1.11	4.66	< .001**	.06
Relate to Work	3.00	.99	3.10	1.20	2.92	1.17	3.07	1.14	3.38	1.11	3.52	.94	2.41	.036	.03
Creativity	3.61	.67	3.75	.89	3.84	.67	3.51	.82	3.71	.67	3.78	.59	1.10	.358	.02
Transformation	3.78	.66	3.85	.50	3.91	.66	3.54	.73	3.75	.77	3.58	.73	1.03	.401	.02
Meaning	3.86	.57	4.03	.67	3.77	.67	3.54	.69	3.96	.63	3.76	.63	1.51	.185	.02

** $p < .008$.

Christians reported a significantly higher relation to God score than each of the other religious affiliations except for Muslims ($p < .001$). Similarly, Muslims and Sikhs reported a significantly higher relation to God score than Buddhists and those ascribing to no or 'other' religious practices ($p < .001$). Finally, there was a significant difference between Sikhism and both Christianity ($p = .001$) and Muslims ($p = .027$) regarding the relation to nature feature of play.

Gender and Features of Play

A T-test indicated that there was no significant difference between males and females on the overall PES score. Relation to nature was the only feature of play that showed a significant difference between males and females: males ($M = 3.93$, $SD = .99$) demonstrated significantly lower relation to nature scores than females ($M = 4.26$, $SD = .79$), $t(343) = 3.4$, $p = .001$.

Age and Features of Play

An analysis of variance demonstrated a significant difference between participant age and overall PES score [$F(5, 339) = 3.86$, $p = .001$, $h^2 = .06$] (see Figure 5.4), as well as with three features of play: freedom [$F(5, 339) = 4.65$, $p < .001$, $h^2 = .08$], relation to others [$F(5, 339) = 5.90$, $p < .001$, $h^2 = .10$], and transformation [$F(5, 339) = 7.15$, $p < .001$, $h^2 = .11$]. A Tukey post hoc test revealed that the average overall PES score was significantly higher for participants aged 14-18 ($M = 3.80$, $SD = .43$) than for those aged 50-59 ($M = 3.48$, $SD = .46$) ($p = .021$). A visual depiction of the means and 95% confidence intervals is presented in Figure 5.4. Further, 50-59-year-olds demonstrated significantly lower freedom scores than 14-18-year-olds ($p = .001$) and 19-29-year-olds ($p = .003$). Similarly, younger participants aged 14-18 ($p = .011$) and 19-29 ($p = .001$) indicated significantly higher relation to others scores than older participants aged 60-69. Finally, there was a significant difference between participants aged 14-18 ($p = .001$) and 19-29

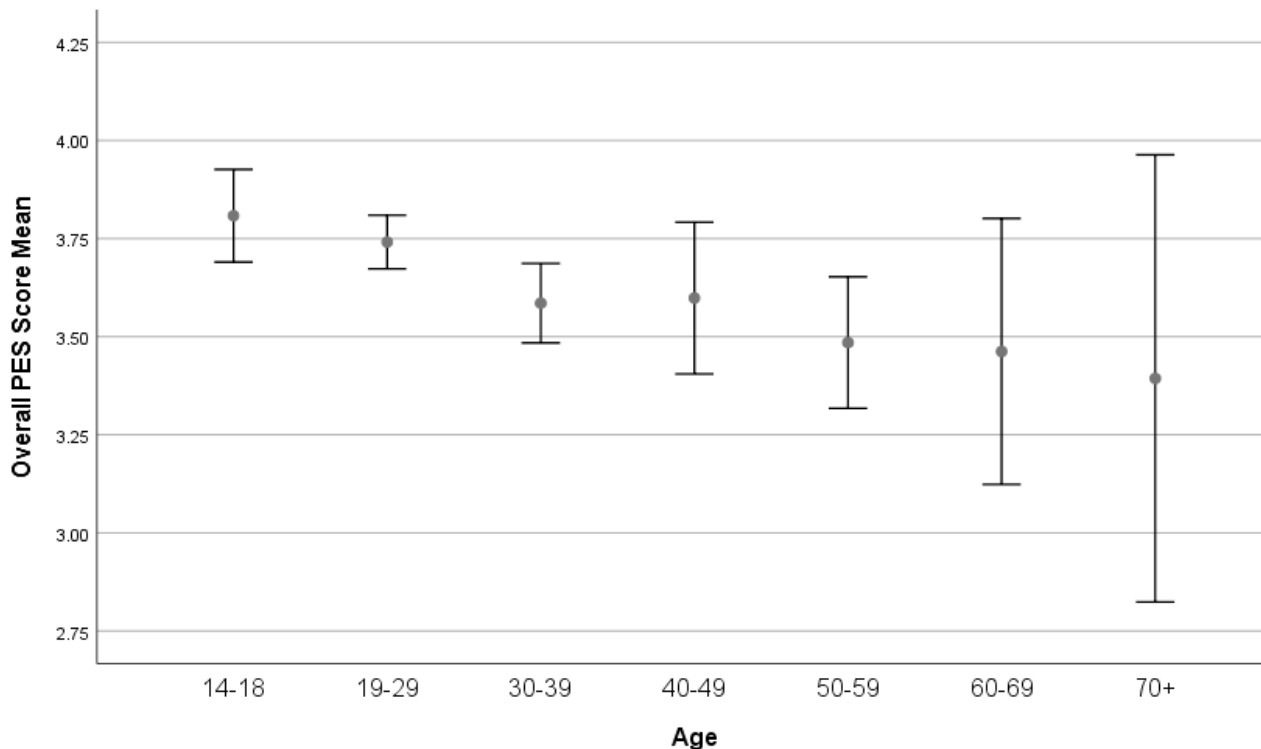
($p = .006 - .019$) and all those aged 30-59 in the transformation feature of play, where the younger aged participants indicated higher transformation in each case.

Income and Features of Play

A subsequent one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the relationships between participant income and the features of play. Between group comparisons for income and the overall PES score was significant, $F(4, 328) = 3.76, p = .005, h^2 = .04$. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied for each feature of play and the overall PES score. Tukey post hoc tests indicated that participants in the lowest income bracket of \$0-24,999 ($M = 3.84, SD = .39$) demonstrated significantly higher overall PES scores than participants in

Figure 5.4

Means of Overall PES Score According to Age



Note. Error bars: 95% CI.

the two highest income brackets of \$50,000 – 99,999 ($M = 3.84$, $SD = .39$, $p = .006$) and more than \$100,000 ($M = 3.60$, $SD = .49$, $p = .013$).

Analysis of variance also indicated that, of the individual features of play, only transformation [$F(4, 328) = 3.51$, $p = .008$, $h^2 = .04$] indicated significant difference between levels of income based on a Bonferroni adjusted alpha value. Post hoc analyses revealed that the feature of transformation was experienced more with participants in the lowest income bracket ($M = 4.02$, $SD = .64$) than those within the \$25,000 – 49,999 ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .70$), \$75,000 – 99,999 ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .71$) and over \$100,000 ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .68$) income brackets.

Marital Status and Features of Play

Given the relatively few widow participants ($n = 2$), their responses were removed in order to analyze the relationships between marital status and the features of play. An analysis of variance showed that the effect of marital status on the overall PES score was significant, $F(3, 336) = 4.89$, $p = .002$, $h^2 = .04$. Additionally, the effect of marital status on five of the nine features of play was significant (see Table 5.15). The assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied for the overall PES score and all features of play except creativity. Tukey post hoc analyses revealed several specific significant relationships between marital status and the features of play, though the most common significant difference was between the married and never married groups. This was demonstrated in the overall PES score ($p = .008$) as well as three features of play: freedom ($p < .001$), relation to God ($p = .006$), and transformation ($p < .001$). For each of those features, except for relation to God, the never married participants experienced more significant effects than the married participants. Regarding the relation to God feature, married participants showed significantly higher effects than participants that indicated a common law ($p = .006$) or separated ($p = .013$) marital status. Finally, never married participants

Table 5.15

Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance for the Effects of Marital Status on the Features of Play

Features of Play	Married		Common Law		Separated		Never Married		F	p	h ²
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD			
Freedom	3.82	.58	3.95	.55	4.00	.64	4.11	.52	7.16	<.001**	.06
Enjoyment	3.44	.50	3.29	.71	3.13	.39	3.52	.50	3.14	.026	.03
Relate to Self	3.53	.76	3.57	.92	3.76	.91	3.72	.69	1.88	.133	.02
Relate to God	3.41	1.07	2.55	.99	2.36	1.12	3.27	1.12	6.19	<.001**	.05
Relate to Others	3.82	.69	3.93	.85	3.39	.66	4.06	.57	6.00	.001**	.05
Relate to Nature	4.22	.74	4.25	1.02	4.36	.67	4.06	.96	1.20	.310	.01
Relate to Work	3.10	1.00	3.40	1.19	3.45	1.04	3.09	1.09	.88	.451	.01
Creativity	3.63	.72	3.71	.87	3.86	.80	3.71	.60	.64	.592	.00
Transformation	3.57	.68	3.84	.69	3.55	.79	3.94	.64	8.06	<.001**	.07
Meaning	3.77	.59	3.94	.70	3.75	.70	3.95	.58	2.64	.050	.04
Overall PES Score	3.60	.45	3.55	.55	3.47	.54	3.76	.41	4.89	.002**	.02

Note. F = 3, 336

** $p < .008$.

indicated significantly higher effects with the relation to others feature of play than separated or divorced participants ($p = .006$).

Education and Features of Play

A one-way ANOVA demonstrated a statistically significant difference between educational groups and the overall PES score, $F(6, 333) = 3.84$, $p = .001$, $h^2 = .07$. Once the assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied, a Tukey post hoc test indicated a significant difference ($p < .05$) in the overall PES score between participants with some high school completed ($M = 3.85$, $SD = .45$) and college graduates ($M = 3.51$, $SD = .34$).

In addition, analyses between educational groups and the ten features of play revealed significant differences in transformation [$F(6, 333) = 3.82, p = .001, h^2 = .06$]. Assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and satisfied the feature of transformation. Therefore, a Tukey post hoc test was conducted to explore variance within education levels and the feature of transformation. The only significant effect ($p = .004$) regarding the feature of transformation was found between graduate school graduates ($M = 3.52, SD = .73$) and participants with only some university and college completed ($M = 4.00, SD = .65$).

Inferential Statistics: Christians and Non-Christians

Several analyses were conducted to compare Christians ($n = 187$) and non-Christians ($n = 159$) in relation to the features of play. While a primary research question aimed to specifically address how the features of play differ between these groups, additional analyses were conducted to explore differences in frequency and enjoyment of participating in playful activities, motivation, flow and sources of spirituality.

Christians and Non-Christians and the Features of Play

In order to explore the differences between Christians and non-Christians on the features of play, independent sample t-tests were conducted. Full t-test results are displayed in Table 5.16. While the effect was relatively small ($d = 0.32$), the Christian sample ($M = 3.73, SD = .42$) indicated significantly higher overall PES scores than the non-Christian sample ($M = 3.59, SD = .48$), $t(344) = 2.97, p = .003$. In addition, t-tests indicated four features of play were significantly different between the two groups. For two of those features, freedom and relation to work, non-Christians reported significantly greater effects than Christians. In the Christian sample, 34.2% of participants agreed and 33.2% of participants disagreed that play is less important than work. In contrast, for the participants who did not associate with Christianity, 27.1% of participants

Table 5.16*Christian and Non-Christian Differences for the Features of Play*

Features of Play	Christians		Non-Christians		<i>t</i> (344)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Freedom	3.87	.52	4.08	.61	3.44	.001**	0.37
Enjoyment	3.50	.46	3.41	.57	1.67	.096	0.18
Relate to Self	3.56	.71	3.69	.79	1.49	.136	0.16
Relate to God	3.94	.74	2.47	.95	15.93	<.001**	1.32
Relate to Others	3.91	.67	3.94	.64	.33	.74	0.04
Relate to Nature	4.29	.73	3.97	1.00	3.31	.001**	0.36
Relate to Work	3.01	.99	3.26	1.11	2.19	.028*	0.24
Creativity	3.61	.67	3.75	.68	1.82	.07	0.20
Transformation	3.78	.66	3.75	.72	.42	.67	0.05
Meaning	3.86	.57	3.85	.65	.18	.86	0.02
Overall PES Score	3.73	.42	3.59	.48	2.96	.003**	0.32

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

agreed and 44.6% disagreed that play is less important than work. The results further indicated that Christians experienced more relation to nature ($p = .001$). As well, a t-test revealed a significant difference in the relation to God feature of play, where Christians exhibited significantly higher effects than non-Christians. The effect size for the analysis on relation to God ($d = 1.32$) was found to exceed the convention for a large effect (Cohen, 1988; Field, 2009).

Christians and Non-Christians and Playful Activity

Comparisons in Frequency of Participation

In order to compare levels of playfulness between Christians and non-Christians, independent sample t-tests were conducted to explore relationships in frequency of participation within specific activities, play categories, and overall play frequency. A test on overall frequency of participation was found to be statistically significant, $t(344) = 2.17$, $p = .031$, $d = .23$.

Specifically, non-Christians ($M = 2.61$, $SD = .44$) indicated a greater frequency of participating in play than Christians ($M = 2.52$, $SD = .38$). Regarding categories of play behaviour, non-Christians participated in significantly greater frequency in spontaneous and casual play as well as within dance (Table 5.17). For dance, the effect size ($d = 0.61$) was moderate.

The differences between Christians and non-Christians in the frequency of participating in specific playful activities was also examined (Table 5.18). Of the thirty-three specific activities included within the Playful Activities Scale, independent sample t-tests revealed significant differences in the frequency of participating in fifteen activities. Additionally, non-Christians indicated greater frequency of participation in three collections of activities defined as ‘other’: spontaneous and casual play, organized play and games and dance. Overall, discounting the ‘other’ activities, the three most frequently participated activities were the same for Christians and non-Christians: listening to music, sociable conversation and web-surfing.

Regarding the collection of specific spontaneous and casual play activities, non-Christians demonstrated significantly higher frequencies of participation than Christians in three activities: childish imitations, dabbling and fiddling, and web-surfing. Within the organized play

Table 5.17

Christian and Non-Christian Differences in Frequency of Participating in Categories of Play

Features of Play	Christians		Non-Christians		$t(343)$	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Spontaneous / Casual Play	3.31	.51	3.46	.59	2.43	.016*	0.26
Organized Play / Games	2.41	.52	2.40	.59	.02	.981	0.00
Physical Contests / Sports	2.93	.80	2.79	.87	1.47	.143	0.16
Dance	1.40	.46	1.81	.80	5.64	<.001**	0.61
Creative / Artistic Activities	2.47	.65	2.57	.66	1.35	.179	0.15

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 5.18*Christian and Non-Christian Differences in Frequency of Participating in Playful Activities*

Features of Play	Christians		Non-Christians		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Spontaneous / Casual Play							
Childish Imitations	2.57	.94	2.80	1.16	2.01	.045*	.22
Dabbling / Fiddling	2.77	1.03	3.06	1.15	2.41	.017*	.26
Daydreaming	3.39	.99	3.52	1.00	1.13	.262	.12
Sociable Conversation	4.04	.75	4.12	.90	.85	.390	.09
Web-surfing	3.79	.94	4.07	.91	2.75	.006**	.29
Pleasurable Reading	3.32	1.04	3.11	1.27	1.71	.088	.19
'Other'	3.19	1.39	4.19	1.17	2.39	.021*	.72
Organized Play / Games							
Jigsaw Puzzles	2.06	.89	1.83	.78	2.53	.012*	.27
Word Games	2.56	1.05	2.44	1.03	1.07	.287	.12
Playground Games	2.03	.85	1.98	.90	.540	.590	.06
Board Games	3.01	.95	2.74	.92	2.68	.008**	.29
Card Games	3.26	1.00	2.99	1.03	2.48	.014*	.27
Games of Chance	1.86	.90	1.76	.86	1.01	.315	.11
Video Games	2.12	1.10	2.61	1.34	3.70	<.001**	.39
Interaction-based Games	2.58	.85	2.48	1.08	.96	.338	.11
Party Games	2.15	1.04	2.70	1.24	4.38	<.001**	.47
'Other' Games	2.82	1.33	3.80	1.08	2.08	.049*	.77
Physical Contests / Sports							
Team Sports	3.19	1.48	2.77	1.55	2.55	.011*	.27
Individual Sports	3.14	1.17	3.03	1.34	.79	.433	.09
Dual Sports	2.10	1.01	2.01	1.06	.85	.394	.09
Aquatic Sports	2.88	1.07	2.49	1.13	3.27	.001**	.35
Fitness Activities	3.27	1.22	3.56	1.18	2.20	.029*	.24
'Other' Contests / Sports	3.33	1.35	3.85	1.21	1.05	.302	.40
Dance							
Social Dancing	1.92	.94	2.69	1.28	6.36	<.001**	.65
Folk / Square Dancing	1.35	.58	1.84	1.33	4.27	<.001**	.48
Performance	1.15	.58	1.74	1.30	5.26	<.001**	.58
Ballroom Dancing	1.19	.44	1.31	.70	1.88	.061	.21
Liturgical Dancing	1.38	.97	1.28	.72	1.02	.308	.11
'Other' Dancing	1.88	1.64	3.94	1.63	2.99	.006**	1.11
Creative / Artistic Activities							
Drawing	2.37	1.14	2.48	1.06	.94	.348	.11
Painting	1.95	1.09	2.06	1.01	.98	.329	.11
Sculpting	1.43	.73	1.51	.76	1.06	.291	.10
Writing	2.65	1.30	2.78	1.31	.85	.345	.11
Theater	1.65	.94	1.88	1.22	2.00	.047*	.00
Music (playing)	2.55	1.47	2.37	1.40	1.15	.252	.34
Music (listening)	4.36	.84	4.42	.92	.69	.488	.14
Photography	2.78	1.12	2.98	1.29	1.54	.124	.05
'Other' Creative / Artistic	3.58	1.56	3.90	1.20	.52	.606	.66

Note. Degree of freedom were 343 except for 'other' categories, which ranged from 20 – 40. Christians *n* = 187, non-Christians *n* = 159.

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

and games group of activities, while Christians reported greater frequencies of participating in jigsaw puzzles, board games and card games, non-Christians indicated greater participation frequency in two specific activities: video games and party games. Additional statistically significant between-group differences were found with three physical contests and sports; while Christians indicated greater frequency of participation in team and aquatic sports, non-Christians participation frequency was higher in fitness activities. The dance category revealed the largest effect sizes and significant differences between groups, where non-Christians reported greater frequency of participating in three specific dances: social, folk and square, and performance dance. Finally, theatre was the only creative and artistic activity that demonstrated significant difference between groups, where non-Christians reported higher frequency of participation, though the effect size was extremely small ($d = .00$).

Comparisons in Enjoyment of Participation

Aside from frequency of participation, t-tests were conducted to examine the differences in levels of enjoyment in participating in playful activities. An independent sample t-test on overall enjoyment of participation was found to be statistically significant, $t(342) = 2.57$, $p = .011$, $d = .28$. Specifically, non-Christians ($M = 3.06$, $SD = .48$) indicated a slightly greater enjoyment of participating in play than Christians ($M = 2.93$, $SD = .47$). Additional t-tests were conducted to examine differences in enjoyment of participating within the categories of playful activities (Table 5.19). Though exhibiting small effect sizes, results indicate that non-Christians reported higher degrees of enjoyment in participating in dance and creative and artistic activities. Numerous t-tests were conducted in order to explore the differences between Christians and non-Christians in the enjoyment of participating in specific playful activities (Table 5.20). Test results showed significant differences between Christians and non-Christians in the enjoyment of

Table 5.19*Christian and Non-Christian Differences in Enjoyment of Participating in Categories of Play*

Features of Play	Christians		Non-Christians		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Spontaneous / Casual Play	3.27	.57	3.39	.61	1.94	.053	.21
Organized Play / Games	2.91	.58	3.02	.65	1.60	.107	.18
Physical Contests / Sports	3.48	.84	3.37	.96	1.12	.262	.12
Dance	2.06	.93	2.34	.98	2.63	.009**	.29
Creative / Artistic Activities	2.89	.80	3.07	.82	1.99	.048*	.22

Note. Degrees of freedom ranged from 339 to 342.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

participating in twelve of the thirty-three activities. The only significant result regarding the 'other' self-defined playful activities occurred within the dance category, where non-Christians reported significantly more enjoyment than Christians ($p = .008$, $d = 1.02$). The three most enjoyed activities for Christians and non-Christians alike were listening to music, sociable conversation, and pleasurable reading.

Of the twelve activities that showed significant difference in degrees of enjoyment, three fell within the spontaneous and casual play category; while Christians reported more enjoyment in pleasurable reading, non-Christians reported more enjoyment in childish imitations and web-surfing. Test results demonstrated that two organized play and game activities showed a significant difference between groups, where non-Christians enjoyed participating in video games and party games more than Christians. While team and aquatics sports were enjoyed significantly more by Christians, non-Christians reported higher degrees of enjoying fitness activities. The four remaining significant differences revealed that non-Christians enjoyed social dancing, performance dancing, painting and sculpting more than Christians.

Table 5.20*Christian and Non-Christian Differences in Frequency of Enjoyment in Playful Activities*

Features of Play	Christians		Non-Christians		<i>t</i> (344)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Spontaneous / Casual Play							
Childish Imitations	2.62	1.09	2.96	1.26	2.70	.007**	.29
Dabbling / Fiddling	2.49	.93	2.69	.98	1.91	.056	.21
Daydreaming	3.20	1.00	3.39	1.02	1.76	.080	.19
Sociable Conversation	4.02	.78	4.13	.88	1.22	.222	.13
Web-surfing	3.13	.87	3.48	.99	3.50	.001**	.38
Pleasurable Reading	3.97	1.01	3.71	1.26	2.13	.034*	.23
'Other'	3.70	1.51	4.33	.90	1.69	.099	.47
Organized Play / Games							
Jigsaw Puzzles	2.71	1.18	2.58	1.17	1.01	.312	.11
Word Games	3.08	1.09	2.95	1.14	1.00	.317	.11
Playground Games	2.57	1.02	2.77	1.11	1.78	.077	.19
Board Games	3.51	1.00	3.54	1.06	.33	.744	.04
Card Games	3.64	1.05	3.67	1.05	.24	.810	.03
Games of Chance	2.16	1.09	2.20	1.11	.39	.697	.04
Video Games	2.60	1.24	3.05	1.40	3.07	.002**	.34
Interaction-based Games	3.28	1.04	3.09	1.14	1.58	.114	.17
Party Games	2.56	1.27	3.14	1.40	4.03	<.001**	.43
'Other' Games	3.45	1.70	4.00	1.31	.93	.363	.37
Physical Contests / Sports							
Team Sports	3.81	1.38	3.44	1.45	2.39	.018*	.26
Individual Sports	3.57	1.14	3.46	1.30	.80	.426	.09
Dual Sports	2.96	1.20	2.86	1.33	.75	.452	.08
Aquatic Sports	3.72	1.11	3.35	1.30	2.71	.007**	.30
Fitness Activities	3.32	1.20	3.62	1.25	2.22	.027*	.24
'Other' Contests / Sports	3.54	1.39	3.67	1.59	.23	.823	.09
Dance							
Social Dancing	2.79	1.33	3.43	1.37	4.27	<.001**	.46
Folk / Square Dancing	2.21	1.23	2.38	1.49	1.09	.279	.12
Performance	1.57	1.05	2.20	1.47	4.30	<.001**	.48
Ballroom Dancing	1.84	1.13	1.85	1.22	.04	.971	.00
Liturgical Dancing	1.64	1.15	1.58	1.06	.52	.604	.06
'Other' Dancing	2.42	1.78	4.24	1.39	2.96	.008**	1.02
Creative / Artistic Activities							
Drawing	2.63	1.32	2.90	1.24	1.93	.054	.21
Painting	2.44	1.32	2.78	1.26	2.41	.017*	.26
Sculpting	1.99	1.20	2.36	1.28	2.70	.007**	.30
Writing	2.72	1.32	2.92	1.39	1.38	.168	.15
Theater	2.40	1.37	2.50	1.49	.64	.520	.07
Music (playing)	3.16	1.43	3.05	1.51	.74	.460	.08
Music (listening)	4.44	.78	4.53	.80	1.03	.306	.11
Photography	3.25	1.18	3.35	1.28	.78	.439	.09
'Other' Creative / Artistic	3.83	1.47	4.10	1.29	.45	.659	.20

Note. Degree of freedom ranged from 320 to 340 except for 'other' categories, which ranged from 20 to 40. Christians *n* = 187, non-Christians *n* = 159.

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

Christians and Non-Christians and Motivation, Flow and Sources of Spirituality

Independent sample t-tests were conducted to explore differences in motivation, flow and sources of spirituality between Christians and non-Christians. No significant differences were found for motivation and flow. Meanwhile, four of the five measures of sources of spirituality demonstrated significant difference between groups. There was a significant difference in the scores for theistic spirituality [$t(341) = 17.33, p < .001, d = 1.37$], nature-based spirituality [$t(343) = 2.17, p = .030, d = .24$], transcendent spirituality [$t(342) = 3.77, p < .001, d = .40$] and human spirituality [$t(342) = 4.39, p < .001, d = .46$]. Specifically, Christians indicated higher affiliation with theistic ($M_{\text{diff}} = 2.02, SE = 0.12$) and transcendent spirituality ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.40, SE = 0.11$), while non-Christians indicated higher affiliation with nature ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.22, SE = 0.10$) and human ($M_{\text{diff}} = 0.46, SE = 0.11$) sources of spirituality.

Inferential Statistics: Christian Sport Participants

One of the central research questions was to explore how play is experienced by Christians in organized, competitive sport. For the purposes of these analyses, a Christian within organized, competitive sport was defined as a participant who indicated often or very often frequency of participation within team sports, individual sports or dual sports based on responses to the Playful Activities Scale. A high frequency of participation is characteristic of organized sport environments, and given that several sporting organizations were recruited to distribute the survey, it was accepted that participants that selected 'often' or 'very often' participation in team, individual or dual sports could be considered as involved in competitive sport. Excluded from the 'sport participant' group were Christians involved in aquatic or fitness activities. Based on this definition of sport participant, the Christian sample ($n = 187$) was categorized into four

groups for inferential statistical analyses: team sport participants ($n = 89$), individual sport participants ($n = 73$), dual sport participants ($n = 64$) and overall sport participants ($n = 131$).

Christian Sport Participants and the Features of Play

A series of t-tests were conducted to explore how the features of play are experienced by Christian sport participants. Sport participants ($M = 3.69$, $SD = .46$) reported significantly higher overall PES scores than non-participants ($M = 3.39$, $SD = .46$), $t(185) = 2.91$, $p = .004$, $d = .46$. Further, of the ten features of play, sport participants indicated significantly higher effects than non-participants on four specific features: enjoyment [$t(185) = 2.78$, $p = .006$, $d = .44$], relation to others [$t(185) = 3.09$, $p = .002$, $d = .48$], transformation [$t(185) = 3.10$, $p = .002$, $d = .48$], and meaning [$t(185) = 3.34$, $p = .001$, $d = .52$]. This is in contrast to the non-Christian sport participants who indicate significantly higher effects on seven of the ten features of play.

Additional t-tests were conducted to examine differences within the team sport, individual sport and dual sport sub-groups. The results for the comparative analysis between team sport participants and non-participants is summarized in Table 5.21. Notably, team sport participants reported significantly higher scores on six features of play: freedom, enjoyment, relation to self, relation to others, transformation and meaning. In addition, team sport participants indicated significantly higher measures on the overall PES score, with a medium-to-large effect ($d = .67$).

Subsequent results from an independent t-test indicated a significant difference between individual sport participants ($M = 3.81$, $SD = .42$) and non-participants ($M = 3.68$, $SD = .41$) on overall PES scores, $t(185) = 2.10$, $p = .037$, $d = .31$. Further, individual sport participants scored significantly higher than non-participants on three features of play: enjoyment [$t(185) = 2.44$, $p = .015$, $d = .36$], relation to nature [$t(185) = 2.49$, $p = .014$, $d = .37$], and meaning [$t(185) = 2.59$, $p = .011$, $d = .38$].

Table 5.21*Christian Team Sport Participant and Non-Participant Differences for the Features of Play*

Features of Play	Sport		Non-Sport		<i>t</i> (185)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Freedom	3.95	.51	3.80	.53	2.06	.041*	.30
Enjoyment	3.60	.42	3.41	.48	2.80	.006**	.40
Relate to Self	3.68	.68	3.46	.73	2.06	.041*	.30
Relate to God	4.04	.71	3.86	.75	1.66	.098	.24
Relate to Others	4.16	.51	3.70	.72	5.09	<.001**	.69
Relate to Nature	4.31	.81	4.27	.65	.46	.645	.07
Relate to Work	3.04	1.05	2.97	.94	.52	.604	.08
Creativity	3.69	.66	3.55	.68	1.40	.163	.20
Transformation	4.05	.57	3.53	.63	.60	<.001**	.80
Meaning	4.04	.41	3.70	.64	4.43	<.001**	.61
Overall PES Score	3.88	.38	3.60	.41	4.87	<.001**	.67

p* < .05. *p* < .01.

= .010, *d* = .38]. Finally, while there was no significant difference between dual sport participants and non-participants on the overall PES score, there were three significant differences between dual-sport groups for three features of play: enjoyment [*t*(182) = 2.35, *p* = .020, *d* = .36], relation to others [*t*(181) = 2.04, *p* = .043, *d* = .29], and meaning [*t*(181) = 2.21, *p* = .029, *d* = .31].

Christian Sport Participants and Motivation

Further exploration of how Christians experience play within sport involved analyzing the effect of sport participation on levels of motivation. Independent sample *t*-tests were conducted with each subgroup of team, individual, dual and overall sport participants and the results of the BREQ-3 scale. Results for the analysis between overall sport participants and non-participants is displayed in Table 5.22. While *t*-tests revealed that overall sport participants

Table 5.22*Christian Overall Sport Participant and Non-Participant Differences for Motivation*

Motivation	Sport		Non-Sport		<i>t</i> (185)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Amotivation	.28	.42	.55	.55	3.22	<.001**	.55
External Regulation	.90	.81	.88	.76	.16	.872	.03
Introjected Regulation	1.69	.97	1.41	.94	1.84	.068	.29
Identified Regulation	3.21	.61	2.62	.73	5.69	<.001**	.84
Integrated Regulation	2.90	.76	2.34	1.03	4.32	<.001**	.73
Intrinsic Motivation	3.41	.50	3.08	.68	3.31	<.001**	.58

Note. Overall sport participants $n = 131$; overall sport non-participants $n = 56$

** $p < .01$.

experienced significantly higher levels of identified, integrated and intrinsic motivation, the overall non-participants experienced higher levels of amotivation. Together, these results indicate that overall sport participants experienced higher levels of self-determination compared to non-participants. Effect size for each significant result were medium to large.

A series of t-tests, utilizing a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of .013 (0.05/4), further indicated that team, individual and dual sport participants exhibited higher levels of self-determined behaviour (Table 5.23). For the team sports subgroups, sport participants indicated significantly higher levels of identified, integrated and intrinsic regulation. The individual and dual sport categories were similar to the overall sport category in that significantly higher scores were reported for participants than non-participants for identified, integrated and intrinsic regulation. For team and dual sport participants, amotivation was reported as significantly higher for non-participants. Altogether, these results show greater intrinsic motivation amongst all sport participants than non-participants.

Table 5.23

Christian Team, Individual, and Dual Sport Participant and Non-Participant Differences for Motivation

Motivation	Sport		Non-Sport		<i>t</i> (185)	<i>p</i>	Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Team Sport Participants							
Amotivation	.27	.39	.44	.54	2.60	.010**	.55
External Regulation	.94	.85	.85	.74	.78	.439	.30
Introjected Regulation	1.78	.96	1.45	.96	2.31	.022	.05
Identified Regulation	3.32	.54	2.77	.73	5.94	<.001**	.66
Integrated Regulation	2.94	.72	2.48	.99	3.68	<.001**	.52
Intrinsic Motivation	3.47	.49	3.17	.61	3.72	<.001**	.64
Individual Sport Participants							
Amotivation	.27	.44	.42	.50	2.04	.043	.30
External Regulation	.84	.73	.93	.83	.73	.469	.11
Introjected Regulation	1.69	1.04	1.56	.92	.88	.379	.13
Identified Regulation	3.26	.63	2.88	.71	3.72	<.001**	.54
Integrated Regulation	2.97	.84	2.53	.90	3.35	.001**	.49
Intrinsic Motivation	3.42	.53	3.24	.60	2.07	.040	.31
Dual Sport Participants							
Amotivation	.20	.34	.46	.52	4.13	<.001**	.55
External Regulation	.73	.66	.98	.86	1.96	.051	.30
Introjected Regulation	1.63	1.02	1.58	.95	.29	.773	.05
Identified Regulation	3.32	.57	2.86	.72	4.46	<.001**	.66
Integrated Regulation	2.99	.78	2.52	.92	3.64	<.001**	.52
Intrinsic Motivation	3.55	.42	3.18	.61	4.76	<.001**	.64

Note. Team sport participants $n = 89$; team sport non-participants $n = 98$.

Individual sport participants $n = 73$; individual sport non-participants $n = 114$

Dual sport participants $n = 64$; dual sport non-participants $n = 119$

** $p < .013$.

Christian Sport Participants and Flow

The final set of analyses in exploring how play is experienced by Christian sport participants was a series of t-tests that examined differences in dispositional flow (Table 5.24). Results indicate that for each dyad of team sport, individual sport, dual sport and overall sport, Christian sport participants reported significantly higher dispositional flow than non-participants. The effect size is considered medium ($d = .56$) for the overall sport dyad.

Table 5.24

Christian Sport Participant and Non-Participant Differences for Dispositional Flow

Sport Dyad	Sport		Non-Sport		$t(185)$	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Team Sport	3.85	.40	3.59	.41	4.40	<.001**	.26
Individual Sport	3.84	.38	3.63	.44	3.30	.001**	.48
Dual Sport	3.83	.38	3.65	.44	2.81	.006**	.43
Overall Sport	3.78	.40	3.54	.45	3.63	<.001**	.56

Note. Team sport participants $n = 89$; team sport non-participants $n = 98$.

Individual sport participants $n = 73$; individual sport non-participants $n = 114$

Dual sport participants $n = 64$; dual sport non-participants $n = 119$

Overall sport participants $n = 131$; overall sport non-participants $n = 56$

** $p < .01$.

Factor Analysis of Play Experience Scale

As one of the primary research questions was to identify the spiritual features of play, it was thought that the exploratory 36-item Play Experience Scale measured nine different features of play that emerged from theoretical and empirical research and as informed by the qualitative interviews from Phase 1. Given that only four original PES sub-scales demonstrate reliability at an alpha level of .70, and given the likelihood that some items are nuanced and could correlate with items from other sub-scales, prior to conducting further statistical analysis it was decided to

complete a factor analysis to purify scale items, maximize reliability amongst subscales and determine if alternative factors, and therefore features of play, would emerge from the data.

With approximately half of the sub-scales indicating adequate reliability, factor analysis was conducted to test construct validity of the questionnaire and to determine if there are unknown factors observed in the data. Prior to conducting factor analysis, several conditions need to be met (Matsungaga, 2010). First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Okin measure was conducted to measure sampling adequacy (Field, 2009). KMO values between 0.8 and 0.9 are considered great, and values above 0.9 are considered superb. The KMO value for the PES was 0.865, well above the commonly recommended value of .6. Next, Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was conducted to ensure that variables maintained adequate correlation levels. Bartlett's Test was significant [$\chi^2(630) = 449597, p < 0.001$], which indicated, with the KMO, that factor analysis was appropriate for the PES data.

To ensure scale reliability, several processes were considered when evaluating item removal. One approach is to conduct a principal component analysis (PCA) and examine factor loadings (Matsungaga, 2010). An initial PCA revealed eight factors with eigenvalues greater than one, accounting for 56.4% cumulative variance. Following the recommendation to utilize at minimum a 0.4 factor loading cutoff, items 6 and 8 would be removed. Another recommended approach is to examine both the highest and second highest loading factors, as this would address cross-loading complications (Matsungaga, 2010). In this case, a rule of .5/.2 could be utilized, meaning that items were discarded that demonstrated primary loadings less than .5 and secondary loadings as greater than .2. As a result, items 1, 6, 8, 11, 18, 20, 28, and 35 would be removed. Before initiating either of these approaches, it was decided to first gauge the correlation between items, as some authors recommend reviewing the correlation matrix to

determine if any specific items consistently correlated too lowly ($-.3 < r < .3$), thereby indicating if a variable was unlikely to measure a common underlying construct (Field, 2009). Given that the PES scale is meant to measure a single construct, that being features of play, it would be expected that most items would correlate with one another. Employing this approach with an item-total correlation of $-.3 < r < .3$ resulted in removing eight items from factor analysis: 1(freedom), 5 (relation to others), 14 (relation to others), 15 (relation to creation), 24 (relation to creation), 29 (enjoyment), 30 (relation to self) and 36 (meaning).

From here, a PCA method of extraction was utilized with a Direct Oblimin oblique rotation. Given that the factors were expected to correlate with each other, especially given the multi-dimensionality nature of play itself, an oblique solution was preferred. This permits factors to be correlated with one another, a common approach when utilizing social scientific data (Field, 2009). The underlying constructs are not expected to be independent from one-another - for example, through qualitative results it was noticed that many people experience nuances between freedom, creativity and enjoyment in play.

While six factors were extracted based on having initial eigenvalues > 1 , the screeplot was slightly ambiguous and showed inflexions at the fourth and six components. To clarify the number of factors to extract, O'Connor's (2000) rawpar.sps script was utilized to conduct parallel analysis. Eigenvalues from the raw PES data, additional mean eigenvalues and 95th percentile values were generated based upon one thousand dataset permutations. The results indicated three eigenvalues above the 95th percentile, and therefore three factors were retained for factor analysis (Figure 5.5).

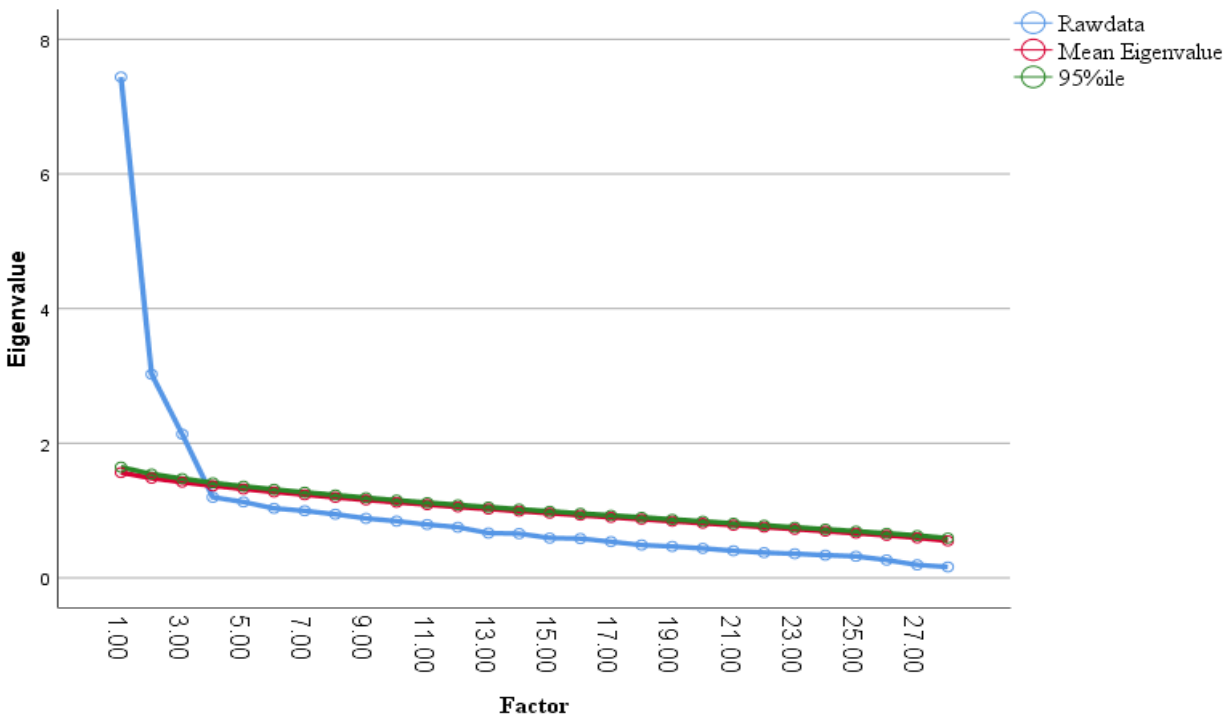
Following extraction, any items that did not load onto a factor with a value greater than .4 were removed, resulting in the removal of items 23 (relation to others) and 32 (relation to

others). The resulting pattern matrix is displayed in Table 5.25. Overall, factor analysis led to three distinct factors which explained 47% of the cumulative variance. The correlations between factors ranged from .023 to .294.

Culling ten items and measuring the 26-item instrument reliability resulted in a Cronbach alpha of .88. Internal consistency for each new scale was examined using Cronbach's alpha, which ranged from 0.76 to 0.88 (see Table 5.26 for summary). Factor 2 remained unchanged from one of the original PES subscales, retaining the relation to God feature of play. Factor 1 resulted in 15 items, including strong factor loadings with all four creativity items and three of relation to self items. The additional items from several others features: two from enjoyment, two

Figure 5.5

Screplot of Eigenvalues



Note. Eigenvalues derived from PES data with Means and 95th percentile Eigenvalue estimates from the Parallel Analysis conducted after eight poorly correlated items were removed.

Table 5.25

Summary of Items and Factor Loadings for Direct Oblimin Three-Factor Solution for the Play Experience Scale, Including Communalities, Eigenvalues and Percentages of Variance

Item	Factor Loading			Communality
	1	2	3	
Creativity (34)	.737	-.187	-.041	.53
Creativity (7)	.716	.009	-.086	.49
Relate to self (3)	.711	.155	-.031	.55
Creativity (25)	.684	-.021	-.185	.43
Relate to self (21)	.617	.046	.132	.46
Enjoyment (2)	.612	.403	-.020	.60
Relate to self (12)	.607	.044	.118	.43
Creativity (16)	.584	.279	-.087	.44
Relate to creation (33)	.566	-.135	.015	.32
Meaning (27)	.510	-.102	.312	.45
Meaning (9)	.501	-.083	.365	.49
Freedom (10)	.491	-.074	.169	.31
Enjoyment (11)	.462	-.012	.159	.28
Relate to creation (6)	.448	.312	-.136	.32
Freedom (28)	.447	-.109	.293	.36
Relate to God (31)	-.007	.900	.045	.81
Relate to God (13)	-.114	.891	.147	.80
Relate to God (4)	.258	.796	.001	.76
Relate to God (22)	-.131	.617	.005	.38
Transformation (17)	.080	-.005	.644	.45
Freedom (19)	-.214	.043	.641	.38
Enjoyment (20)	-.018	.223	.635	.45
Transformation (35)	-.028	-.112	.615	.38
Transformation (8)	.266	.023	.614	.55
Transformation (26)	.252	-.026	.519	.41
Meaning (18)	.239	.278	.460	.44
Eigenvalue	7.12	2.98	2.13	
% of variance	27.39	11.46	8.18	

Notes. Items are ordered and grouped by size of loading, and loadings above .4 are bolded. Number next to items corresponds with item number on the Play Experience Scale.

Table 5.26*Descriptive Statistics, Cronbach Alphas and Revised Constructs for Play Experience Scale*

Factor	Constructs	No. of items	<i>M (SD)</i>	α
1	Creative Expression	15	3.75 (.57)	.88
2	Relation to God	4	3.27 (1.12)	.85
3	Transformation	7	3.68 (.59)	.76

Note. $N = 346$

from meaning, two from relates to creation and two from freedom. Given the strong loadings with creativity and relation to self, as well as the phrasing associated with the other items, the first factor suggests a creative expression feature of play. Factor three seemed to represent transformation given that it included all four transformation items, as well as one item from each of the previous enjoyment, freedom and meaning features.

Analyses of the Three Features of Play

Upon completion of factor analysis, statistical analyses were conducted to further explore how the three revised features of play, creative expression, relation to God, and transformation, were correlated to playful activities, motivation, flow, sources of spirituality and socio-demographic characteristics. Additionally, inferential analyses were conducted to examine differences within the three features of play between Christians and non-Christians, and Christian sport participants and non-participants. Given that the second factor, relation to God, remained unchanged from the previous analyses, statistical results associated with this factor also remained unchanged.

Prior to these analyses, correlations between three features of play were examined. Creative expression was significantly and positively correlated to transformation ($r = .48, p < .001$) and relation to God ($r = .22, p < .001$). Finally, relation to God was also significantly and positively correlated to transformation ($r = .17, p = .002$).

Playful Activity Frequency of Participation and the Three Features of Play

Correlations between the three features of play and the frequency of participating in specific playful activities (see Table 5.27), playful categories and overall play participation were examined. Creative expression was significantly and positively correlated with the frequency of participating in twenty-three of the thirty-three specific playful activities, including all physical contests and sports, all creative activities, and all dances except liturgical. The strongest significant correlations ($r = .35, .64, .63, .64, .71$) were found between creative expression and the frequency of participating in the self-defined ‘other’ activities. Relation to God retained its significant and negative correlations with dabbling, daydreaming, web-surfing, video games, party activities and social dancing, and its significant and positive correlations with playground games, card games, team sports, dual sports, aquatic sports, liturgical dance and playing music.

Finally, the revised transformation feature of play was significantly and positively correlated with greater frequency of participating in 15 specific playful activities, including all physical contests and sports, sociable conversation, five organized play and games (card games, games of chance, video games, interaction-based games, party activities), three dances (social, folk / square, performance) and listening to music. The only significant and negative correlation between transformation and a specific activity was regarding the frequency of participating in pleasurable reading.

Creative expression was also significantly and positively correlated with all five categories of playful activity, with the strongest correlation found with the collection of creative and artistic activities (see Table 5.28). Relation to God remained negatively correlated with spontaneous and casual play and positively correlated with physical contests and sports. The transformation feature of play was significantly correlated with organized play and games, dance

Table 5.27*Correlations for Frequency of Participation of Playful Activities and the Three Features of Play*

Playful Activities	Creative Expression	Relation to God	Transform
Spontaneous / Casual Play			
Childish Imitations	.20**	.05	.07
Dabble / Fiddle (e.g., fidget)	.23**	-.12*	.08
Daydreaming	.12*	-.11*	-.07
Sociable Conversation	.12*	-.05	.16**
Web-surfing	.08	-.15**	.01
Pleasurable Reading	.01	.00	-.24**
Other	.35*	-.04	.09
Organized Play / Games			
Jigsaw Puzzles	.08	.12*	-.07
Word Games (e.g., crosswords)	.04	-.06	.05
Playground Games	.17**	.11*	.07
Board Games	-.02	.05	.02
Card Games	.01	.11*	.13*
Games of Chance	.02	.05	.13*
Video Games	.06	-.18**	.16**
Interaction-Based Games	.09	.08	.13*
Party Activities	.20**	-.19**	.23**
Other	.64**	.11	.10
Physical Contests / Sports			
Team Sports	.13*	.22**	.41**
Individual Sports	.21**	.03	.18**
Dual Sports	.12*	.11*	.17**
Aquatic Sports	.20**	.17**	.14*
Fitness Activities	.15**	-.03	.25**
Other	.63**	-.17	.19
Dance			
Social Dancing	.27**	-.14**	.19**
Folk / Square	.18**	.01	.14*
Performance	.17**	-.08	.11*
Ballroom	.11*	.02	.01
Liturgical	.06	.17**	.02
Other	.64**	-.23	.48*
Creative / Artistic Activities			
Drawing	.20**	-.02	-.02
Painting	.19**	.03	-.04
Sculpting	.18**	-.01	.02
Writing	.15**	-.02	-.08
Theater	.17**	-.06	-.06
Music (playing)	.18**	.11*	.10
Music (listening)	.22**	-.02	.15**
Photography	.24**	-.05	-.01
Other	.71**	-.06	.18

Note. $N = 346$ * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 5.28

Correlations for Frequency of Participation of Categories of Playful Activities and the Three Features of Play

Playful Activities	Creative Expression	Relation to God	Transform
Spontaneous / Casual Play	.24**	-.11*	-.01
Organized Play / Games	.15**	-.00	.18*
Physical Contests / Sports	.24**	.15**	.35**
Dance	.26**	-.03	.15**
Creative / Artistic Activities	.33**	-.00	.00

Note. $N = 346$

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

and, with its strongest correlation ($r = .35$), physical contests and sports. Finally, overall playfulness was significantly and positively correlated to both creative expression ($r = .38$, $p < .001$) and transformation, ($r = .21$, $p < .001$), but remained insignificantly correlated to relation with God ($r = -.01$, $p = .872$).

Playful Activity Enjoyment of Participation and the Three Features of Play

In addition to frequency of participation, bivariate analyses were conducted between enjoyment of participating in specific activities and the three features of play that emerged from factor analysis (see Table 5.29). Enjoyment in participating in twenty-four of the thirty-three specific activities, as well as each self-defined ‘other’ activity, was significantly and positively correlated with creative expression. These activities included all physical contests and sports, dance and creative and artistic activities, as well as six additional activities: childish imitations, dabbling, daydreaming, playground games, interaction-based games and party activities. The relation to God retained its aforementioned positive correlations with most physical contests and sports, liturgical dance and sculpting, as well as its negative correlations with daydreaming, web-surfing, video games and party activities. The revised transformation feature of play was significantly and negatively correlated with the enjoyment of daydreaming, pleasurable reading,

Table 5.29*Correlations for Enjoyment of Participation of Playful Activities and the Three Features of Play*

Playful Activities	Creative Expression	Relation to God	Transform
Spontaneous / Casual Play			
Childish Imitations	.14**	-.02	.03
Dabble / Fiddle (e.g., fidget)	.21**	-.09	.06
Daydreaming	.12*	-.14*	-.12*
Sociable Conversation	.05	-.08	.09
Web-surfing	-.01	-.15**	-.00
Pleasurable Reading	.06	-.03	-.18**
Other	.53**	.24	.08
Organized Play / Games			
Jigsaw Puzzles	.09	.05	-.12*
Word Games (e.g., crosswords)	-.00	-.10	-.01
Playground Games	.11*	-.01	-.01
Board Games	.00	-.10	-.02
Card Games	.01	-.03	.06
Games of Chance	.01	-.02	.15**
Video Games	.02	-.18**	.18**
Interaction-Based Games	.13*	.10	.14**
Party Activities	.22**	-.18**	.21**
Other	.53**	-.04	.02
Physical Contests / Sports			
Team Sports	.13*	.22**	.39**
Individual Sports	.23**	.11*	.20**
Dual Sports	.13*	.12*	.13**
Aquatic Sports	.25**	.18**	.09
Fitness Activities	.19**	.04	.24**
Other	.63**	.12	.37
Dance			
Social Dancing	.26**	-.10	.07
Folk / Square	.20**	.10	.09
Performance	.18**	-.10	.07
Ballroom	.16**	.07	-.06
Liturgical	.15**	.18**	.01
Other	.56**	-.36	.27
Creative / Artistic Activities			
Drawing	.24**	-.06	-.04
Painting	.21**	-.09	-.06
Sculpting	.21**	-.14*	-.08
Writing	.19**	-.08	-.09
Theater	.19**	-.01	-.13*
Music (playing)	.20**	.06	.08
Music (listening)	.18**	-.04	.09
Photography	.22**	-.06	-.05
Other	.74**	-.05	.25

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

jigsaw puzzles and theater. Positive correlations between transformation and specific playful activities included the enjoyment of participating in games of chance, video games, interaction-based games, party activities and all physical contests and sports except aquatic sports.

Additionally, correlations between each category of playful activities and enjoyment was also examined (Table 5.30). Creative expression significantly and positively correlated with all categories of play, with the correlations being of varying degrees of strength ($r = .14$ to $r = .30$). Relation to God continued to be significantly and negatively correlated with spontaneous and casual play, as well as organized play and games, while being significantly positively correlated with physical contests and sports. The third factor, transformation, was positively and significantly correlated with both organized play and games, as well as physical contests and sports. Finally, overall enjoyment of participating in playful activity was significantly and positively correlated with creative expression ($r = .36, p < .001$) and transformation ($r = .11, p = .05$), but was not significantly correlated with relation to God ($r = -.05, p = .36$).

Table 5.30

Correlations for Enjoyment of Participation of Categories of Playful Activities and the Three Features of Play

Playful Activities	Creative Expression	Relation to God	Transform
Spontaneous / Casual Play	.22**	-.11*	-.05
Organized Play / Games	.14*	-.11*	.13*
Physical Contests / Sports	.26**	.18**	.30**
Dance	.28**	.03	.07
Creative / Artistic Activities	.30**	-.08	-.07

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Motivation and the Three Features of Play

Upon examining the relationships between self-determined motivation and the three factors that emerged from factor analysis, it is clear that both creative expression and

transformation significantly correlated with each dimension of the SDT continuum, aside from the fact that creative expression did not significantly relate to external regulation (see Table 5.31). Based on where these correlations are their strongest, it seems creative expression is associated with more self-determined motivation, given that it significantly and moderately correlated with intrinsic motivation ($r = .50$), identified ($r = .54$), introjected regulation ($r = .56$) and autonomous motivation ($r = .60$). Figure 5.6 illustrates increasing association with self-determined motivation for creative expression and, to a lesser degree, transformation. Transformation demonstrated its strongest correlation with introjected regulation ($r = .49$). Relation to God continued to show significant correlations with introjected regulation, integrated regulation and both controlled, and to a lesser degree, autonomous motivation.

Table 5.31

Correlations for the Relationship Between Self-Determination and the Three Features of Play

	Creative Expression	Relation to God	Transformation
Amotivation	-.20**	-.06	-.17**
External Regulation	.08	.06	.22*
Introjected Regulation	.42**	.16**	.49**
Identified Regulation	.54**	.09	.41**
Integrated Regulation	.56**	.11*	.42**
Intrinsic Motivation	.50**	.08	.28**
Controlled Motivation	.31**	.14**	.43**
Autonomous Motivation	.60**	.11*	.43**

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

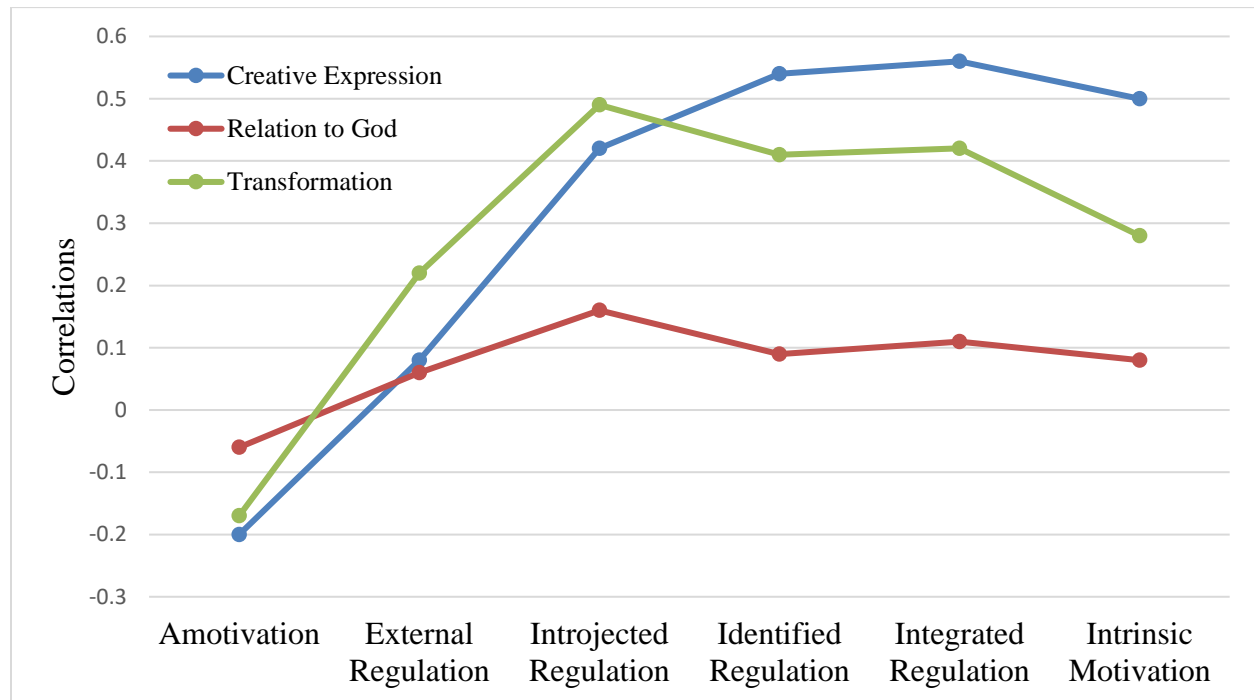
Flow and the Three Features of Play

Bivariate analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between dispositional flow and the three features of play. Dispositional flow was significantly and positively correlated with creative expression ($r = .42, p < .001$) and transformation ($r = .39, p < .001$). There was no

significant relationship between the relation to God feature of play and dispositional flow ($r = .10, p = .052$)

Figure 5.6

Correlation Strength for each Feature of Play in Relation to the Self-Determination Continuum



Sources of Spirituality and the Three Features of Play

In order to further explore the relationship between spirituality and the revised features of play, correlations were conducted between the sources of spirituality scale and the three features of play (Table 5.32). Creative expression was significantly and positively correlated to all sources of spirituality, except theistic. Relation to God continued to be significantly correlated with theistic, human and transcendent spirituality. Finally, transformation significantly correlated to two dimensions of spirituality: nature and human.

Table 5.32*Correlations for the Relationship Between Sources of Spirituality and the Three Features of Play*

Features of Play	Theistic	Nature	Human	Transcend	Self
Creative Expression	.00	.47**	.38**	.30**	.39**
Relation to God	.82**	.04	.17**	.45**	.01
Transformation	.10	.11*	.20**	.10	.07

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.**Socio-Demographic Characteristics and the Three Features of Play**

In order to explore the relationship between various socio-demographic characteristics and the three features of play, a series of t-tests were conducted against a Bonferroni-adjusted alpha level of .01 (0.05/5). To begin, a t-test revealed that males ($M = 3.81$, $SD = .5$) reported significantly higher transformation scores than females ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .60$), $t(343) = 2.84$, $p = .005$. There was no significant difference between genders and the creative expression and relation to God features of play.

Regarding age, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted. While there was no significant results relating to the creative expression or relation to God features, there was a significant effect of age on the transformation feature of play, $F(6, 339) = 9.10$, $p < .001$, $h^2 = .14$. To follow-up on the significant effect of age on transformation, a Tukey post-hoc test was conducted. The results indicated seven significant comparisons. Participants aged 14-18 ($M = 4.01$, $SD = .58$) indicated significantly more transformation than participants aged 30-39 ($p < .001$), 40-49 ($p < .001$), 50-59 ($p < .001$), and 60-69 ($p = .005$). Additionally, the 19-29 ($M = 3.80$, $SD = .51$) year-old-group also indicated significantly more transformation than those aged 30-39 ($p = .012$), 40-49 ($p = .012$) and 50-59 ($p < .001$).

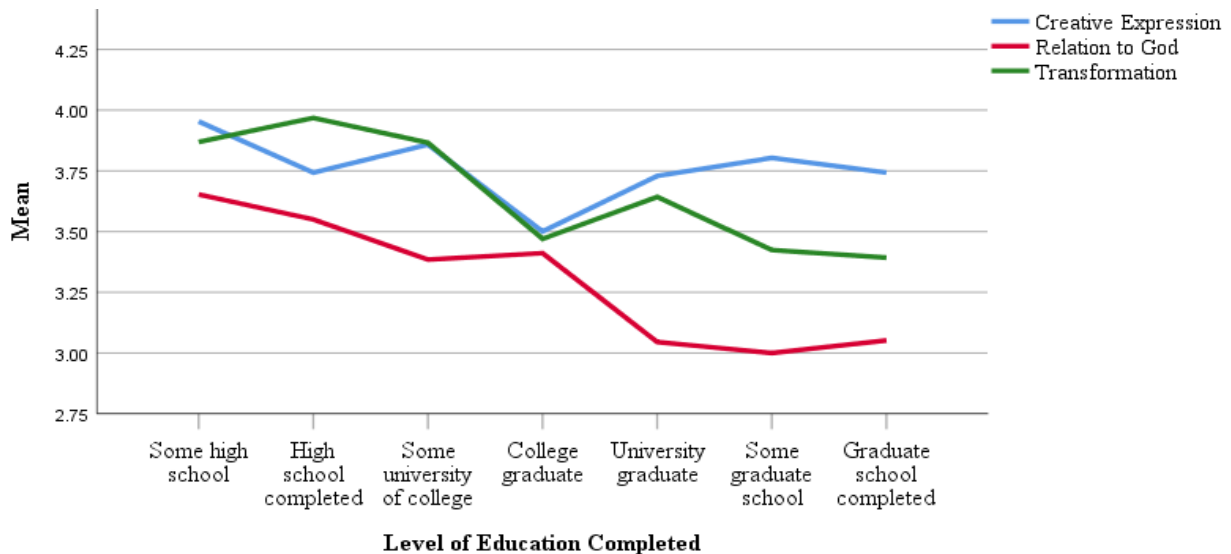
Next, ANOVAs were conducted to compare religious affiliation and the three features of play. While there was no significance between religious groups and creative expression, there

was, as previously reported, a significant effect of religious affiliation on relation to God, $F(6, 339) = 86.85, p < .001, h^2 = .56$. Specifically, Christians reported significantly higher relation to God than each of the other religious affiliations except for Muslims ($p < .001$). Similarly, Muslims and Sikhs reported significantly higher relation to God than Buddhists and those ascribing to no or 'other' religious practices ($p < .001$). Additionally, an analysis of variance revealed a significant effect of religious affiliation on transformation, $F(6, 339) = 3.74, p = .002, h^2 = .06$. Pairwise comparisons of the means using Tukey's post hoc tests showed significant differences between Sikhs and Buddhists ($p = .038$), as well as Sikhs and those that defined their own religious practice under 'other' ($p = .006$). In both cases, the Sikh participants indicated high scores on the transformation feature of play.

Subsequent ANOVAs demonstrated significant effects of educational level on transformation [$F(6, 339) = 7.05, p < .001, h^2 = .11$]. Conduction of a series of Tukey post hoc tests revealed the specific between group differences. Regarding the transformation feature of play, eight significant differences were found between education levels. Those with only some high school completed reported significantly higher transformation scores than those that have completed some graduate school ($p = .038$) or have completed graduate school ($p = .003$). Further, those that completed high school reported the highest transformation scores ($M = 3.97, SD = .47$), and consistently scored significantly higher than those with more advanced education. Similarly, those with only some university or college completed indicated significantly higher transformation results than all those with more educational experience, less university graduates. Together, these results indicate that increased transformation was associated with lower levels of education (see Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7

The Relationship between Level of Education and the Three Features of Play



Note. Mean scores based on scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree).

A final series of ANOVAs were conducted to explore the relationships between the three features of play and marital status. Results indicated a significant effect of marital status on creative expression [$F(4, 337) = 4.65, p = .001, h^2 = .03$], relation to God [$F(4, 337) = 4.69, p = .001, h^2 = .01$], and transformation [$F(4, 337) = 8.58, p < .001, h^2 = .14$]. In order to explore the significant effect of marital status on transformation, Tukey post-hoc tests were conducted. Results demonstrated that those never married indicated more creative expression than those that are married ($M_{diff} = .18, SE = .06, p = .029$), and widows experienced less creative expression than all other groups. Regarding relation to God, married individuals reported significantly higher scores than those living common law ($M_{diff} = .86, SE = .26, p = .010$) or those that are separated or divorced ($M_{diff} = 1.05, SE = .34, p = .020$). Finally, those that have never been married also reported significantly higher transformation scores than those that are married ($M_{diff} = .31, SE = .07, p < .001$), divorced ($M_{diff} = .54, SE = .18, p = .022$) or widowed ($M_{diff} = 1.13, SE$

= .41, $p = .043$). Collectively, those that have never been married reported significantly greater effects than married individuals for two features of play: creative expression and transformation.

Christians and Non-Christians and the Three Features of Play

In order to explore the differences between Christians and non-Christians regarding the three features of play that emerged from factor analysis, independent-sample t-tests were conducted. The results indicated no significant difference between groups on the features of creative expression and transformation, though there remained a significant difference regarding the relation to God feature of play, $t(344) = 15.93$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.32$.

Christian Sport Participants and the Three Features of Play

A series of t-tests were conducted to better understand the relationship between Christian sport participants and the three features of play. Sport participants indicated significantly more ($M_{diff} = .16$, $SE = .08$) creative expression than non-participants, $t(185) = 1.98$, $p = .049$, $d = .02$. Additionally, Christian sport participants also reported significantly more ($M_{diff} = .29$, $SE = .08$) transformation than sport non-participants, $t(185) = 3.41$, $p = .001$, $d = .06$.

Aside from overall sport participation, differences between three subgroups were also explored: team, individual and dual sport participants. While there were no significant differences within the features of play between the dual sport participants and non-participants, individual sport participants indicated significantly more ($M_{diff} = .16$, $SE = .08$) creative expression than non-participants, $t(185) = 2.06$, $p = .041$, $d = .02$. In addition, team sport participants reported significantly more creative expression [$M_{diff} = .22$, $SE = .07$, $t(185) = 2.99$, $p = .003$, $d = .05$] and transformation [$M_{diff} = .47$, $SE = .07$, $t(185) = 6.51$, $p < .001$, $d = .19$] than team sport non-participants.

Summary

Analysis of the *Play and Spirituality Survey* data revealed statistically significant findings regarding the primary features of play. Specifically, results revealed what the primary features of play may be, how they relate to flow, motivation and spirituality, and how they are evident in Christians and non-Christians at play. Finally, analyses also indicated how the features of play are experienced by Christian sport participants and non-participants.

Overall, a clear correlation ($r = .72$) was found between frequency of participation and enjoyment of participation. Frequency of participation in all categories of play, as well as 21 of the 23 specific playful activities, correlated to the overall play experience score. Similarly, enjoyment of participation in all categories of play (except spontaneous and casual play), as well as eighteen specific activities, was positively correlated to the overall play experience score. While there were varying degrees of relationships between specific playful activities and the ten features of play, the features of freedom, meaning, creativity, relation to self and transformation were routinely correlated to most or all categories of playful activity. All features of play, except 'relation to God,' including the overall play experience score, were significantly and positively correlated to both overall frequency and enjoyment of participation in play.

Analyses revealed a strong relationship between the features of play and motivation, where correlation strength and direction generally increased along the self-determination continuum. This analysis suggests a strong association between play and intrinsic motivation for most features of play, with a primary exception being the 'relation to God' feature, which was poorly correlated to the SDT framework. Similarly, the 'relation to God' feature was the only feature of play that did not correlate with dispositional flow.

The overall PES score correlated with all expressions of spirituality, while self-oriented and nature-oriented spirituality correlated respectively with ten and nine of the features of play. While relation to God correlated significantly and strongly with theistic spirituality, the features of freedom and relation to work negatively correlated with theistic spirituality.

Several significant socio-demographic results were found. Participants aged 14-18, participants never married, and participants with less educational experience all reported less self-determined motivation. Further, males, youth aged 14-18, and those with less education reported more dispositional flow. Age was also correlated to the features of play, where younger participants generally had a significantly higher overall PES score, and higher scores on three features of play: freedom, relation to others, and transformation. Regarding income, those earning less annual income generally reported higher scores on the overall features of play, specifically freedom, relation to God, relation to others, and transformation. The overall PES score as well as four features of play (freedom, relation to others, transformation and meaning) were all experienced significantly more by participants that have never been married than by those that were currently married. Lastly, educational levels also showed a significant effect on the features of play, as participants with less educational experience generally indicated more experience with the overall features of play, as well as freedom and transformation.

In exploring differences between Christian and non-Christian participants, it was found that Christians scored significantly higher on the overall PES score, and two features of play: relation to God and relation to nature. In contrast, non-Christians indicated more freedom and relation to work through their play. Additionally, results showed that non-Christians exhibited greater frequency and enjoyment of participating in play, especially in dance. Non-Christians also reported significantly more enjoyment of participating in creative and artistic activities.

While there were clear differences between groups when it came to participation and enjoyment of specific activities, the three most frequently participated-in activities were the same for Christians and non-Christians (listening to music, sociable conversation and web-surfing), as was the most enjoyed activities (listening to music, sociable conversation and web-surfing).

Results also revealed how play is evident in the lives of Christian sport participants, as compared to Christian sport non-participants. Specifically, the overall features of play were experienced at more significant levels, as were the features of enjoyment, relation to others, transformation and meaning. As well, results suggest that Christian sport participants experience higher levels of self-determination and dispositional flow than sport non-participants.

Factor analysis of the PES suggested a three-factor solution which were labeled as creative expression, relation to God, and transformation. Overall playfulness was significantly and positively correlated with both creative expression and transformation. Creative expression was correlated with more self-determined and autonomous motivation, while transformation most strongly correlated with introjected regulation and autonomous motivation. Dispositional flow was significantly and positively correlated with creative expression and transformation. Regarding sources of spirituality, creative expression was significantly and positively correlated to human, self, and transcendent perspectives on spirituality, relation to God was significantly correlated with theistic, human and transcendent spirituality, and transformation was correlated to two dimensions of spirituality: nature and human. Analysis of the three factors and socio-demographic data indicated a significant effect of age on the transformation feature of play, a significant effect of religious affiliation on relation to God and transformation, and significant effects of educational level and marital status on all three factors. Sport participants indicated significantly more creative expression and transformation than non-participants.

Chapter 6: Results of Phase 3 In-Depth Interviews

Given the historical suspicion and ambivalence towards play that is often attributed to the Christian church, the intersection of Christianity and play was explored through in-depth interviews held with Christian ministers and pastors. While these interviews indirectly addressed how play is evident in the lives of Christians, the primary purpose of these interviews was to answer the fifth research question which asks how playful activities can be integrated into ecclesiological praxis, that is, church practice. In exploring the role of play within church life, participants addressed the values and qualities associated with a Christian attitude towards play. As these interviews took place following the quantitative component of this study as presented in the previous chapter, differentiations between Christian and non-Christian attitudes were also discussed. Seven participants were interviewed using a semi-structured interview guide and interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis conducted to consolidate data themes.

Demographics of Participants

The results of this qualitative study are based on interview responses from seven participants who responded to invitations to participate. While pastors within several Christian denominations were contacted for sampling purposes, response rates resulted in each respondent currently ministering within the Canadian Reformed Churches, a federation of Protestant churches with doctrinal roots in the sixteenth-century Reformation. This homogenous response rate might be attributed to the researcher's affiliation with this federation, participant willingness and availability and genuine participant interest in the research study. While a broader Christian purposeful sampling strategy was intended, upon conducting two interviews with initial participants it was recognized that pursuing a more homogenous sample might be advantageous given the research questions. Given that much of the historical suspicion towards play has been

ted to ideologies of 16th century Reformers John Calvin and Martin Luther (Guttmann, 1988; 2004; Kelly, 1996; Parker & Weir, 2012; Watson & Parker, 2013; Weber, 1958), it seemed appropriate to interview pastors influenced by this spiritual heritage. Additionally, given that ecclesiological praxis significantly varies between Christian denominations, reducing variation and simplifying application might be achieved through homogeneity (Palinkas et al., 2015; Patton, 2015). Therefore, continuing with this homogenous sample allowed for the possibility of direct engagement with 16th-century dogma, and provided opportunities to clarify the value and purpose of play within reformed Christianity. Given that the Canadian Reformed Churches adhere to a male-only ministerial calling, each of the seven participants were male.

The participants represented a range of ages and ministerial experience. While overall ages ranged from 30 to 63, four participants were in their thirties and the other three participants were 46, 57 and 63 respectively. Four pastors were currently serving within their first congregations, while the other three participants have served within the ministry for 20 to 30 years amongst several congregations each. The most senior pastor recently retired on account of ill-health. Educationally, each participant completed undergraduate degrees (e.g., BA in Biblical Studies), and a Masters in Divinity (theology), while two participants additionally completed a PhD in theology and history. As a spiritual leader, pastor duties generally include preaching, leading ceremonies (e.g., baptisms, worship services), instructing congregants through theological seminars and classes, and pastoring congregational members through visits.

Participants engaged in a variety of playful activities. While one participant identified some non-work activities as non-play, such as reading, running and exercise, most participants generally viewed play as any non-work activity. Participants did not generally categorize playful activities as distinct from leisure or recreation, as definitively stated by “Kevin” who “considers

play to be pretty synonymous with recreational activities.” As a result, a wide range of interests and activities were identified as play, including sports, board games, card games, music playing, music composition, playing with children (e.g., Lego, toys), outdoor activities (e.g., fishing, canoeing), motorcycle riding, rock climbing, reading, cycling and weight lifting.

All interviews took place between August 2018 and January 2019. Interviews, which lasted between twenty to forty-five minutes, were audio-recorded and took place in person or via the telephone. Interviews were transcribed within a few weeks of occurrence, and once the content of interviews was reviewed and confirmed by participants, the data was uploaded to NVivo software for thematic analysis. Pseudonyms are utilized to protect participant identity.

Research Results

Thematic analysis revealed several themes and sub-themes (Table 6.1). First, several goals or purposes of play arose while participants identified their primarily play activities. Second, a prevailing theme nestled the value and role of play in Christian life within a belief in God’s sovereignty. Subthemes of this worldview included: (a) God-glorifying, (b) freedom to play and enjoy, (c) play and an authentic life, (d) play and a balanced life, and (e) non-permissible play. Third, several approaches and/or benefits to intentionally integrating play into church life were identified: (a) community witness, (b) inter-generational play, (c) pedagogy and play, and (d) relationship building. Lastly, participants described instances in which play can go off the rails, or deviate from more wholesome or appropriate behaviour.

Defining Play by Play’s Goals

Definitions for play were closely tied to the purposes or values associated with an activity, or in other words, what counts as play “depends on the end goal of what you’re doing” (“Jason”). The data revealed three dominant purposes of play as identified by participants. First,

Table 6.1*Major Themes and Subthemes from Phase 3*

Themes	Subthemes
Defining Play by Play's Goals	
Sovereignty and Worldview	God-glorifying play Freedom to play and enjoy Play and an authentic life Play and a balanced life Play out of bounds (non-permissible play)
Play and Church Life	Community witness Inter-generational play Pedagogy and play Relationship building
Play can go off the rails	Christians versus non-Christians

play was described as a non-obligatory end in itself, done “for the fun of it” or as something that is “fortuitous...not necessary, but it’s enjoyable” (“Wayne”). Composing music, for example, was identified by “Tyler” as something enjoyable for its own sake: “It's something I don't have to do. No one requires me to do it. I simply do it because I enjoy it.” One pastor, “Alex.” described himself as a “driven person” who values productivity in his play and admitted that play need not have utilitarian benefit: “I think as a Christian you can, and I'm sort of figuring this out as I go along, it's okay to spend time with people...doing activities that doesn't necessarily have a goal in mind, but that are still enjoyable.” Within his play contexts of physical activity, that meant “taking pleasure in the function[ing] of your own body...taking pleasure in something, like a really heavy squat set, and enjoying that on its own.” The only caveat he placed on any forms of play were that they did not come “at the expense of other things which should be done.” Thus, play need not have an end but was characterized by joy attributed to a Christian worldview.

Secondly, several pastors appreciated play for its utilitarian benefits. To some, this utilitarian attitude stemmed from general dispositions to view all activity in life as purposeful. In the case of Kevin, walking with his children or tending to his vegetable garden were examples of

his attitude towards play: “Play has to be beneficial, and so I prefer play that is productive in some way.” Similarly, Alex, who equated play with weight lifting and exercise, would only participate in activities that provided direct personal benefit: “The bigger picture is how does this contribute to me becoming a more productive person? It's goals-oriented in that sense. So, there's certain things I will not do, because I don't think they have a long-term productivity associated with them.” The benefits associated with his time spent in play included increased focus for work, “being grounded again...having mental well-being restored...having clarity of mind.” An additional benefit acknowledged by Tyler was that play helps people develop their talents and allows them to share their creativity and abilities with others. He therefore added that competition within sports was an appropriate way for play to channel an innate “drive within us...in healthy ways.” Despite these breadths of benefits, the most commonly identified benefit of play was that play provided a time for renewal or refreshment.

Third and related to utilitarian benefits, play was generally viewed as an activity intended to ‘release energy’ and ‘refresh yourself.’ Most pastors participated in physically active play, and associated such experiences as ‘a time for renewal,’ as having ‘a key role in clearing the mind and being reset,’ and as having ‘a profound effect every time.’ For “Richard,” this meant play is “a time in which my mind and body and spirit are literally regenerated.” Similarly, “Jerry” suggested that “physical activity as part of play is good for a healthy mind and body.” In instances where ministry demands weighed heavy, physically active play provided overall enrichment: “I can be stressed going into a work out, and an hour later I come out and I just feel purified” (Alex). Even though physical activity could at times be strenuous, Richard differentiated the labour involved with gardening from the “more pure play” of cycling:

I do a lot of cycling. I cycle about 6000 km a year...mostly it's 50 km or less and that is my ultimate relaxation strategy and my health strategy and my play strategy. Because for me it's utter and pure relaxation.

In short, play was generally defined by the goals associated with it, including enjoyment as well as utilitarian and health benefits, as Alex succinctly summarized: "I derive benefit from it, for my personal life, my spiritual life, my work. And, there's pleasure in the act itself."

Sovereignty and Worldview

Upon reflecting on how Christianity infuses play and play attitudes, participants were quick to ground the Christian life within the context of a belief in the sovereignty of God.

Viewing "all of life as under the dominion of God" (Alex) suggests that all play contexts fall within God's supremacy. It is this over-arching view of life that Kevin associated directly with the Christian tradition:

The Christian faith is wholistic. It's an all of life thing. There's no part of life that falls outside of it. That's something people think; faith is this box. You get your box with faith and your box with the rest of life. Christianity doesn't work that way. You know, it's not just a set of practices, it's a way of life that comes with a profound sense of transformed identity.

Similarly, Jason associated the Christian faith with an all-encompassing worldview: "Your whole worldview is centered around being a Christian and following Jesus Christ. He has sway over every aspect of your life." To another, all of life is "shaped by being a Christian...so your goals for playing should be shaped by Christ as well." This transformed identity and worldview would then spill over into all areas of life, including transforming play. While this meant, for some, that a Christian identity would "restrict certain kinds of play," a greater emphasis was placed on how

an individual plays, because, as Tyler stated, “the Christian life should be a seamless life, and so our faith requires us to play in a way that is clean, fair, respectful, safe and conscious of other people and so on.” More broadly, Wayne suggested that there has to be a “complete overlap in terms of faith and how you play.” A belief in God’s sovereignty and an over-arching Christian worldview led to the emergence of five implications: (a) play should glorify God, (b) there is freedom to play and enjoy, (c) play represents an authentic life, (d) play is integral to a balanced life, and (e) some activities are out of bounds.

God-glorifying Play

While play’s enjoyment and utilitarian benefits were certainly praised by study participants, each pastor qualified that his belief system oriented his play attitudes towards glorifying God, for any benefit or intention of play “coheres together under this larger umbrella of God’s dominion over life” (Alex). This theme included an awareness that no dimension of life is purposeless: “As a Christian you don’t do anything pointlessly. You do things for God’s kingdom constantly. You are His and He bought you. So, you are living your life for Him...and there is opportunity in that to play for Him” (Jason). In that way, Jason stated that “furthering the kingdom of God” was the “overall goal of living life,” including how and why someone plays.

How play brings glory to God was associated with behaving in ways that aligned with God’s character, especially as revealed in the Bible. To Tyler, this meant playing in ways that are pleasing to God: “I’ve played hockey with Christians who are jerks when they play hockey. It’s like they think what happens on the ice stays on the ice. But I believe that’s a lie. You need to play in a certain way.” For Kevin, God’s supremacy required that certain behaviours within play are “up-building for the people around you and not to their detriment.” God-glorifying play was also described as play that intends to acknowledge and celebrate God more than it glorifies or

celebrates oneself. Naturally, then, what constitutes God-glorifying play also impacted which activities garnered engagement. Here, Wayne suggested utilizing one's conscience to discern which type of play honours God: "If you want to involve yourself in a certain activity then you ought to be able to have a clear conscience and say this is something I can do to God's glory."

This attitude he applied to all areas of life:

If you can't say you're doing something for the glory of God then you ought not to be doing it. And so for me that would go for play as well. For example, I like smoking cigars. There are people who have a problem with it. I say I smoke cigars to the glory of God. But there are other people who won't say that. They'll admit perhaps that they think it's wrong, but they'll do it anyway. And that's where I think it's wrong. We ought to think through it. You ought to think through these things and deliberate them and make decisions that are faith based.

In this example, Wayne asserted that using one's conscience was an appropriate metric to determine what constitutes God-glorifying play. Overall, an over-arching disposition towards life emphasized that play falls within the scope of God's dominion.

Freedom to Play and Experience Joy

Richard tied the second implication of God's sovereignty to an additional metric for how God is glorified through play: "I think God is glorified when we are enjoying ourselves." Each pastor emphasized the primacy of joy in the life of a Christian, and therefore encouraged participation in play as a means to experience increased enjoyment. In referring to Old Testament feast days, Kevin emphasized the importance of play and enjoyment:

If there's one thing I do stress, also as a pastor, is that God created us to enjoy ourselves. So, play, by definition needs to be enjoyable. God wants us to celebrate. God even legislated for the Israelites that they throw parties.

In referring to the Heidelberg Catechism, a doctrinal document, he emphasized that the Christian life is marked by joy, both in knowing the comfort of salvation in Jesus and in being renewed in His image. To facilitate this joy, Kevin called for more play: “If play is defined as enjoyment, then Christians should do everything they can to enjoy life and play.” Likewise, Jerry heeded the same call to experience the joy of play: “Playfulness is important and people should be more engaged in playful activities.” While the enjoyment of play was associated with “taking pleasure in something for its own sake” and experiencing the “sheer joy of competing to the best of my ability,” the joy of play was more significantly related to the freedom to participate.

While the Christian life was characterized by a sense of intrinsic joy, so too was it characterized by a degree of freedom, where “within the parameters of God's sovereignty over life there's a lot you can do” (Alex). God's umbrella over life was not described as excessively restrictive, for play is “something that God gives to you, and it's something good. It's not a waste of time. It can be good for its own sake, and it can have spin-off benefits as well” (Alex). The freedom to enjoy life gives play great significance for Richard:

[Play] is very significant. I think God is playful Himself. I think that being able to play is a reflection of a healthy, light heartedness that genuine Christianity brings. Christians can just be free to explore and to enjoy this awesome creation that we live in, in a relationship with God.

Even though Christians are called to lose their lives in order to follow Jesus, that does not negate opportunity “to play for Him...and to have enjoyment, spread enjoyment, spread peace and joy”

(Jason). While Alex was careful to distinguish a moral imperative to play from the permissibility to play, the Christian faith opens the door to participate in play, which does not necessarily restrict any and all activities at first glance. For example, while some Christians may question the permissibility to participate in combat-based activities, Alex intentionally identified jiu-jitsu and wrestling as activities that can be done with a Christian attitude: “You can love your neighbour while you’re still putting him in a headlock. Those two things are not mutually exclusive.”

These attitudes to freely enjoy play were contrasted by a more serious tone often associated with Christians, especially those influenced by Reformed theology. Richard referenced an “overly serious attitude, sometimes associated with Calvinism” as infecting compromised play-attitudes. He detailed a book, *Drie Kleine Vossen*, written by the prominent Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper, as reinforcing “a severe worldview” that he regrets exists among his parishioners, where activities such as theatre, dance and card playing are viewed as “ruining the virtuous life of God’s people.” Similarly, Tyler suggested that Christians within his circles “take themselves a little too seriously.” In contrast, he suggested that a Christian who is assured of God’s sovereignty and providence would be free to enjoy play:

God wants His people to be a joyful people. And the kingdom of heaven and the new world is pictured in the New Testament as having real, actual, tangible joy. So, for Christians to laugh with one another, and play board games...for us, at home to relax and play and be restful...not to the extent of neglecting other duties and being lazy. But I think play, real play, takes a certain amount of relaxing, forgetting the duties of the rest of life. You have to leave everything else behind in order to really play. And, I think as Christians that's really healthy. God is in control; we can be at peace and that works itself out in real ways.

Likewise, Wayne suggested that a Christian ethic of hard work can have a tendency to distrust God's provision:

We are given rest, of course, weekly on the Sabbath. But beyond that I think our entire life in some respects is characterized by rest. Because Christ has done everything. It is finished....We don't have to work ourselves to the bone because, in any other aspect, God provides. And so, we have opportunity for leisure and we have to trust in God who provides. We don't have to feel the need to simply do as much as we can to provide and establish as good a life as possible in the here and now.

In each of these instances, participants experienced play as a freedom that released a person from one's personal need to control every aspect of one's own life and instead allowed the enjoyment of play to remind oneself of God's sovereignty over every dimension of play. Pastors suggested that not only are Christians free to play, but play is also a means to demonstrate trust in God.

Play and an Authentic Life

A prominent theme within the data was a message of seeking harmony within life, especially between mind, body and spirit. Jerry emphasized that play, within sport or any physical activity, "is essential to living a Christian life" because "the body and soul are both part of the living being. We're not just a soul encapsulated within the body. There's unity between body and soul that is essential to Christian living." His view that play reflects an integrated understanding of a person was reiterated by other participants as well, especially by Richard who described how play contains "a certain aspect of authenticity that you would like to see...that people are authentically enjoying themselves...there's harmony about what they're doing. They're in harmony with their body and their mind and their soul." He identified little children as examples of this harmony and authenticity: "Little kids just lose themselves in their play, and

it's beautiful. And I think that's really healthy and adults should try be like those children.”

Modeling the play of children was representative of more authentic play.

A loss of authenticity amongst adults was attributed to the tendency of separating spiritual from unspiritual domains of life. After emphasizing the value of adopting an all-encompassing worldview, Kevin questioned the common approach of compartmentalizing life into different categories:

[Play has] a prominent role, but I also find that people don't appreciate that role. They think it's actually wrong. Like, it's more important to do Bible study at Cadets than to get ready for cub car races. To me, no. There is no priority here.

This contrast between more spiritual (e.g., Bible study) and less spiritual (e.g., cub car races) activities was further iterated by Richard who suggested that youth and adults tend to have very narrow views of what it means to be a Christian:

I often tell them...when you are playing soccer you are serving God every bit as much as you are when you are in church on Sunday morning. Just differently. So, I will...try to affect their worldview that way. And that's truly how I view my own life too. When I'm out on the road, I view that as part and parcel of my walk with God. It's my enjoyment of God; it's my service of God. It's all included in what I'm doing. It's...I guess it's an outflow of my love for God and my service of God. So, I don't categorize my life in terms of, okay this is now spiritual and this is not spiritual. Or, this is merely physical and this was merely material. I just view my life as one great big integrated whole.

A similar perspective was shared by Alex who questioned the legalistic character his parishioners demonstrate when relegating worship to the confines of Sunday worship services. He detailed a congregational baseball game and BBQ event that took place after a worship

service one Sunday. While some church members questioned the appropriateness of this activity, his rebuttal emphasized the holistic character of worship:

We [had] a baseball game after church...And people had an issue with that. To me...it's a little legalistic to make that distinction. In the end, play helps you get out of that box of, well worship is this very formal thing that we do on Sunday between the hours of 10 am and 3 pm or whenever the services are done, and now we get on with the rest of life. If there was more of a blend between these two, then okay, you can play on Sunday but you can also worship during the week...If you're together anyway for formal, structured worship, which is important and good, then why not benefit from that with the fellowship by spending more time together doing whatever.

Each of these pastors emphasized that play helps challenge commonly held dichotomies between spiritual or unspiritual and worship or play. Blending these behaviours and attitudes were indicative of more harmonious or authentic worldviews.

Play and a Balanced Life

Alignment with a Christian worldview also had implications for embracing play as essential in living a balanced life. Play was associated with the “Christian life being a balanced one” (Wayne), as “important to a well-rounded Christian life” (Jerry), and as “all part of a balanced life as a Christian” (Alex). In most cases, play simply served as a complement to time spent in work, and was therefore appreciated for its restorative potential as established by God’s created pattern for life: “Following the pattern that God set in place during creation of work and rest. So, if play is distinguished from work, rest in the Bible means stop. Stop working. So, play is part of the rest” (Kevin). Similarly, Wayne described how feeling rested after “playing on [his] motorcycle” was essential to his “life-balance.” Within this view, sports, vacations, and other

activities were all associated with balancing work life: “Judging by my community, what I see here is that people work hard, people play hard” (Richard).

In acknowledging that their church communities are influenced by a Protestant work ethic ideology, pastors questioned the tendency for that work ethic to detract from living a balanced life. Richard raised concerns regarding his community’s tendency to over-work: “I’m always suspicious of overly serious Christians who don’t have time to play, they say. I always think there is something wrong with that. There is something unhealthy there.” Alex positioned his concern with the view that many of his parishioners ground their personal identities in their work, and are therefore required to keep working in order to “maintain the identity.” Instead, he advocated for a faith-infused worldview on identity:

A healthy understanding [of life] doesn't work too much, doesn't let the Protestant work ethic get to a point, where it's like, I almost have to prove myself in this world by working. You've already been proven. Your identity is already secure. You are not the sum total of the things that you accomplish. That's a very utilitarian way of looking at life.

Though Alex added that “work is still valuable and important and is part of the big picture,” he emphasized that “work is not the only thing...as Christians you can play because you don’t always have to work.” His time in play was guilt-free: “The Lord is not looking at His watch waiting for me to get back to work. I can do this. And I can be okay with taking time for [play].” The ability to detach from an incessant need to work, be it to fulfill their Christian calling or in attempts to protect personal reputation, was associated with grounding personal identity in the work of Jesus:

I think this is all part of a balanced life as a Christian. Because your identity first and foremost is in who you are, not in what you do....What you do, whether that be productive, in the general sense of the word, or unproductive, your identity doesn't lie in what you did. It lies in who you are. So, to say we should spend more time on this and less time on that because of [productivity], that's fine, we can have that discussion, but what's the ultimate cause of wanting to be productive? Why the focus on the productivity?...You don't have to get hung up in how you divide that line, because in the end...my identity doesn't lie in what I do, it doesn't even lie in myself, it lies in Christ. And any identity I have comes out of that. And if he was a true human being who lived a full human life, then undoubtedly, he played sport as well. (Alex)

Rooting personal identity in Jesus Christ rather than within work, play or productivity led this pastor to integrate different activities into his life in a more fluid manner. Even for those pastors who viewed play as a complement to work, play was expressed as foundational to a living a balanced, Christian life.

Play out of Bounds (Non-permissible activities)

A fifth theme related to how a Christian worldview impacts play though restrictions on participation in some activities. While this chapter has already highlighted the permissibility and freedom associated with play, pastors also suggested that some forms of play are considered out of bounds. When an individual's worldview is centred on following Jesus Christ, pastors suggested that this means "your choices of play are going to be shaped by being a Christian" (Jason) and that "there are some things as a Christian that you can't do" (Alex). Similarly, what a Christian can play was directly reflective of holding a Christian worldview: "I think as a Christian there should be a very strong relationship between [faith and play]. So, for example,

there are certain kinds of play that are out of bounds for myself as a Christian” (Tyler). Though participants were cautious in identifying specific non-permissible activities, Jason more broadly emphasized that a Christian faith means following Biblical ethical standards: “I’m not going to be playing things that are unethical for me. I’m not going to be doing things that are unbiblical. I’m going to be wanting to follow God’s commands in my play.” In expanding on biblical standards for behaviour, specifically in referring to the Ten Commandments, some specific activities were identified as non-permissible. According to Kevin, “recklessly endangering yourself” infringed on the sixth commandment to not kill. The implications of this commandment mean that some activities, like bungee jumping or skydiving, should be approached cautiously. Similarly, Alex warned against “certain forms of martial arts” that violate the sixth commandment:

A heavy weight fight between two guys. MMA [mixed martial arts]. You know, they're looking at each other...these two guys were glaring at each other. There was hatred there. And, you know, the one basically demolished the other with his hands. To me, as a Christian, if you were to do that, that would violate the sixth commandment. You may not have killed the guy, but obviously the desire to do so was there....So, as a Christian that is one form of play that is not permissible.

Other activities cautioned against included “playing the lottery” given that it is an “expression of greed,” as well as attending strip clubs or drinking excessively, which were identified as play that should be considered out of bounds.

Though most pastors emphasized that a Christian worldview impacts *how* Christians play more than *what* Christians play, activities which violate biblical ethical standards fail to “respect God’s sovereignty over your life” (Alex). Yet, despite these restrictions, Alex shared an

appreciation for prioritizing the permissibility and privilege of play: “Within the parameters of God's sovereignty over life there's a lot you can do.” That a belief in God’s sovereignty grants freedom to play and enjoy life was a consistent perspective shared by study participants.

Play and Church Life

While submitting to God’s sovereignty and maintaining a Christian worldview led to broad perspectives on how faith infuses play, pastors were explicitly asked to identify how play can be integrated into church life. Certainly, viewing play as God-glorifying and embracing the freedom to play and enjoy life serve as a valuable foundation for integrating play into church life. Yet, to its detriment Richard acknowledged that with “the church as a whole, in terms of its organized activities, there's not a lot of emphasis on play.” So, study participants identified three primary means of integrating play into church life: (a) as a community witness, (b) inter-generational play, and (c) incorporating play into pedagogy. An additional summary theme for each of these primary means of integrating play, as well as others, emerged from the data: play facilitates relationship building.

Community Witness

Several pastors expressed some frustrations that their parishioners failed to sufficiently engage in community-based sport and play, and therefore they expressed the need for church members to play in order to “be a good Christian witness” (Alex) because “in terms of outreach, play has a role” (Richard). While part of the Christian life includes spreading the gospel, Alex critiqued his parishioners’ approach and advocated for more community-based involvement:

We're so much into evangelism...we talk about it...but how many opportunities do we actually give ourselves to rub shoulders with people that are not Christian in a context that's non-threatening? Where you're actually collaborating together on something? I

would imagine, being involved in sports outside of your own circle, would give you that opportunity. Or play, whether that be a chess club or soccer tournament or whatever. From that perspective alone there's lots of good reasons for Christians to be involved in sports...we'll use the opportunities that I have while playing to be a good Christian witness.

City or community organizations provide good opportunity to connect with community members who are not Christians and to “bring your faith, your worship so to speak, into your play, and to be part of that world and not be too insular” (Alex). Jason also shared his skepticism of Christian-only sport leagues “because in our play we are often just as sinful as people in the world.” He therefore advocated for community-based sports as they are an “excellent opportunity to work together with non-Christians” and grow alongside them. Finally, Richard praised a youth soccer camp that a local church facilitated in place of vacation bible school:

You are working hard with 35 kids between ten and fifteen for five days, for five hours a day, and you're building something with them. You're building connection with them, and you're modeling something for them. I think that's a very wonderful opportunity for churches to explore.

Though in each of these accounts pastors specifically identified sport as an ideal activity to bridge relationships with community members who are not Christians, the general recommendation was to engage in more play-based community activities rather than Christian-only programs.

Inter-generational Play

While play was valued for its potency to form relationships between people of varying spiritual backgrounds, play was also identified as facilitating and strengthening inter-

generational relationships within a church family. Now in retirement, Jerry recounted his years of ministry and the opportunities to participate in church activities with a wide range of church members: “cross-generational play within church life can be encouraged and supported.”

Examples included “games nights for seniors,” where young people and older people participate in board and card games together:

[Game nights] are good ways to build relationships with older people on a level that everyone can relate at. Young people can play games with older people, and they are able to talk through that and build up relationships and become familiar with each other.

While a few other pastors also identified constructively created “game nights” as valuable inter-generational play, Richard highlighted the spontaneous play seen after a worship service:

I've often thought that it would be good for the older folks and younger folks of the church to play together. For example, we have lots of room on our church yard here, and there's a basketball hoop on one end of it, and it's remarkable how often you'll see dads and sons shooting a few hoops. It's a really good thing to see. And the kids love it if after church their dads in their Sunday best are shooting a few hoops with them. I think that's a healthy thing.

Church picnics were also recognized as valuable, “especially when you're able to mix the age ranges” (Wayne). In this case, Wayne appreciated play for its ability to break down barriers and remove initial obstacles in relating to one another:

I recall vividly...I think for a church anniversary or something like that back when I lived in Toronto. There was this silly game where you had to pass around the circle a zucchini. You held it between your knees and you had to pass it to the person beside you and sort of go around the circle and it was just a [laughs]...I don't even think it was a

competition...it was just watching people try to pass these things off. But the age range in there...I'm thinking in particular of this one older woman who must have been around 80 at the time, participating alongside some teens and sort of passing it off. To see that interaction was pretty neat. I think play has enormous potential in bridging gaps.

Whether intentionally coordinating activities or encouraging them to spontaneously occur, inter-generational play was appreciated for its capacity to strengthen church member relationships, and was therefore encouraged as a simple means of incorporating play into church life.

Pedagogy and Play

Teaching the Christian doctrine to youth within a church family was expressed as a central component of regular church life. Given that the youth ranges in ages from twelve to eighteen, several pastors incorporated various elements of play within their regular pedagogical practices. For example, at the end of a year of catechism teaching, Kevin turned to games to reinforce the yearly lessons: “With the younger group, I tend to play a game of Pictionary based on the lessons I've taught. Yet, it's a playful way to finish the season.” Within his congregation and others, youth programs provided additional opportunity to employ play-based activities:

[Youth ministry] is another one where you have a combination of instruction and playful activity to encourage relationship. I think our focus in our church life tends to be you've got to learn stuff; you've got to teach stuff. We don't realize enough that you can also do stuff together and learn stuff together simply by enjoying each other's company.

An example of combining pedagogy with outreach programs was given by Kevin who described a vacation bible school program that ends with a “a neighbourhood BBQ. There's a bouncy castle. There's volleyball courts set up, and a few other games and things. So, there's a lot playing going on during the BBQ. And it starts to build relationships.” Utilizing play-based activities for

learning the Christian doctrine was identified as a healthy example of integrating play in ecclesiological praxis.

Play Builds Relationship

While each of these activities of community witness, inter-generational play, and play-based pedagogy emphasize a unique relational dimension of Christian life, the capacity for building relationships through play was a primary theme emerging from the data. Faith-infused play was viewed by the participants as having “an end goal of building each other up in love” (Jason), being “up-building for the people around you” (Kevin), characterized by “consciously helping each other develop” (Wayne), a means to “enjoy other people” (Richard), and ultimately providing opportunity for “connecting with people...and having opportunity to minister to them in a low-key kind of way” (Alex). While these benefits clearly derive from playing together, pastors further specified that the Christian faith also leads to certain play-based behaviours and attitudes, such as “honoring others...being loving and loyal in your play towards others” (Kevin) as well as demonstrating Christian virtues of “fair play, honest play, kindness in play, and compassion to others as you play” (Richard). Even within emotionally charged competitive environments, Jason suggested that attitudes of “building each other up in love and support” were possible when play occurs within “a spirit of fun.” When asked to provide an example of what relationship development could look like within church life, Alex detailed a Sunday experience that blended worship and play into a day of rest:

I lived with a small church community, very close to each other. Very great people to be with. After church they would have, or between the services, they would have a potluck...And the young people would be playing soccer. That was their way of connecting and burning off energy between the services. They just played....It was just

casual, fun, you know, light soccer. It was a way for them.... You get your worship, and that's connecting with God, and then your potluck and soccer afterwards and that was connecting with each other. And the two blends into each other.

While study participants provided several examples regarding how play can be integrated into church life, the primary thrust of their perspective was to enjoy the capacity for play to organically build and solidify relationships between participants.

'Play Can Go Off the Rails'

Notwithstanding the benefits derived from play and the value play has in living a balanced, free life, interview data also revealed an undercurrent of critique towards how Christians play. General critique included mis-valuing play and the prevalence of behavioural and attitudinal lapses. Some pastors suggested that Christians within their church community tend to minimize the value of play, perceiving it to be a "waste of time" or as subservient to more serious matters, such as work. This view of play differs with the recommendations from participants to view play as essential to living a balanced life, and the general consensus was that the value of play ought not be discounted given that it adds "value to your personal life and also being able to connect with other people" (Alex).

In contrast to some evidence of an under-appreciation for play, pastors also warned against over-valuing play. In instances where individuals experience excessive time in play, Tyler warned that other life responsibilities may be harmed:

I think people can definitely take play too seriously. You can love hiking, and then you can go hiking every weekend and neglect your family. You can love gaming but then get addicted to it and do it every spare moment. So, we can take our play too seriously, almost like an idol or escapism.

Similarly, Wayne identified that excessive engagement in sports was “overblown” and takes play too far, where “unhealthy levels of commitment and loyalty towards sports [can be] detrimental to other things that should be greater priority.” Richard stated that an over-involvement in sport was further associated with individuals being “caught up in the competitiveness of play” and an accompanying over-emphasis on winning:

I think there is something more to play than just competing to win.... Lots of people [in my Christian community] play hockey, they play volleyball. And, the goals are to win. And sometimes, if the winning isn't there, then a feeling of futility comes to effect their play, so to speak. And I think that's too bad. Because there is more to it than winning.

Though competitiveness was not discarded as harmful, and was instead appreciated as something that “brings out the best in people in healthy ways,” Richard shared his concern regarding his community’s tendency to over-emphasize winning:

I can enjoy sports and I can enjoy play without having to be dominant, without having to succeed. But within my community? I don't know if that's true. I think winning is too much emphasised. And, I don't want to play with someone who's not trying to win (laughs), that's not fun either. For me, it doesn't work. You have to be trying to win. So, even if you don't win, you have to be trying to win. And if you are playing against someone and they're not trying to win, and they let you win, that's not fun either. So, I think competition is healthy, but we have to transcend competition and find something in play beyond winning. In my community, that's a problem.

Aside from over-valuing community-based sport, Jerry also criticized professional sports: “I'm not a fan of organized professional sports because I think it has misguided aims and goals. The glorification of man is outside the created order. I find organized sport is bent out of shape.”

These accounts suggest that when play distracts from other life responsibilities or is pursued with misguided aims, a balanced integration of play within life is compromised.

Aside from mis-valuing play, or potentially as indicative of that mis-value, pastors also expressed concerns regarding inappropriate attitudes and behaviours exhibited in play. In reflecting on how play can bring out positive and negative characteristics of people, Jerry criticized the abrasive “gladiator style of hockey” seen within his community and professional sport: “Play can go off the rails...somehow we’ve bought into a belief that these things are part of sport.” While sport was identified as an environment where unsuitable actions may manifest, pastors generally suggested that those behaviours are a result of weakness, sin or “an element of self-promotion” (Tyler), and therefore deteriorated play can simply be a “casualty” (Alex) of spiritual immaturity. For example, Tyler suggested his own aggressive behaviour in hockey was a result of self-interest:

Sports brings out things that are already in us. I literally thought about quitting hockey - every time I would go home, I would be frustrated with myself because I'm so competitive. And I recognized that as a weakness, a sin. It was all about me needing to look good. But, at the same time, I thought that if I quit, it's actually an opportunity to recognize these things that are already within myself. They won't go away if I quit playing.

Aside from innate depravity, pastors also identified “compartmentalizing faith” as a mentality that leads to a deterioration of play. Alex described how this compartmentalization leads to harmful behaviour: “The Christian hockey league was notorious for just being hard drinking, hard playing guys, and a lot of stuff went...it wasn't good. They separated their sports from the rest of what it means to be a Christian.” While also reflecting on his experience with ice hockey,

Tyler affirmed the tendency to compartmentalize faith from play: “I've played hockey with Christians who are jerks when they play hockey. It's like they think what happens on the ice stays on the ice. But I believe that's a lie.” Wayne identified “trigger tempers” and excessive roughness as occurring in his play because sport was viewed as “something that happened outside of our faith life...we failed miserably in that regard.” Regret in ensuring a Christian worldview permeates all areas of life is evident in these critiques, as all areas of life were believed to fall under God’s sovereign domain.

Pastors were also requested to reflect on the quantitative results which demonstrated that the non-Christian sample identified higher frequencies and enjoyment of play participation than the Christian sample. Although the Christian sample was not homogenous Canadian Reformed as the pastor sample, generally pastors were unsurprised by these quantitative findings: “I often find non-Christians who know how to play better than Christians do. And that is to our own shame” (Jason). Imbalanced attitudes towards play and work, along with a Protestant work ethic ideology, were viewed as the primary causes for the variation in play participation between Christians and non-Christians. In addition, Kevin suggested non-Christian Western ideology leads to a heightened value for play and leisure over work:

In the week we live for the weekend, in the year we live for the winter getaway and the summer vacations, and in life we live for retirement. That tends to be the process for society. I do wonder whether Christians.... I wouldn't be surprised if non-Christians live for play, while Christians find a balance between work and play.

Tyler shared a similar perspective and suggested that while Christians view work as good, a secular perspective might prioritize play:

I think Christians believe that we're made to work, and that work is good. Whereas a different perspective from the world would be TGIF. Like, you can work if you have to, but we really live for play. I think that Christians don't think the same way. We can rejoice in play without idolizing it.

Aside from a difference in overall worldview, Jason suggested that the Christian belief in eternal life renders the “urgency of trying to satisfy my bucket list...or things I hope to play” as secondary to appreciating that a Christian has all eternity to enjoy life: “If you are living for this life and there isn't a hope for the life to come, then trying to find personal enjoyment in leisure time becomes a very high priority.” A worldview that devalues work, a belief in eternity, and a Christian tendency to value play and work in excessive extremes were all identified as factors contributing to the variance in Christian and non-Christian play participation rates.

Chapter Summary

Seven Reformed Christian pastors were interviewed to share their attitudes towards play, to reflect on how play is evident in the lives of Christians, and to provide recommendations on how play can be integrated into ecclesiological praxis. Primarily, in expressing a belief that God oversees all domains of a person's life, participants suggested that Christian play ought to be God-glorifying and directly integrated into a life characterized by enjoyment, authenticity and balance. Additionally, pastors emphasized the capacity for play to develop and secure relationships, notably through pedagogical practice, inter-generational events, and within organized community programs. Finally, pastors suggested that a mis-valuation of play and a belief in innate depravity frequently causes Christian play to deteriorate into self-promoting attitudes and behaviours.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

This chapter summarizes the examination of the relationship between spirituality and play by answering the research questions presented in Chapter 1:

1. How is play evident in the lives of Christians?
2. What are the spiritual features of play, and how are they evident in Christians at play?
 - a. How do the spiritual features of Christians at play compare to the spiritual features of play for people from other religious/spiritual traditions?
 - b. Are the spiritual features of play related to flow? If so, how?
3. How does a spiritual and relational attitude, or ‘I-Thou’ relational encounter (Buber, 1958), influence playful experiences?
4. How is play experienced by Christians in organized, competitive sport?
5. How can playful activities such as sport, dance, music and the arts be integrated into ecclesiological praxis?

To answer these questions, the findings presented in the results chapters (4-6) will be integrated with the literature review (Chapter 2) and background context (Chapter 1).

Overall findings suggest that the spirituality and play relationship is best captured within creative expression, transformation and relationships, features characteristic of both play and human identity. An additional feature of play, relation to God, is also strongly associated with Christians at play. These general findings will be systematically explored by addressing each research question, and then implications for future research and practice will be discussed.

The Evidence of Play in the Lives of Christians

As a relationship between play and spirituality has existed since antiquity (Mathisen, 2006), it was expected to see evidence of play in the lives of spiritual people. However, the

frequency or significance of playful behaviour was difficult to predict given that play has been accused of dying, despite the prolific cultural attention to sport, music, dance and other play-based activities (Anderson, 2012).

Study findings indicate contrasting perspectives towards overall play engagement and significance. Phases 1-3 demonstrate a significant appreciation for play within the lives of participants, while simultaneously presenting degrees of ambivalence and imbalance. These contrasting perspectives were especially seen within the subtheme of ‘balanced life’ presented in Chapters 4 and 6. Dichotomous perspectives of viewing play as both significant and insignificant appear representative of the paradoxical nature of play (Kretchmar & Watson, 2020). In contrast to some suggestions that Protestant ideologies gave rise to a depreciation for play (Johnston, 1997; Overman, 2011), findings from this study indicate that Christian players and pastors held a deep appreciation for play, though this enthusiasm is contrasted with findings demonstrating tensions in play and that non-Christians play more than Christians.

‘God Created Us to Enjoy Ourselves’

While much of the appreciation for play is related to the spiritual features of play, Phase 1 and 3 participants emphasized the importance of play within their lives as an expression of glorifying God and experiencing delight and enjoyment: “God created us to enjoy ourselves...[so] Christians should do everything they can to enjoy life and play” (Kevin). Play was viewed as an opportunity to respond to God’s invitation to enjoy and experience the goodness of life (e.g., Ellis, 2014; Smedes, 1975; Treat, 2018) while maintaining an integrated perspective on the role of play within life (Johnston, 1997). Viewing the created purpose of humanity as both stewardly development and creaturely delight means that delight and enjoyment can be found in multiple dimensions and activities of life (Treat, 2018).

The freedom to experience playful joy echoes a long line of scholars who have embraced the value of play (e.g., Johnston, 1997; Lewis, 1955) and confronts suggestions that play is partitioned from the call for Christians to bring glory to God (Harvey, 2014). Further, in contrast to a perpetual rhetoric that casts play as frivolous (Sutton-Smith, 2001), a participant in Phase 3 affirmed the goodness of play and freedom to integrate play into life:

[Play] is very significant. I think God is playful Himself. I think that being able to play is a reflection of a healthy lightheartedness that genuine Christianity brings. Christians can just be free to explore and to enjoy this awesome creation that we live in. (Richard)

While the suggestion that ‘God is playful’ parallels Moltmann’s (1972) thesis, Richard and other participants in Phases 1 and 3 based the ‘freedom to explore and to enjoy’ on God’s sovereignty.

In *Theology and the Playful Life*, Smedes (1975) similarly asserted that God’s grace grants freedom to play and enjoy, for without grace “everything becomes either despairingly serious or playfully illusionary” (p. 60). Extending this appeal to God’s grace, several Phase 1 and 3 participants suggested that a Christian who is assured of God’s sovereignty and control would be free to trust in God’s provision and simply enjoy play. For Christians, time in play can be spent guilt-free, knowing God is not impatiently waiting for people to get back to work. Overall, Phase 1 and 3 participants experienced play as a freedom that released them from their personal need to control every aspect of life and instead allowed the enjoyment of play to remind themselves of God’s sovereignty over every dimension of life. Play expresses freedom and dependence: Christians are free to play, and play is also a means to demonstrate trust in God.

‘We Don’t Play Well’

Although results provide evidence for Christian appreciation of and participation in play, several findings moderate a unilateral enthusiasm. Some results from Phase 1 and 3 suggest that

play was viewed as subservient to either spiritual life or work responsibilities. For example, Vicky's Christian worldview meant that life responsibilities, such as work and daily duties, deserved more of her attention than dancing. Similarly, Ray felt that spirituality must precede play and sport. In contrast, pastors highlighted God's sovereignty in all of life and confronted any proclivities to devalue play as an activity that may be 'less spiritual' than other activities. For example, Kevin, a pastor, questioned whether Bible study is more important than cub car races at Cadets. These results challenging commonly held dichotomies between spiritual or unspiritual realms contrast with those who view play as secular (e.g., Harvey, 2014) or suggest play is a special realm awaiting encounters with God (e.g., Johnston, 1997).

While the primacy of spirituality de-emphasized the role of play within some participants' lives, others based their tempered attitude towards play on the biblical creation account and call to work. Human priorities were ranked as "first work, and then play" (Doug) where "play has to be hobby" (Vicky) because humans "haven't been created first of all to play, play, play" (Dale). Most pastors also valued play for its restorative quality. These findings are consistent with dominant cultural tendencies to value leisure and play for their benefit in revitalizing one's capability for work (Goodale & Godbey, 1988; Hunnicut, 2006). Play's inherent value is often underrated and reduced to its quantifiable benefits: it alleviates stress, refreshes, and recharges; it alters perspectives and invokes optimism (Marano, 2019).

Findings from Phase 1 and 3 support previous claims that a "driven and results-oriented" work obsession (Watson & Parker, 2013, p. 33) substantially influences modern life (Weber, 1958), including Christians. As seen in Phase 3, several pastors associated some Protestant theology, especially Calvinism, as reinforcing an "overly serious attitude" (Richard) where people "take themselves a little too seriously" (Tyler). Richard was suspicious of "overly serious

Christians who don't have time to play.” Alex suggested that work obsession is associated with an individual basis for identity, an interesting critique when held in balance with Marx’s claim that human creativity is expressed through labour (Marx & Engels, 1959). Alex further noted how work-based identity contrasts with a view of human identity based in creation and in relationship to God (Harvey, 2014; Sproul & Mathison, 2005): “A healthy understanding [of life] doesn't work too much...where it's like, I almost have to prove myself in this world by working. You've already been proven. Your identity is already secure.”

Along with Protestant ideology, a cultural influence of work obsession was described at length by a Phase 1 participant, who lamented his inability to maintain an adequate perspective on play: “We don't play well...People are always tired these days. I think that's one of the reasons why - too much stuff on the go, too busy. Therefore, we don't play, we don't rest” (Doug). While a Protestant work ethic can be associated with some devaluation of play, Doug’s description of our societal tendency to be ‘busy’ is more broadly representative of current individualistic and competitive capitalistic cultures (Hoffman, 2010; Parker & Weir, 2012).

Non-Christians Play More than Christians

Findings from Phase 2 offer additional perspective on the valuation between work and play. There was a significant difference between Christian and non-Christian responses regarding how they valued work and play, with a greater proportion of Christians agreeing that play is less important than work (see Table 5.16). Thirty-four percent of Christians and 27% of non-Christians agreed and 33% of Christians and 45% of non-Christians disagreed that play is less important than work. So, while there was variation in Christian attitudes towards the primacy of work or play, the non-Christians generally showed more favourable attitudes towards play.

Overall, non-Christians exhibited greater frequency and enjoyment of participating in play than Christians. The pastors interviewed in Phase 3 were generally unsurprised by these findings, with Kevin suggesting that these differences may lie in societal proclivities to value play over work: “I wouldn't be surprised if non-Christians live for play, while Christians find a balance between work and play.” Jason was less assured of the reason for a difference between groups: “I often find non-Christians who know how to play better than Christians do. And that is to our own shame.” Generally, pastors identified a secular devaluation of work, a Christian belief in eternity, and a tendency to value play and work in excessive extremes as factors contributing to the variance in Christian and non-Christian play participation rates. These assumptions reflect common questions concerning Christian appreciation for and participation in play and attitudes towards rest and work-life integration (Johnston, 1997; Ryken, 1995).

While the majority of Canadians (68%) are satisfied with their work-life integration, degrees of satisfaction with that integration have steadily decreased from 2008 to 2016, with the main source of dissatisfaction attributed to excessive work responsibilities (Statistics Canada, 2017). Increasing dissatisfaction suggests incongruence between thoughts, feelings and actions (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Robinson, 2007b). Therefore, questions arise concerning Christian authenticity in response to living a life of creaturely delight. It is uncertain whether Christians value opportunities to play or if Christians are detrimentally influenced by work obsession or lack of work-life integration as suggested by study participants.

Interestingly, the three most frequently participated in and enjoyed activities were the same for Christians and non-Christians (listening to music, sociable conversation and web-surfing) (see Table 5.18). These activities parallel the statistics on time spent on daily passive leisure activities (73.9% of Canadians) and socializing (38% of Canadians) (Statistics Canada,

2015). Christians demonstrated significantly greater frequency of play participation in five specific activities: jigsaw puzzles, board games, card games, team sports and aquatic sports. Conversely, non-Christians demonstrated significantly greater frequency of participation in overall spontaneous and casual play as well as ten specific activities: childish imitations, dabbling, web-surfing, video games, party games, fitness activities, social dancing, folk dancing, square dancing, and theatre. A corresponding theme that emerged from interviews with pastors was that “choices of play are going to be shaped by being a Christian” (Jason). However, few activities were specifically identified as conflicting with a Christian worldview; pastors emphasized *how* Christians play is more significant than *what* Christians play.

One noteworthy difference in play participation is that non-Christians reported greater frequency and enjoyment of participating in dance (see Table 5.17). Though dance is prolific in Scripture, the role of dance within the Christian life has been contested, having been associated with sinfulness or secularization (LaMothe, 2015) and feared by some Christians due to the association between dance and hedonistic pleasure or extravagance (Overman, 2011). While some exceptions exist, dance was largely excluded from church life after the Reformation (Gagne et al., 2000). Recent research demonstrates that some Christians integrate their faith into dance rather than viewing these areas of life as conflicting (Kraus, 2010). However, Kraus found that participants were concerned about external judgment, and therefore some approached their participation in dance with trepidation, suggesting lingering suspicious attitudes towards this play-form. For one Phase 1 participant, dance was a primary means of play. Vicky’s love for dance was viewed as a “gift from God” and an opportunity for creative expression, a break from work and school tasks, and a way to connect with friends. Likewise, recent research in Norway documenting a resurgence in dance in Christian contexts found that participants used dance as a

means to connect with others, themselves and God (Schuff, 2019). Given the capacity for dance to facilitate spiritual and relational encounters (Ross, 1993), one would expect a continued resurgence in this play-form amongst Christians despite lingering historical skepticism.

The Spiritual Features of Play

A primary objective of this study was to examine the spiritual dimension of play (e.g., Harrison & Robinson, 2017; Huizinga, 1950; Rahner, 1964). While Phase 1 and 3 participants expressed definitional and relational ambiguity regarding spirituality and play, emerging themes cautioned against dualistic thinking, where spiritual/unspiritual are treated as opposing qualities. For Christians who view spirituality as life-encompassing, distinguishing some features of play as spiritual and others as unspiritual was inconsistent with their worldview. For example, a Phase 1 participant described that all dimensions of life “meld into one...the natural and the spiritual are all together” (Doug) The pastors expressed a similar view, that the Christian faith is “an all of life thing” (Kevin); Jesus “has sway over every aspect of your life” (Jason).

Attempts to reassert body-soul holism are as old as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas (trans. 1920), who both maintained that the soul, or the spiritual, is present in the whole body and made complete in physical form (Q76, Art. 1; Robinson, 2011). As found in Phase 3, pastors emphasized that play helps challenge commonly held dichotomies between spiritual versus unspiritual and worship versus play because “there's unity between body and soul that is essential to Christian living” (Jerry). Richard described how play contains “a certain aspect of authenticity...they're in harmony with their body and their mind and their soul,” as exemplified in his time spent cycling which he viewed every bit as spiritual as Sunday morning worship. A more authentic integration of material and immaterial realities is similar to research that has associated spirituality with physicality (Trousdale et al., 2010) and corporeality (Nortje & van

der Merwe, 2016; van der Merwe & Habron, 2015). While several specific features of play were connected to spirituality through this present study, it is recognized that those features remain intimately bound to the physical experience of play itself.

Overall Spirituality of Play

The Play Experience Scale (PES) was developed to examine the primary characteristics and features associated with play as informed by theological, conceptual and empirical literature as well as data from Phase 1. The overall PES score correlated with overall frequency and enjoyment of play, as well as with all sources of spirituality, most strongly with transcendent and self-sources of spirituality. This finding suggests that the collective features of play are most associated with a sense of authenticity and connection with a deep sense of self or with “something that seems completely outside the physical order” (Davis et al., 2015, p. 505). This finding provides empirical evidence of a relationship between spirituality and play, and was reinforced by Phase 1 participants who identified inextricable similarities between their spirituality and play. To Amy, a recent Christian convert, play was associated with her emerging sense of Christian spirituality and a sense of freedom, self-expression, creativity, enjoyment and relationship building. The primary characteristics of enjoyment, creativity, and relationships were echoed by every Phase 1 participant, perhaps best summarized by Jenn who explained how spiritual growth results in a clearer understanding of how her spirituality and play relate.

While the overall themes emerging from interview data included enjoyment, freedom and creative expression, connection, transformation and meaning, factor analysis of the PES revealed a three-factor solution which, based on item analysis, were labeled as creative expression, transformation and relation to God. These three features, as well as broader interpersonal connections, represent the primary relationships between spirituality and play. Figure 7.1

illustrates the features of play as they emerged through various phases of the research process, demonstrating links between themes that loaded onto corresponding factors.

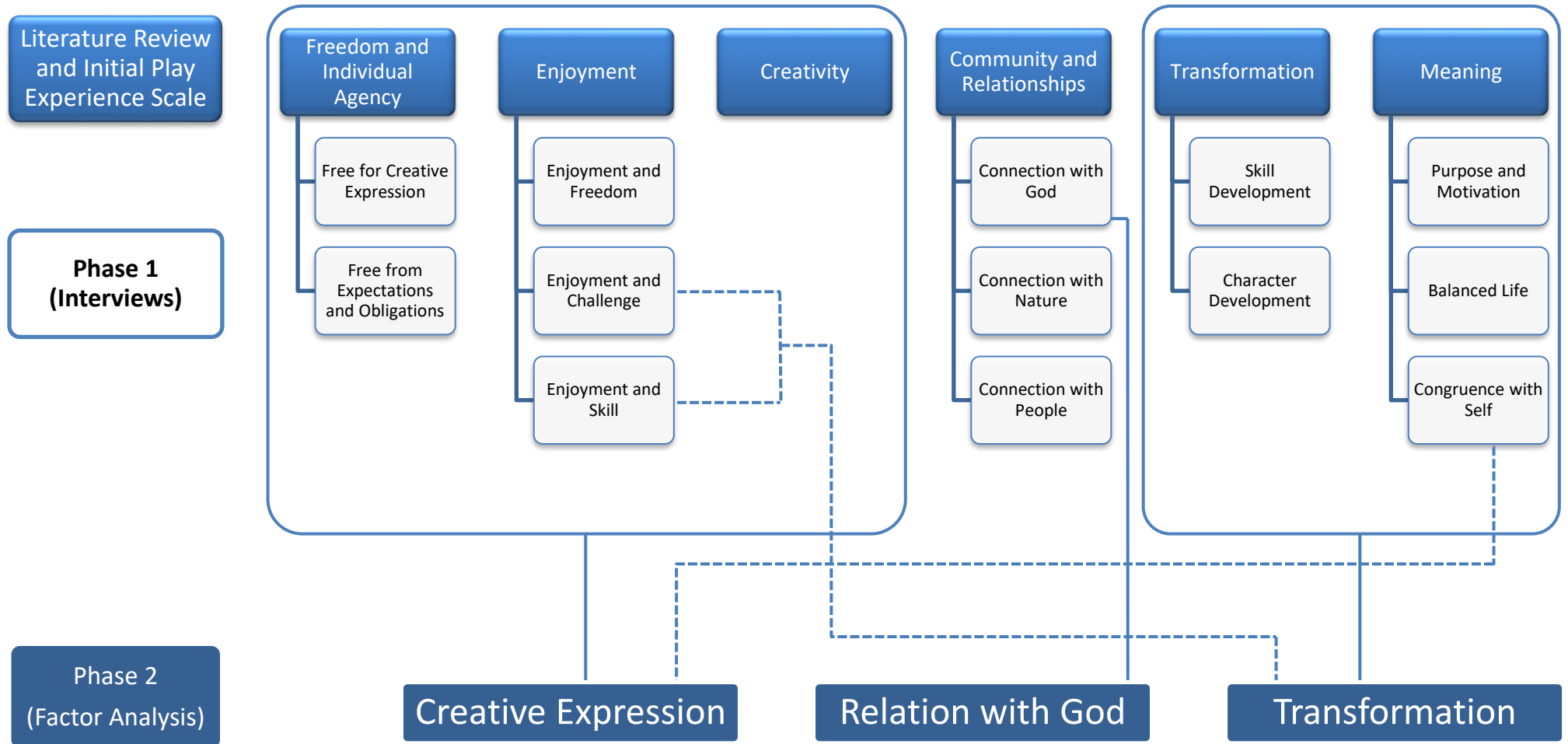
Given both the inextricable similarities found between spirituality and play in Phase 1, as well as the significant correlations between the collective features of play and each source of spirituality, it is evident that there is a relationship between spirituality and play. Additionally, each of the features of play significantly correlated with at least two different sources of spirituality (see Table 5.13). However, the nature of the relationship between spirituality and play is more ambiguous given that Phase 1 and 3 participants discouraged perpetuating a spiritual/unspiritual dichotomy. What is granted is that play, and the features of play, have been recognized by many people as possessing a spiritual dimension, though to identify creative expression, transformation or relationship as ‘spiritual features of play’ would risk dissociating spiritual from unspiritual realities. So, play and its characterizing features have an innate spiritual dimension and individuals can explore spirituality through play (Harrison & Robinson, 2017), though as a critical realist it is accepted that what can be fully known about the spiritual dimension of reality is inherently limited (Fletcher, 2014; O’Mahoney & Vincent, 2014).

Creative Expression

Findings from both the quantitative survey and interviews affirm the primacy of creative expression as a spiritual dimension of play. Fifteen scale items from the PES loaded onto this first feature. A review of those items demonstrates that creative expression is primarily reflective of freedom, creativity, joy and a sense of identity and self-expression. Play frequency and enjoyment, as well as each category of playful activity, were significantly correlated with creative expression (see Tables 5.27-5.30). Further, given that creative expression significantly correlated with human, self, nature and transcendent sources of spirituality, it is apparent that

Figure 7.1

Concept Map Summarizing the Features of Play



participants related this feature of play with spirituality (see Table 5.32). Creative expression is repeatedly identified as a primary spiritual dimension of play, as demonstrated in research with both children (Champagne, 2001; Fraser & Grootenboer, 2004) and adults (Rothman, 2009).

The relationships between creativity, freedom and play were directly related to Phase 1 participants' spirituality. For example, Vicky stated that her spirituality "makes me want to be more creative...God created us to be in His image, which means we're smaller creators." Robin shared a similar perspective linking creativity and freedom to play: "The Bible talks about being made in the image of God - it's a spark of that image coming out when people are free to play." In viewing themselves as image-bearers, participants viewed play as representative of a creative, congruent and authentic sense of self. These associations between creative expression and being God's image-bearers are similar to scholars who have linked God's creation with human creativity and artistic expression (Hendry, 1980; Moltmann, 1972), as well as with those who viewed play as a way to discover and be more fully human as image-bearers (Berryman, 1991).

In accordance with the Christian belief that creative expression is an extension of being image-bearers, this study found that creative expression is strongly associated with three sources of spirituality: self, human and transcendent. In connecting play and creative expression with "one's deepest or authentic sense of self," with all of humanity, or with something "outside the physical order" (Davis et al., 2015, p. 505), findings suggest that play and creative expression affirm something about who people are and represent an authentic mode of existence (Jirásek, 2015). Huizinga (1950) suggested that the innate non-materialistic characteristic of play brings people closer to realizing their humanity and provides opportunity for individuals to creatively express themselves. Phase 1 participants affirmed this possibility, as Amy described her play as a way to "feel like myself," and Keith described his best experiences of play as a sense of harmony

between vulnerability and agency. Jenn suggested that play “helps me express who I am and who I was created to be” and, the more play parallels daily activities, “the more connected to my purpose I feel.” Following the likes of Huizinga, Ellis (2014) noted that humans are natural players: “we play to express our nature, we play to be human” (p. 266).

Findings in this study support Huizinga’s (1950) and Fink’s (1968) primary tenet that play is meaningful because it represents who people are in relation to themselves and the world around them. For Christians, meaning is about being *who* they are: identity is grounded in being image bearers of God and disciples of Jesus. Creative expression is reflective of who we are as image bearers: play reflects the creative nature of God.

Transformation

The second primary feature of play found in Phases 1 to 3 is transformation. According to the items from the PES that loaded onto this factor, transformation is associated with a sense of improvement and growth, as well as meaning and purpose, which are similar to Johnston’s (1997) “but productive” (p. 42) and Harvey’s (2014) “yet meaningful” (p. 69) characterizations of play. Overall play frequency and enjoyment were correlated with transformation, though not as strongly as with creative expression. Transformation correlated most strongly with physical contests and sports, and did not correlate with the categories of casual play or creative and artistic activities (see Tables 5.27-5.30).

Transformation correlated with two dimensions of spirituality: nature and human (see Table 5.32). As the correlation with nature was weaker and less significant, it seems the transformative feature of play is most associated with a human-oriented source of spirituality, a closeness or connection with other people. In other words, the meaning, purpose and transformative qualities of play are related to a spiritual connection with all of humanity, a

finding consistent with scholars suggesting that play develops an appreciation for humanity (Twietmeyer, 2007, 2015) or represents the totality of the world (Fink, 1960).

Phase 1 interviews confirmed that play naturally exhibited transformative qualities and spirituality further leads someone to seek growth or change (Robinson, 2007c). Character and skill development were both identified as primary features of the transformative capacity of play, affirming suggestions that transformative play is indicative of self-transcendence and a longing for development and growth (Ellis, 2014; Jirásek, 2015). As well, transformation has been identified as a theme in a study on spirituality and music (Nortke & van der Merwe, 2016). Heintzman (2016a) identified spiritual well-being as a transformative benefit of leisure.

The finding that transformation is a spiritual feature of play affirms Robinson's (2007b) suggestion that the spiritual element of any human experience is dynamic and changing, and so the transformative spiritual dimension of play invites repeated playful encounters, creating optimal conditions for the actualization of individual and collective potentiality (Sutton-Smith, 2001). For example, Ray, from Phase 1, associated both his spirituality and play with a desire to improve, to "persevere and continue to grow." Keith, also from Phase 1, shared a similar perspective: "I think my spirituality adds another aspect to play, and that would be, does it improve yourself?" Created with the capacity for growth and potential, rather than as static and complete, humans reach beyond themselves toward a more authentic and complete self (Ellis, 2014; Robinson, 2007c).

Play's transformative capacity is made possible because it is internally rewarding and enjoyable (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975a), as evidenced in how the overall PES score negatively correlated with amotivation, but correlated with all forms of internal self-determined motivation, most notably with autonomous motivation (see Table 5.10). These findings support the long-

standing claim that play is an intrinsically motivated behaviour (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Iso-Ahola, 1999; Schmid, 2011). The innate psychological need for mastery and competence corresponds with this transformative quality of play (Ryan & Deci, 2017; White, 1963).

While creative expression reflects humanity's identity as image-bearers of God, transformation resembles humanity's status as creatures. Play, then, embodies these inherent qualities of people as evidenced in these present findings. This combined quality of play to create and transform was noticed by Schiller (1965) who believed that, through the freedom of play, life-transformation is possible. Robinson (2007b) also highlighted that a primary component of spirituality is recognizing the sameness and difference individuals have from the world around them. Perhaps, then, the creative expression of play is indicative of a degree of sameness with God, while transformation is indicative of a degree of difference: humanity's finitude as creatures that transform and change differ from an unchanging, infinite God.

Relation to God

A point of separation between Christian and non-Christian participants was noticed in the third factor that emerged from the PES, which reflected a relationship to God. As expected, this feature significantly correlated with theistic and transcendent sources of spirituality (see Table 5.32). Christians viewed their play as a gift from God, an opportunity to express gratitude, and an opportunity to connect with God, a finding consistent with the in-depth interviews and with previous empirical research (Mosley et al., 2015). Phase 1 and 3 participants described their relation to God through play as central act, extension or opportunity of their worship. For example, Jenn highlighted that play was used to "to express worship or express who God is." Viewing play as an expression of worship contrasts with suggestions that play is secluded from worship or God's presence (e.g., Harvey, 2014; Suits, 1977), for "even our play...is in a sense a

sacrifice to God” (Keith). These findings reflect conceptual and empirical research that position play as a gift of grace to honour God (Schroeder & Scribner, 2006; Smedes, 1975).

Notably, relation to God was not significantly related to overall frequency of play participation or enjoyment in participation. Rather, relation to God significantly and positively correlated with frequency and enjoyment in physical contests and sports (specifically team, dual and aquatic sports) (see Tables 5.27-5.30), which contrasts with research that did not find a relationship between physical activity and sports with spiritual well-being (Heintzman, 1999). In addition, relation to God significantly and negatively correlated with spontaneous and casual play (specifically dabbling, daydreaming and web-surfing) and other specific activities including video games, party activities and social dancing. While the relation to God feature cannot be directly equated to spiritual well-being, these findings parallel research that has shown negative correlations between spiritual well-being and social dancing as well as mass media activity participation styles (Heintzman, 1999, 2009). The negative relationships between relation to God and social dancing might be due to lingering suspicious attitudes that some Christians have towards dance (Gagne et al., 2000; LaMothe, 2015); while non-Christians had a lower level of relation to God and tended to dance more, Christians had a higher level of relation to God and reported less frequent dance participation than non-Christians. The negative correlation between relation to God and passive media activities (e.g., web-surfing, video games) may relate to the general dissatisfaction and apathy associated with these activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014a), or Phase 1 participant Keith’s reflection that Christians especially “select areas that we enjoy, that we also somehow at a gut level think this is somehow more pleasing to God.”

Comparing Christian and Non-Christian Perspectives on the Features of Play

Aside from the relation to God feature, several other features of play differed between Christians and non-Christians. While there were no significant differences between groups regarding the creative expression and transformation features of play, analysis showed that non-Christians reported significantly higher levels of both freedom and relation to work (discussed above), while Christians reported significantly higher levels of relation to nature.

Freedom

Freedom, described by survey items as the ability to sense freedom and make decisions while playing, was significantly associated with a spirituality that emphasizes connecting with nature, other people and expressing an authentic sense of self, and was significantly and negatively correlated with theistic spirituality (see Table 5.13). That non-Christians reported higher freedom is consistent with findings that non-Christians reported higher affiliation with nature and human sources of spirituality, and lower affiliation with theistic spirituality. Discovering that non-Christians indicated higher freedom is consistent with the finding that non-Christians engaged in play more frequently than Christians, because freedom is often associated with individual autonomy (Watson & Parker, 2013) and the freedom to choose to play (Kretchmar & Watson, 2020). The significant correlation between autonomous motivation and freedom supports the association between freedom and autonomy in facilitating more self-determined behaviour (Ryan & Deci, 2000) (see Table 5.11).

The correlation between freedom and self-spirituality is similar to research demonstrating that freedom is associated with self-expression (Nelson & Rawlings, 2007; Moriarty, 2013). However, the positive correlations between freedom and both nature and human sources of spirituality are more puzzling. That autonomy is balanced by an intrinsic need for relatedness

may explain the relationship between freedom and a sense of connection with humanity (Ryan & Deci, 2017), or may be a recognition that autonomy is constrained by seeking wholeness through interpersonal relations (Hyland, 1978). Relationships between nature spirituality and freedom is similar to research that showed that opportunity for free time in nature positively impacts spiritual outcomes (Heintzman, 2010, 2016a, 2016b). Perceptions of freedom and control over lifestyle choices may facilitate greater opportunity to connect with the natural world.

Of interest is the negative correlation between theistic spirituality and freedom, and that Christians reported less freedom than non-Christians (see Table 5.16). These Phase 2 findings are held in balance with Phase 1 findings, where Christian participants identified spiritual freedom as a primary feature of play. These experiences of freedom were expressed in numerous ways: Amy “just felt free...[and] was fully present” while playing basketball; Robin described the sensation of “freedom in a fall” during aerial arts; Keith described the freedom to “interpret that piece of music” while playing within a string quartet. Participants referred to freedom as innate to play, but also saw their spirituality as freedom for creative expression and freedom from expectations and obligations, reflective of Guttmann’s (2004) conceptions of *freedom to* and *freedom from*. Participants in Phase 1 affirmed that Christian theistic spirituality facilitated some sense of freedom, which contrasts with the quantitative result. Christians live in a tension of total freedom and total responsibility.

Relation to Nature

While the relation to nature feature of play correlated with all sources of spirituality, it predictably correlated most strongly with a nature-based source of spirituality, which is associated with a sense of awe and wonder toward nature (see Table 5.13). An aesthetic appreciation and amazement for the natural world is commonly associated with nature-based

spirituality (Jirásek, 2015). Interestingly, while non-Christians indicated greater affiliation with nature spirituality, Christians indicated a greater sense of awe and wonder while playing in nature or the outdoors. These findings may be due to the fact that, while Christians experience wonder in nature, they are more likely to associate with theistic or transcendent spirituality, while non-Christians identified human and nature as primary sources of spirituality.

Frequency and enjoyment of participation in individual and aquatic sports, reading, photography and painting were all significantly associated with relation to nature (see Tables 5.5 and 5.6). Conversely, frequency and enjoyment of participating in video games was significantly negatively correlated with relation to nature. Both active and passive playful activities were associated with a spiritual sense of awe or wonder in the outdoors. These findings are similar to other studies which have associated spirituality with a wide range of nature-based recreation activities (Fredrickson & Anderson, 1999; Heintzman, 1998, 2016b; Stringer & McAvoy, 1992).

Play, Spirituality and Flow

Dispositional flow refers to the tendency for participants to experience flow within a specific activity (Jackson et al., 2008). Findings demonstrate that overall play participation and enjoyment, as well as the overall play experience score, were associated with dispositional flow (see Table 5.12). These findings affirm the long-standing tradition that flow and play are similar experiences (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975b; Kotler, 2014).

While no Phase 1 participants used ‘flow’ to describe their play experience, their descriptions were saturated with language commonly associated with flow. These descriptions included expressing the euphoric highs associated with simple joys, reflecting on the conditions of skills and challenge to maximize enjoyment, expressing feelings of control and deep absorption in an activity, and detailing the struggle of uncertainty or vulnerability that leads to

enjoyment (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Jackson et al., 2008). Keith particularly explained that “a prime example of play” occurs in moments of ultimate agency and heightened vulnerability: “Those are the times when we are going to really feel the moment.” Experiences of deep satisfaction and engagement revealed deeper experiences of enjoyable play, often heightened by vulnerability and adequate degrees of challenge and competency, all of which have been associated with flow states (Kotler, 2014).

Phase 1 results suggest that participants experienced flow in more active playful activities, which is consistent with Phase 2 results that showed significant relationships between dispositional flow and organized play and games, physical contests, sports and dance. Research indicates that people experience higher levels of flow during active leisure than passive leisure activities (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014a; Schmidt et al., 2007). Dispositional flow also correlated with autonomous motivation and all forms of more self-determined regulations, confirming research that suggests flow is strongly related to intrinsic and autonomous forms of motivation (Fong et al., 2015; Nakamura et al., 2019).

Aside from relating to play in a general sense, dispositional flow correlated with all of the features of play except the relation to God feature (see Table 5.12). That the tendency to experience flow in play was unrelated to the relation to God feature and theistic spirituality corroborates the finding that relation to God was not related to overall play frequency or enjoyment. Dispositional flow was significantly positively correlated with creative expression, providing further empirical support for the relationship between creativity and flow (Kotler, 2014). Also, the correlation found between transformation and dispositional flow supports research associating flow with personal development, learning and an increased complexity of the self (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Nakamura et al., 2019).

Dispositional flow significantly correlated with nature and, more strongly, self-sources of spirituality, indicating that the tendency to experience flow in play relates to a sense of connection with individual identity and personal authenticity (Davis et al., 2015). Generally, the relationship between flow and spirituality is inconclusive (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015; Sainz, 2004; Watson & Nesti, 2005), and flow is typically associated with psychological and emotional experiences more than with spirituality (Esfahani et al., 2014; Jarratt & Sharpley, 2017). It is noteworthy, though, that dispositional flow also correlated with creative expression, and given that creative expression correlated with self-spirituality, there appears to be a relationship between flow, creative expression and one's sense of authenticity and connection to the self. Two other quantitative studies have found correlations between spirituality and flow (Dillon & Tait, 2000; Foster, 2012) but, as these studies evaluated spirituality differently, it may be premature to conclude that flow and spirituality are directly related.

I-Thou Relational Encounter and Playful Experiences

As there are “no academic publications that specifically address relationships from a Christian perspective” within the sport context (Watson & Parker, 2013, p. 40), the present findings provide new and valuable perspectives on how Christians view relationships within their play. Few social scientific studies have utilized Buber's (1958) notion of relational encounter to examine participant experiences in playful activity, with some exceptions including studies with athletes (DeSensi, 1980, 1981, 1982) and within childhood education (Bone, 2008).

While ‘relation to other people’ did not emerge as one of the three primary factors from the Play Experience Scale, the ‘relate to others’ feature of play did significantly correlate with overall frequency and enjoyment of participation, and specifically with organized play and games (card games, board games, party activities) and physical contests and sports (team,

individual, aquatic sports) (see Tables 5.5 to 5.9). In addition, frequency and enjoyment of participating in sociable conversation, social dancing and listening to music were all significantly correlated with relation to others, suggesting that these activities provided participants with a sense of belonging and an appreciation for others within playful activity. As the ‘relate to others’ feature of play also correlated with several sources of spirituality, including human, nature, and self, this finding suggests that participants affirmed a spiritual connectedness to others through playful activities, consistent with previous research that highlighted a spiritual connection with others in music (Hays & Minichiello, 2005), dance (McGuire, 2007) and sport (Ellis, 2012).

The Phase 1 findings present a more robust response as to how spiritual and relational encounters influence playful activities. A strong theme of relational connectivity emerged from the data as every Phase 1 participant associated both their spirituality and play with relationships. Several participant responses capture the significance of this theme. For Vicky, the significance of play is in the “opportunity to connect with other people.” In Ray’s view, play “has to have some relational aspect to it, otherwise why are we doing it?” Believing that people are naturally relational informed John’s general attitude towards play: “I think play often brings an element of community, and I think that speaks more to the perfection of how God has created us...I think ultimately heaven...is a place that's a community; it's a city.” Amy identified that the most valuable component of a playful experience was “the people I was playing with.” Even the depth of play was related to the presence of others: “If you want pure play, then I think you're approaching it more when you're with other people” (Keith). While these responses clearly speak to the relational nature of both spirituality and play, the subthemes of experiencing tension with others and experiences of love and inclusivity with others appear more representative of Buber’s (1958) ‘I-It’ and ‘I-Thou’ relational encounters.

I-It and Tension with Others

Collectively, participants observed various degrees of tension in relation to others that could be characteristic of relating to others as ‘It,’ where others are utilized for functional purposes (Buber, 1958) and not appreciated as distinct beings worthy of recognition and value (Robinson, 2007b). Phase 1 participants described tensions as “us versus them” (Sarah), “acting like a clown on the ice” (Ray) and as a general consequence of self-promoting attitudes and behaviours. Dale added that, especially when he was younger, other play participants “weren't relevant at all. They were just seen as somebody else to beat...there was no deeper connection. There was no relationship.” The pastors also described situations in which ‘play can go off the rails,’ as observed when individuals are “caught up in the competitiveness of play” (Richard) or participate in “gladiator style hockey” (Jerry). These examples are representative of ethical and moral lapses in play (Watson & Parker, 2014), or abandonment of a spirituality that recognizes other people as having worth and value (Robinson, 2007b). Viewing others as ‘them,’ ‘irrelevant,’ or as ‘somebody else to beat’ is representative of relating to others as ‘It’ and fails to recognize a spiritual relationship with the other (Buber, 1958).

Over-emphasizing performance and outcome is also indicative of what Hyland (1978) described as “deficient modes of play” (p. 35). When competitive play results in alienation rather than friendship, “agonistic aspirations and glorious exhibitionism” appear to be of primary concern (Huizinga, 1950, p. 146). Phase 1 participants based deficient relational encounters on self-centeredness and “a sinful nature that pulls us away from God” (Doug). John added that “the sinful nature just comes roaring out of some people more than others,” resulting in tension between self and others where individuals “play for themselves and for their own stats.” Sarah noted that this same nature leads to a “natural desire to hate your opponent while you’re

playing.” Several of the pastors acknowledged similar tendencies, where deficient play behaviours are a result of weakness or “self-promotion” (Tyler), and therefore deteriorated play can simply be a “casualty” (Alex) of spiritual immaturity. Jerry suggested organized sport is “bent out of shape” because “the glorification of man is outside the created order.”

Csikszentmihalyi (1990) warned that self-centeredness is antithetical to autotelic experiences, which parallels John’s description that, as he has grown in spiritual maturity, his attitude towards play has changed. Dale also emphasized that his growth in spiritual maturity has meant prioritizing appreciation for others as central to “playing in the right spirit...because [others] are not enemies...they also have been created in God’s image.” As self-centeredness has been associated with compromised play (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990), so too Watson and White (2007) argued that pride results in an over-emphasis on winning. So, as participants experienced growth in their spirituality, so too did they describe greater appreciation for others and greater recognition of their own limitations. While Kretchmar (2013) conceded that modern sport does not provide overtly positive environments to nurture healthy versions of pride and humility, participant responses suggest that transitioning from viewing others as ‘It’ to ‘Thou’ can occur by “playing in the right spirit,” one that recognizes a spiritual relationship with the self and others fostered through spiritual development and growth (Robinson, 2007b).

I-Thou and Love and Inclusivity of Others

According to Buber (1958), meaningful relationships are found when people meet others as authentic beings and recognize a living, spiritual relationship with them. Differing from I-It encounters which may emphasize sensation and experience, I-Thou spiritual encounters emphasize the relationship itself. While the tension participants experienced with others was

characteristic of I-It encounters, participants also expressed connection with love and inclusivity that is more indicative of I-Thou encounters.

Play, be it with familiar or unfamiliar people, served to strengthen and deepen relationships with others. Phase 1 and 3 participants associated play with bringing others joy, sharing indescribably intimate experiences, and developing relationships within families and the broader community. Echoing the eschatological hopes of Moltmann (1972), Dale suggested that play was a foretaste of an eternal life in heaven: “Play is something that will be part of our experience in heaven. [pause] The communal nature of play and how that brings out the best in people.” A communal aspect of play has repeatedly been identified as a primary feature between spirituality and play (Fink, 1960; Hay & Nye, 2006; Trousdale et al., 2010; Twietmeyer, 2007).

While participants referenced the Fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22-23) as characteristic of their attitude towards others, love was identified as the most important characteristic of their relational encounters. According to Buber (1958), love is a subject-to-subject relation in which I relates to Thou with a sense of caring, commitment and responsibility. The centrality of love in shaping an I-Thou relational encounter was expressed in a variety of ways by Phase 1 participants: love represented “selflessness...putting others first” (Dale), loved showed “you value someone” (Robin), and love involved looking to the “characteristics of Jesus” and appreciating opponents’ mutual love for play while playing basketball (Amy). Jenn described her “whole purpose is to love others” and how she is “wired for relationships and connection,” which comes out in her play. In calling love “the clearest example of spirituality” (p. 131), Nesti (2007a) asserted that human love cannot be reduced to psychological experience, but is reflective of a spiritual relationship. While that relationship can be directed towards the activity itself, as in

‘the love of play,’ Phase 1 participants expressed that love is an outflow of their character and sense of spirituality, and so emphasized the relational nature of themselves and play.

As an extension of love and appreciation for others, Robinson (2007c) suggested that a spiritual and relational encounter is marked by inclusivity. For Phase 1 participants, inclusivity meant bridging social gaps where “everybody has a good time” (Vicky) and people “feel a valued part of what’s going on” (Robin). The beauty of play to facilitate harmony and inclusion of others was expressed as an extension of how spirituality infuses play. Buber (2002) utilized the term ‘inclusion’ to describe the confirmation that occurs when meeting others within I-Thou encounters. Buber’s ‘inclusion’ was representative of a deep empathy for others that occurs when individuals experience a connection with others within an immediate moment. Inclusion, then, is not merely a dialogical activity (e.g., Scott et al., 2009), but is representative of a spiritual appreciation and awareness of others as the same and different (Robinson, 2007b), which especially occurs in situations that suspend time and space where individuals are immersed together within an immediate moment. When Huizinga (1950) called play a ‘magic circle,’ he was referring to the capacity for play to distort time and space, as occurs in moments of pure or deep play (Ackerman, 1997) or within flow (Kotler, 2014). Play, therefore, provides a context for players to meet others and simultaneously experience the event as oneself and as the other.

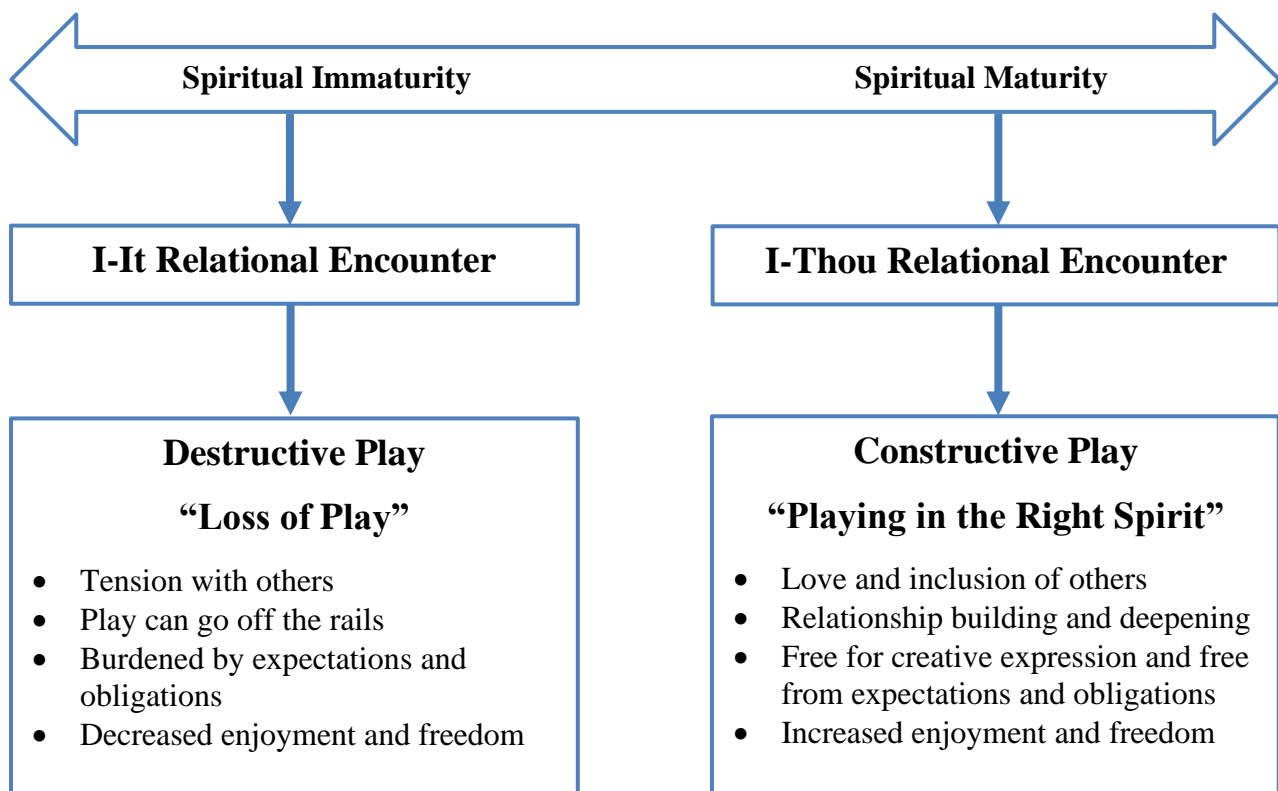
Spirituality is marked by love and inclusivity where others are met as Thou; valuable, personal and authentic beings, not objects to use or overcome. The experiences of tension with others (I-It) and a lack of inclusion were indicative of “a loss of play” (Dale), “a weakness, a sin” (Tyler), a compartmentalization of play as “something that happened outside of faith life” (Wayne) and, generally speaking, spiritual immaturity. Phase 1 and 3 participants affirmed that play has the capacity to nurture compassion and an awareness that other lives are meaningful.

Play does not simply develop relationships, but it also invites “experiencing the other side” (Buber, p. 114). When Jenn spoke of “[knowing] them in some capacity” or as feeling “very connected to them,” she seemed to be expressing a profound spiritual encounter with others.

Figure 7.2 summarizes the relationships between spiritual maturity, the relational encounter, and behaviours and experiences associated with constructive and destructive play. These relationships are further discussed in the following section on Christians in sport.

Figure 7.2

Summary of Relational Encounters and Spiritual Maturity



Christians in Sport

The preceding discussion illustrates findings suggesting that Christians in organized, competitive sport experience both constructive and destructive aspects. Constructively, sport was viewed by Phase 1 participants as a way to “serve others [by] bringing other players and

teammates into the game” (Dale), as the best activity to “build that relationship” with others (Ray), as a place to “build an environment that honours God” (Robin), and as a forum to “love other people” (Jenn). In contrast, participants also shared various destructive aspects of sport, including: “nastiness” (Sarah), “white-line fever” (Dale), “getting lost and getting angry” (Doug), the general presence of undesirable expectations and pressures, and the suggestion that organized sport is “bent out of shape” (Jerry). These destructive aspects associated with organized, competitive sport are reflective of the supposed disease that infects modern sport (Guttman, 1994; Watson & Parker, 2014), and these findings also demonstrate that those same ethical lapses confront Christians within organized, competitive sport.

To combat some of these moral or ethical lapses, some have suggested that “the recovery of the play ethic in modern sport is essential for its long-term health” (Watson & Parker, 2013, p. 19). Findings from this study support this suggestion, as participant responses indicate that characteristics of play help alleviate some of the more detrimental experiences associated with sport. To that end, Phase 1 and 3 participants described that when sport ‘goes off the rails,’ it “loses a certain aspect of play” (Keith), especially when the pursuit of elite performance displaces the freeing and enjoyable aspects of sport (Hoffmann, 2010). The loss of freedom and play was found in another study of Christian athletes (Bickley, 2014), and therefore appeals “to keep the nugget of play alive” (John) is argued to counteract any detrimental experiences associated with modern sport. Findings suggest that the recovery of play is facilitated through spirituality and associated conceptions of both *freedom from* and *freedom to* (Guttman, 2004). Phase 1 participants suggested that their spirituality and Christian faith freed them from the pressures and expectations associated with performance, enabling a reorientation toward “the way God’s made play” (Robin). When personal worth is anchored in a greater sense of

spirituality and a relationship with God, performance expectations are mitigated and players are “able to just be free” (Jenn). Therefore, the need to recover a ‘play-ethic’ is complemented by a sense of security and worth found when identity is grounded outside of behavioural expectations.

While these examples provide insight into how Christians experience competitive sport, the long-standing Christian infatuation with sport (e.g., Novak, 1976; Hoffman, 2011) was also evident in the Phase 2 finding that Christians reported significantly higher rates of participation and enjoyment in team and aquatic sports than non-Christians, a result that contrasts with the finding that non-Christians were generally engaged in more play than Christians (see Table 5.17 and 5.18). Results also showed that there were no significant differences between Christian and non-Christians regarding individual sports, dual sports and the overall physical contests and sports category. The historical acceptance of some forms of play, especially sport, within Christianity was often with a view toward instrumentalism; physical activities served for the development of a healthy body, which was necessary in nurturing a holy mind, a disposition codified within Muscular Christianity (Mathisen, 2006). Given that Christian sport participants indicated significantly more transformation than sport non-participants, suggests a continued infatuation with the utilitarian value of sport. Further, team sport participants also indicated significantly higher scores on their overall play experience as well as several specific features of play: creative expression, freedom, enjoyment, and relation to others.

Creative expression is largely inclusive of freedom and enjoyment, and several authors have suggested that sport, of many play activities, is especially enjoyable and serves to express and connect with the self (Ellis, 2014; Moriarty, 2013; Ronkainen et al., 2013). However, finding that Christian sport participants experienced significantly higher rates of creative expression, freedom and enjoyment than Christian non-participants does not suggest that those

characteristics of play do not occur in other playful activities. Rather, age may be a mediating factor in that 62% of the Christian sport participants were under the age of 30 (compared to 38% of the Christian non-participants), and younger participants were more likely to participate in team sports. Younger Canadians (aged 15-24) generally spend more daily time in active sports and active leisure than older Canadians (aged 25-54) (Statistics Canada, 2015). Subsequently, younger participants (14-29 years old) indicated more freedom and transformation than older participants, which is consistent with the finding that sport participants experienced more freedom and transformation. This finding suggests that younger participants may simply experience more freedom and transformation in their play, and they happen to predominantly participate in active sport and leisure activities. Whether sport serves as the medium for youth experiences of freedom and transformation or whether youth experience more freedom and transformation irrespective of playful activity is inconclusive. What is known, however, is a relationship exists between age, characteristics of play and activity type.

As with freedom and transformation, younger participants (aged 14-29) and overall sport participants indicated higher relation to others than older participants and sport non-participants. While studies have demonstrated how play strengthens human connection (e.g., Mata-McMahan, 2019; van der Merwe & Habron, 2015), sport has specifically been identified as an activity conducive to spiritual connections with other people (Ellis, 2012; Huffman & Etnier, 2020; Moriarty, 2013). Clearly there remains a dynamic relationship between participant age, spiritual relation to others and participation in sport.

The Place of Play within Church Life

Due to some suspicious attitudes that the Christian church has traditionally held towards play (Guttmann, 1988; Mathisen, 2006), Watson & Parker (2013) asked, “how can playful

activities such as sport, dance, music and the arts be integrated into church life?” (p. 19). This question was directed toward Christian pastors for this study and their responses provide some insights into the role of play within church life. Richard felt that, in “the church as a whole, in terms of its organized activities, there's not a lot of emphasis on play.” In contrast, Alex detailed an experience where worship and play were blended into a Sunday experience, where congregants were able to connect with God through worship and subsequently connect with each other through playing soccer. While the value of relationship building has been clearly established, the pastors also emphasized the potential for play as it relates to community witness, intergenerational play and pedagogy.

While many Christian communities have utilized playful activities, most dominantly sport, as a vehicle for evangelism (Treat, 2018), the pastors in this study shared concerns that their church communities have failed to sufficiently engage in community-based sport and play, and they expressed the need for church members to play in order to “be a good Christian witness” (Alex) because “in terms of outreach, play has a role” (Richard). Alex critiqued his parishioners’ approach in talking about the value of evangelism without actually engaging in community-based activities, such as chess clubs and soccer leagues. Jason also shared his skepticism of Christian-only sport leagues “because in our play we are often just as sinful as people in the world.” He advocated for community-based sports as an “excellent opportunity to work together with non-Christians” and grow alongside them. In each of these accounts pastors specifically identified sport as an ideal activity to bridge relationships with non-Christian community members. Though sport can be appreciated for its intrinsic worth, it is often valued for its instrumental value (Mathisen, 2006; Sutton-Smith, 2001), also in this case in utilizing play-based community activities as a means to evangelize.

While play was valued for its ability to form relationships between people of varying spiritual backgrounds, play was also identified as facilitating and strengthening intergenerational relationships within a church family. Even though play has been argued to be an important component across the life-span (Sutton-Smith, 2001), most research prioritizes childhood play and developmental benefits (Gray, 2013). Whether intentionally coordinating activities or encouraging them to spontaneously occur, pastors endorsed intergenerational play for its capacity to strengthen parishioner relationships. Examples included “games nights for seniors” (Jerry) where young people and older people participate in board and card games together and “they are able to talk through that and build up relationships and become familiar with each other.” While other pastors also identified scheduled ‘game nights’ as valuable intergenerational play, Richard promoted the spontaneous play seen after a worship service. Church picnics were also recognized as valuable, “especially when you're able to mix the age ranges” (Wayne). Wayne, recounting a silly game with a zucchini, appreciated play for its ability to break down barriers and remove initial obstacles in relating to one another.

Some scholars have underappreciated the importance of play for adults (Burghardt, 2005), but research indicates that adults value the social networks and interpersonal connections developed through play (Yarnal et al., 2008). Recent research identified several benefits of intergenerational play, including enjoyment, bonding, increasing familiarity with each other, and teaching lessons (Agate et al., 2018). Focused time, talking and listening, and engaging in interactive activities all served as mechanisms that facilitated intergenerational play (Agate et al.), and provided mutual benefit for church members.

While play was encouraged for outreach and evangelism purposes, so too pastors endorsed utilizing play for educative purposes. Extensive research has demonstrated that play is

a primary component of childhood education (e.g., Pellegrini, 2009; Piaget, 1962; Sutton-Smith, 2001; Vygotsky, 1967), and more recent research has highlighted the benefit of utilizing play as a practice to explore, express and nurture spirituality (Harrison & Robinson, 2017; Mata-McMahon, 2019). As teaching Christian doctrine comprises a central component of church life, pastors endorsed the inclusion of various elements of play within regular pedagogical practices. For example, at the end of a year of catechesis, Kevin turned to games to reinforce the yearly lessons: “With the younger group, I tend to play a game of Pictionary based on the lessons I’ve taught...it’s a playful way to finish the season.” Youth programs provided additional opportunity to employ play-based activities:

[Youth ministry] is another one where you have a combination of instruction and playful activity to encourage relationship. I think our focus in our church life tends to be you’ve got to learn stuff; you’ve got to teach stuff. We don’t realize enough that you can also do stuff together and learn stuff together simply by enjoying each other’s company.

Utilizing playful activities for learning the Christian doctrine was identified as a healthy means of integrating play in church life, and has been systematized in programs such as Godly Play (Berryman, 1991; Mata, 2015) and the intergenerational Messy Church (Messy Church Canada, 2020). Play can awaken a sense of wonder and openness associated with spirituality (Berryman, 2019), and the play of children and youth can facilitate religious development (Nye, 2019).

These findings emerging from interviews with pastors is a key contribution of this present study. Despite the growing number of theologians who have addressed play (e.g., Smedes, 1975; Harvey, 2014), and despite the growth in academic literature examining spirituality and play (Harrison & Robinson, 2017; Watson & Parker, 2014), the only empirical study identified that has explored similar themes with Christian leaders predominantly focused

on the integration of Christian faith and leisure (Hothem, 1983). Therefore, this study provides emerging empirical evidence that demonstrates the value of integrating play into church life, specifically within the Reformed Christian tradition, through community, intergenerational and pedagogical engagement.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

Though this examination of spirituality and play is novel, several limitations can be acknowledged. The mixed-methods utilized provided advantages and disadvantages. While the Play Experience Scale was developed in order to examine the primary spiritual features of play, this approach may have perpetuated dualistic thinking where spiritual and material realities were viewed as disconnected. As a result, several features measured by the PES, such as enjoyment, freedom and even some relational components may be perceived as psychological, emotional, or sociological rather than spiritual characteristics of play. For example, one respondent stated that, “I did not connect play with my spirituality until taking this survey. I thought play was more of a social activity rather than a spiritual one. These questions are most definitely interesting and mind-opening.” While the relationships found between subscale features and various sources of spirituality help mitigate these limitations, spiritual characteristics of play remain embodied and can therefore simultaneously present as alternative facets of human expression.

In addition, instrument analysis revealed some unreliable subscales that could not be fully utilized for subsequent analysis. For example, how people relate to the world is a complex phenomenon that extends beyond an aesthetic appreciation for nature. This relational complexity cannot be fully operationalized into one subscale or feature. As factor analysis revealed three factors associated with the scale, further revision of the scale is recommended prior to future research. Future research needs to examine the utility of the PES and its relationship to various

expressions and conceptualizations of spirituality. For example, exploring how the PES relates to spiritual well-being or an immediate spiritual experience may provide further insight into how the features of play relate to the spiritual dimension of human existence.

A second limitation associated with the PES is the ambiguity found in definitions of play and spirituality. While a range of playful activities were included and categorized utilizing Guttman's (2004) classification of play, games, contest and sport, Caillois' (1961) classification of various categories of play, and Stebbins' (2016) serious leisure perspective, some participants questioned the inclusion of a range of activities as play. For example, some survey respondents commented that they did not differentiate between play and work, and one commented that they had not considered such a range of activities as inclusive of play. Another participant critiqued the term 'play' altogether: "I recoil from the term 'play.' Seems infantile. Recreation would be more accurate for me and perhaps less loaded." While providing Huizinga's (1950) definition of play might have mitigated some ambiguity, both play and spirituality remain amongst the most personal and indefinable terms of human life (Hubbuck, 2016). As play can occur in a range of activities and behaviours, restricting its usage to childhood or a narrow scope of activities (e.g., casual play, sport) would not be inclusive of its flexibility and quirkiness (Sutton-Smith, 2001).

A third limitation is the familiar sampling problem associated with defining 'Christian' participants (Nye, 2019). The criteria for defining 'Christian' varies in empirical research and can include self-definition, frequency of church practice or indications of other faith commitments. The present study invited participants to self-identify as Christian and took into consideration frequency of participation in a religious practice. As the majority of self-identified Christians (90%) indicated weekly or daily religious practice, it was accepted that all participants who self-identified as Christian could be grouped into the same sample. However, Christian

beliefs and practices vary substantially from one denomination and tradition to the next, so future research may benefit from asking participants to explicitly express their religious or Christian identity for themselves (Nye, 2019).

Relatedly, given the explanatory limitations associated with bivariate analysis, consideration of mediating factors (e.g., Christian tradition, age, access to resources, skill level) and their influence on participation frequencies or variable relationships deserves future consideration. For example, while a strong correlation clearly exists between the frequency and enjoyment of play participation (see Figure 5.1), these results cannot be used to infer that the enjoyment of play is simply a matter of participation frequency, as a variety of other factors clearly influenced the enjoyment of participation according to Phase 1 and 3 participants (e.g., presence of others, degree of expectations, competency, spiritual maturity).

Another sampling limitation was that this study purposefully sampled participants with an interest in spirituality and play. While this was helpful in examining key features between spirituality and play, future studies should utilize a representative sample to more accurately reflect cultural and societal demographics.

A sixth limitation is that the pastors recruited for in-depth interviews in Phase 3 were exclusively from one church federation. While an advantage of this approach was to ensure that the pastors had some familiarity with the historical suspicion towards play that has been associated with Reformed theology (Kelly, 1996; Watson & Parker, 2014), it is recognized that numerous Christian traditions emerged from the 16th century Reformation, and inclusion of non-Protestant traditions (e.g., Roman Catholic, Orthodox) would provide complementary or contrasting perspectives on play. As such, a broader sample of Christian pastors would provide a more comprehensive overview of the role of play within church life. In addition, the pastors in

the present study predominantly confined their responses to games and sports. As such, future research should further explore how music, arts, dance and other recreation and leisure activities can be further integrated into church life.

Finally, a seventh limitation associated with this study is that dispositional flow measures the tendency for participants to experience flow rather than event-specific experiences. As such, to better understand the relationships between spirituality and flow, future research should include state measurements of flow and administer data collection immediately following a playful experience. While dispositional flow assesses the frequency in which flow is experienced, state flow scales would assess the extent of flow experienced within a specific activity (Jackson et al., 2008). Combining state flow measures with subjective assessments would enable a deep exploration of this complex phenomenon.

Aside from the future research recommendations associated with the above limitations, two additional implications for future research arise from this study. First, in light of the predominant exclusion of dance from church life after the Reformation (Gagne et al., 2000), the role of dance within Christian life can be further explored. Present findings were mixed; while non-Christians reported more dance participation than Christians, some interview participants detailed their participation and enjoyment of dance. Research examining the extent of dance behaviour within Christian populations is limited, and given some spiritual associations with dance (e.g., Kraus, 2010), further research in this area is needed.

Secondly, qualitative data from this study suggests that spiritual maturity impacted the quality and nature of relational and spiritual encounters. Participants suggested that spiritual immaturity results in deteriorated play and increased tensions with others within play. Therefore, future research could explore whether an increase in spiritual maturity results in less harmful or

alienating behaviours experienced within play. Specifically, how spiritual maturity impacts encounters with others can be examined through Buber's (1958) 'I-Thou' relational lens.

Practical Implications

This study has several implications for pastors, teachers, church leaders and play participants. Findings suggest that pastors and church leaders should seek to integrate play into church life, including intergenerational play, community-based play and in educative settings. Research suggests that activities such as arts, crafts and physical activity programs facilitate collaborative intergenerational play (Agate et al., 2018). In church communities where few intergenerational play opportunities exist, leaders and programmers may consider integrating intergenerational activity with community-based initiatives, such as developing collaborative programs with local senior care homes and church youth (Cohen-Mansfield & Jensen, 2015). Further, collaborating with Christian community-based programs that presently exist (e.g., Athletes in Action, Praise Theatre Ensemble and Arts Ministry, Vacation Bible Schools) may help facilitate effective program development and implementation.

Regarding educative opportunities, a popular initiative that seeks to intentionally integrate playful activities into Christian education is *Godly Play* (Berryman, 1991). The Godly Play Canadian website (www.godlyplay.ca) defines that "Godly Play is a creative and imaginative approach to Christian nurture" that seeks to utilize "story, play, ritual and creativity to enhance the child's authentic experience of God." While Godly Play has been widely utilized in early years religious education (Hyde, 2010), some have cautioned that its application be restricted to church communities (e.g., Sunday School) and not be integrated into general early childhood education (Grajczonek & Truasheim, 2017). The present findings suggest that intentionally expanding playful activities such as Godly Play into areas that have typically been

viewed as strictly spiritual (e.g., Bible studies, catechesis) could help mitigate perpetuating spiritual-material dichotomies.

The current study responds to calls to explore spirituality and play in order to challenge scientific worldviews that dominate many cultural playgrounds, especially sport (e.g., Hoffman, 2010; Watson & Parker, 2014). Present findings suggest that any ‘loss of play’ can be recovered through emphasizing the creative, transformative and relational features of play. While these characteristics reflect Ryan and Deci’s (2017) three basic psychological needs (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness), this research affirmed that spirituality is distinguished from and can influence basic needs satisfaction (Dierendonck, 2012; Miner et al., 2013). Given the clear associations between play and autonomous behaviour, teachers, coaches and programmers can nurture the spiritual dimension of creative expression by establishing autonomy-supportive environments within any play context. The relational and transformative features of play can be fostered through ensuring a cooperative, safe and inclusive play environment. Additionally, punishing mistakes within a play activity is bound to heighten expectations for performance; rather, assuring participants that their internal value includes awareness and appreciation for personal limitations permits players to more freely express themselves.

Moreover, given the relational nature associated with both play and spirituality, emphasizing an awareness and appreciation for others would foster greater understandings of spirituality, expression, discovery and overall meaning (Robinson, 2007b). Whether play can truly counteract a commodified or utilitarian approach to sport is a question of spiritual maturity more than it is a mere recovery of a play ethic. Revolutionizing playful activities and contexts, and restoring the play-spirit that seems to have been replaced by economic and business pursuits, will not necessarily come about through changes in program policy or the economic, political or

social system in which play occurs. Marx's communism, for example, failed not because of inaccurate blueprints, but because it does not change the hearts and ambitions of humans. Social structures, and the play that occurs within them, will alienate so long as attention is turned inwards rather than outwards (Watson & White, 2007). As play awakens in the player an awareness and appreciation for others, play will be more fully recovered when pastors, teachers and church leaders continue to nurture individual spiritual development and growth.

Closing Remarks

Play and spirituality are amongst the most personal aspects and indefinable terms of human life (Hubbuck, 2016). Perhaps this is the case because play and spirituality are representative of who we are. This study found that the collective features of play are most associated with a sense of authenticity, a deep sense of self and with something outside the physical order. It is suggested that the defining characteristics of play, namely creative expression, transformation and relation to others, are also the defining characteristics of who we are as humans: image-bearers and creatures suspended by the sovereignty of a relational God. The characteristics of play reflect the characteristics of humanity. Creative expression is reflective of who we are as image-bearers: play reflects the creative nature of God and represents a creative and authentic sense of self. Transformation is reflective of who we are as creatures: as finite creatures bound by space and time, we are perpetually subject to change and find meaning in sharing that sense of finitude with the rest of humanity. Relation to others reflects our being people designed for community, designed for relationship with God and with others.

Play embodies our creative, transformative, relational power and our capacity to develop and take delight in the world. In play we freely explore, enjoy and experience our deepest identities and express our nature. Play is who we are.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Phase 1 Information Letter and Consent Form

Information Letter

Title of Study: Examining the Relationship between Spirituality and Play.

Principle Researcher: Carl Nienhuis, MHK
School of Human Kinetics
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Ottawa
125 University Private, Ottawa, Canada, Montpetit 428

Supervisor: Dr. Paul Heintzman
Associate Professor
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Ottawa
125 University Private, Ottawa, Canada, Montpetit 331
(613) 562-5800 ext. 4251

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a study that investigates the spiritual features of play. The research is part of the researcher's (Carl Nienhuis) Ph.D. thesis at the University of Ottawa and is under the supervision of Dr. Paul Heintzman.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between spirituality and play, aiming to understand why people play and what they love about it.

Participation: You will be asked to take part in an in-depth interview consisting of approximately 30 questions. The interview should last between 45 to 90 minutes depending on the answers you provide. During the interview, you will be asked about your experience with play, and asked to reflect on a specific enjoyable playful experience. You will also be asked to describe your spirituality and the overall significance that play has in your life.

Benefits: Thanks to your feedback, we will gain a better understanding of the relationship between spirituality and play. Your feedback will help in understanding why people play, what makes play significant and will help identify specific qualities inherent to play. Reflecting on your own playful experiences may also help you gain better knowledge and appreciation for the role that play has in your life.

Risks: Your participation in this study will consist of you anonymously answering questions concerning your experiences and opinions on play and spirituality. A chance of emotional discomfort does exist as you will be asked to reflect on emotional experiences in your life. You will also be asked about your personal spirituality. In the unlikely event that you do feel emotional discomfort, sensitive questions will be skipped and you will not have to answer them.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: For analytical purpose, the interview will be audio recorded. The information that you share will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research. The only people that will have access to the research data are the researcher, Carl Nienhuis, and the supervisor, Dr. Paul Heintzman. Your answers to open-ended questions may be used verbatim in presentations and publications but you will not be identified. In order to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be used in the final report. The audio recording will be safely kept in a computer protected by a password.

Data storage: The data will be conserved on an encrypted memory stick placed in the researcher's locked office for a period of five years. After the conservation period, all data will be securely destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: Although your participation in this study is encouraged, it remains totally voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer questions that you do not want to answer. Even after the interview, it will be possible to withdraw from the study by contacting the researcher. The data you have provided will then be destroyed and removed from the research.

Information about Results: The research findings can be made available to you if you wish. If you are interested, please contact the researcher at the email or phone numbers mentioned above and the researcher will send you a copy of the results.

If you decide to participate in this study, please sign the consent form. There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is yours to keep.

If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, you may contact the researchers at the numbers mentioned above.

If you have any questions with regards to the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, tel.: (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

Please keep this form for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Consent Form

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in an in-depth interview conducted by Carl Nienhuis of the School of Human Kinetics in the Faculty of Health Science at the University of Ottawa under the supervision of Dr. Paul Heintzman. Also, I consent to the interview being audio-taped. I have made this decision based on the information I have received in the Letter of Information and have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about this study.

Participants Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researchers Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix B: Phase 1 Qualitative Interview Guide

1. What has been your experience with play?
 - a. How would you describe play?
 - i. What does play mean to you?
 - ii. What other terms, words, or phrases would you associate with play?
2. Which activities do you participate in that you would call play? How often?
 - a. Which activities do you play with other people? Which do you play alone?
 - i. How are these playful experiences similar or different?
 - ii. Which do you enjoy more?
 - b. Do you participate in any other hobby, recreation, or leisure activities that you would not consider play?
3. What does spirituality mean to you?
 - a. How important is spirituality to you?
 - b. Why is spirituality important to you?
 - c. What words or terms do you associate with spirituality?
 - d. Can you describe your own spirituality?
4. How does spirituality impact your play?
 - a. How do you understand or interpret the phrase “spirit of play”?
 - b. What does it mean to do something in the spirit of play?
5. Can you identify any spiritual qualities, features or characteristics of the play activities you have mentioned?
 - a. What kind of personal or spiritual qualities do you think would contribute to appropriate participation in playful activity?
6. Can you think of a particular occasion when you most enjoyed how you were playing? Can you describe, in as much detail as possible, everything that happened?
 - a. What thoughts and feelings did you have?
 - i. Did you experience any sense of:
 1. freedom while you played?
 - a. Were there rules? Did you have to follow them? How did that impact your enjoyment of your play?
 2. joy while you played?
 - a. Did you experience any sense of awe or wonder?
 3. growth or change while you played?
 - a. Did you learn anything through your play? How important is it for you to improve at your play?
 4. God while you played? Did you feel close to God?
 5. increased creativity while you played?
 - a. Did you experience any new ideas?
 6. meaning in your play?

- a. What did/does that play experience mean to you? What gives it significance?
 - b. How do you know you experienced (*those affirmative qualities*) while you played?
 - c. Was anyone or anything else involved or included? Who? What?
7. What significance do other people have to your play?
 - a. How does your relationship with others influence how you play?
 - i. Do you feel close to other people when you play?
 - b. How much concern do you have for other people within your play? How relevant or important are they?
 - i. E.g., teammates / peers, opponents
 - c. How do you view opponents in your play?
 - i. As something to overcome?
 - ii. Does their enjoyment matter as much as yours? Why? Why not?
 - d. Would you describe other people in your play as objects or subjects?
 - e. What objects are involved in your play? What significance does your play object (e.g., canvas, ball, cards) have in your play?
 - i. Does it matter what you use? Why?
8. What significance does play have in your life?
 - a. Why do you play?
 - b. What makes your play meaningful?
 - i. Are there times when it is not meaningful?
 - c. How has your play changed over your lifespan?
 - i. Does play's significance change with age? How? Why?
 - d. To what degree does your play impact how you structure your life?
 - i. How would you describe the relationship between play and work?
 1. Is one more important than the other? Why or why not?

Appendix C: Phase 2 Information Letter

Information Letter

Title of Study: Examining the Relationship between Spirituality and Play.

Principle Researcher: Carl Nienhuis, MHK
School of Human Kinetics
Faculty of Health Sciences
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125 University Private, Ottawa, Canada, Montpetit 428

Supervisor: Dr. Paul Heintzman
Associate Professor
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Ottawa
125 University Private, Ottawa, Canada, Montpetit 331
(613) 562-5800 ext. 4251

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a study that investigates the spiritual features of play. The research is part of the researcher's (Carl Nienhuis) Ph.D. thesis at the University of Ottawa and is under the supervision of Dr. Paul Heintzman.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between spirituality and play.

Participation: If you wish to participate in this study, please complete the attached survey. By completing and returning this survey, you will also indicate your consent to participate in the study. The survey should take you approximately 15 minutes to complete. You can withdraw from the study at any time. Once you have completed the survey, please return it to the researcher.

Benefits: Thanks to your feedback, we will gain a better understanding of the relationship between spirituality and play. Your feedback will help in understanding why people play, what makes play significant and will help identify specific qualities inherent to play. Reflecting on your own playful experiences may also help you gain better knowledge and appreciation for the role that play has in your life.

Risks: Since this study involves only the completion of a questionnaire in which no personal information will be gathered and you are only asked to provide your personal experience and opinions with play and spirituality, participation in this survey involves no risk to you.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: The information that you share will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research. The only people that will have access to the research data are the researcher, Carl Nienhuis, and the supervisor, Dr. Paul

Heintzman. Results will be published in pooled (aggregate) format, which means that only overviews of the data, and non individual surveys, will be published. Anonymity is guaranteed since you are not being asked to provide your name or any personal contact information.

Data storage: The surveys will be kept on a password-protected computer and/or in a locked filing cabinet in the office of the researcher for a period of five years at which time they will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: Although your participation in this study is encouraged, it remains totally voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer questions that you do not want to answer. Completion and return of the questionnaire by you implies consent.

Information about Results: The research findings can be made available to you if you wish. If you are interested, please contact the researcher at the email or phone numbers mentioned above and the researcher will send you a copy of the results.

If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, you may contact the researchers at the numbers mentioned above.

If you have any questions with regards to the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, tel.: (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

Please keep this letter for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Appendix D: Phase 2 Assent Form for Participants Under 18

Title of Study: Examining the Relationship between Spirituality and Play.

Principle Researcher: Carl Nienhuis, MHK
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Supervisor: Dr. Paul Heintzman
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 (613) 562-5800 ext. 4251

We are doing a research study about why people participate in playful activities, like sport, games, music and dance. We want learn more about what they love about play. A research study is a way to learn more about people. If you decide that you want to be part of this study, you will be asked to complete a survey which should take you approximately 15 minutes.

There are some things about this study you should know. There are several different parts to the survey. Some questions will ask you about the kinds of activities you play, why you play, and some will ask you about your thoughts on spirituality. It may be that you choose not to answer some of the questions because they make you feel uncomfortable, or because you do not understand the question.

Not everyone who takes part in this study will benefit. A benefit means that something good happens to you. We think these benefits might be that in learning more about why people love play, we will be able to encourage more people to play more often.

When we are finished with this study we will write a report about what was learned. This report will not include your name or that you were in the study.

You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too. Your parents know about the study too.

If you decide you want to be in this study, please sign your name.

I, _____, want to be in this research study.

 (Sign your name here)

 (Date)

Appendix E: Initial Spiritual Features of Play Scale

The following are initial questions and statements which may be used for this scale. The questions and statements will be answered using a Likert scale.

Freedom, Volition and Agency

1. If something happens during my play that I think is morally wrong, I quit playing.
2. I value playing by the rules.
3. How I play is influenced by what other people are doing.
4. I feel very strongly that I have the opportunity to make choices with respect to the way I play.

Enjoyment

1. During my play, I fully enjoy my thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations.
2. When I play with others, I care that others are enjoying themselves too.
3. During play I enjoy a spiritual sense of wonder and joy.
4. It is more important that my play produces something than that it is enjoyable.

Community and Relationships

- **Self**

1. Through my play I express my deepest identity.
2. In general, I feel confident and positive about myself while I play.
3. I am aware of my limitations in my play.
4. When I play, I feel free to express myself and be true to who I am.

- **God/Higher Power**

1. My opportunity to play is a gift from God.
2. Playful activities help me connect with my higher power / God.
3. I feel God has little interest in what or how I play.
4. The more I play, the closer to God I feel.

- **People**

1. I feel a sense of belonging and connection to a larger community through my play.
2. I have a genuine concern for other people while playing with them.
3. It is more important that I enjoy myself than others that may play with me.
4. I would play anything if the right people were playing with me.

- **Creation**

1. Playing in nature or the outdoors often inspires me with a sense of awe and wonder.
2. Play is less important to my life than my work.
3. It is helpful for me to play in places that are of special significance to me.

4. The objects (e.g., canvas, ball, cards etc.) of my play are merely tools that I use for the sake of my play.

Creativity

1. I experience my best ideas while I play.
2. The more I play, the more my creative capacities increase.
3. I feel that my spirit acts most freely in my play.
4. I feel hesitant to share what I create in my play.

Transformation

1. I am not interested in play activities that will expand my horizons.
2. I think it is important that play experiences challenge how I think about myself and the world.
3. For me, play is very much a process of learning, changing and growth.
4. Even if I do not have fun, I play again because I want to get better.

Meaning

1. My play provides me with a sense of purpose.
2. As chaotic my life may be, playing establishes some rhythm and harmony in my life.
3. My play enables me to express what I value and care about.
4. My play often seems trivial and unimportant to me.

Appendix F: Play and Spirituality Survey

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between spirituality and play. By completing this questionnaire, you are agreeing to freely participate in this study. This means that you have read the information letter and consent form, been informed of the research requirements, understand that you can ask questions and discuss the study, and are assured that your information will remain confidential.

The survey should take you approximately 15 - 25 minutes to complete.

Part 1: Playful Activities Scale - WHAT DO YOU PLAY?

Firstly, please indicate how often you currently participate in the following playful activities. Circle the appropriate number on the scales provided (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Often, 5 = Very Often). Secondly, for those activities that you participate in, please indicate whether you participate in each activity Alone (A) or with Others (O) (please circle both when appropriate). Lastly, please indicate how much you typically enjoy participating in these types of play and play activities.

	How often do you participate in this activity?					Do you participate in this activity alone or with others?		Please rate how much you enjoy playing this activity.					
	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very Often	Alone	With Others	Hate a lot					Enjoy a lot
Spontaneous and Casual Play													
• Childish imitations	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Dabbling / fiddling	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Daydreaming	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Sociable conversation (witticisms, banter, jokes, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Web surfing	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Pleasurable reading	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Sex	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Other _____	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
Organized Play and Games													
• Jigsaw puzzles	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Word games (crosswords, word-search, Sudoku, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Playground Games (tag, leapfrog, hide-and-see, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Board Games (Chess, Strategy, Monopoly, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	
• Card Games	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5	

• Games of chance (dice, slots, roulette, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Video Games (arcade, computer, console, handheld, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Interaction-based Games (foosball, billiards, ping-pong, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Party Games (drinking, daring, singing, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Other _____	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
Physical Contests / Sports												
• Team Sports (hockey, soccer, baseball, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Individual Sports (golf, cycling, running, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Dual sports (Tennis, racquetball, combat, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Aquatic (canoe, kayak, swimming, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Fitness activities (jog, weight, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Other _____	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
Dance												
• Social Dancing	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Folk or Square Dancing	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Performance (ballet, belly, acrobatic, etc)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Ballroom	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Liturgical	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Other _____	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
Creative / Artistic Activities												
• Drawing	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Painting	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Sculpting	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Writing	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Theater	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Music (playing instruments)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Music (listening)	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Photography	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5
• Other _____	1	2	3	4	5	A	O	1	2	3	4	5

Part 2: Motivations for Participation in Play - WHY DO YOU ENGAGE IN PLAY?

We are interested in the reasons underlying peoples' decisions to engage or not engage in playful activities. Using the scale below, please indicate to what extent each of the following items is true for you. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers and no trick questions. We simply want to know how you personally feel about play. Your responses will be held in confidence and only used for our research purposes.

		Not true for me	1	Sometimes true for me	2	3	Very true for me	4
1	It's important to me to play regularly	0	1	2	3	4		
2	I don't see why I should have to play	0	1	2	3	4		
3	I play because it's fun	0	1	2	3	4		
4	I feel guilty when I don't play	0	1	2	3	4		
5	I play because it is consistent with my life goals	0	1	2	3	4		
6	I play because other people say I should	0	1	2	3	4		
7	I value the benefits of play	0	1	2	3	4		
8	I can't see why I should bother playing	0	1	2	3	4		
9	I enjoy my play sessions	0	1	2	3	4		
10	I feel ashamed when I miss a play session	0	1	2	3	4		
11	I consider play part of my identity	0	1	2	3	4		
12	I take part in play because my friends/family/partner say I should	0	1	2	3	4		
13	I think it is important to make the effort to play regularly	0	1	2	3	4		
14	I don't see the point in playing	0	1	2	3	4		
15	I find play a pleasurable activity	0	1	2	3	4		
16	I feel like a failure when I haven't played in a while	0	1	2	3	4		
17	I consider play a fundamental part of who I am	0	1	2	3	4		
18	I play because others will not be pleased with me if I don't	0	1	2	3	4		
19	I get restless if I don't play regularly	0	1	2	3	4		
20	I think playing is a waste of time	0	1	2	3	4		
21	I get pleasure and satisfaction from participating in play	0		2	3	4		
22	I would feel bad about myself if I was not making time to play	0	1	2	3	4		
23	I consider play consistent with my values	0	1	2	3	4		
24	I feel under pressure from my friends/family to play	0	1	2	3	4		

Part 3: The Play Experience Scale – WHAT DO YOU EXPERIENCE IN PLAY?

We are interested in understanding what people ultimately love about play, and what makes participating in activities in the spirit of play so captivating and meaningful. Please answer the following questions in relation to your experience in your play. It may help to think of a specific playful experience you have recently experienced. Using the scale below, please indicate to what extent you agree with the following statements from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	As long as the rules do not get in the way, I feel free when I play.	1	2	3	4	5
2	During play I enjoy a spiritual sense of wonder and joy.	1	2	3	4	5
3	Through my play, I express my deepest identity.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Play helps me connect with my higher power / God.	1	2	3	4	5
5	I have a genuine concern for other people while playing with them.	1	2	3	4	5
6	Playing in nature or the outdoors often inspires me with a sense of awe and wonder.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I experience my best ideas while I play.	1	2	3	4	5
8	It's important that I experience self-improvement through my play.	1	2	3	4	5
9	My play provides me with a sense of purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
10	When I feel free, I play better.	1	2	3	4	5
11	During my play, I fully enjoy everything about the experience.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Though my play may make me feel vulnerable, play helps me connect with and understand who I am.	1	2	3	4	5
13	My opportunity to play is a gift from God.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I would play anything if the right people were playing with me.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Play is less important to my life than my work.	1	2	3	4	5
16	I feel that my spirit acts most freely in my play.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Even if I do not have fun, I play again because I want to get better.	1	2	3	4	5
18	My play is usually meaningful.	1	2	3	4	5
19	My best experiences of play are when I feel in control.	1	2	3	4	5
20	I experience more enjoyment when I remember why I'm playing.	1	2	3	4	5
21	When I play, I feel free to express myself and be true to who I am.	1	2	3	4	5
22	I feel God has little interest in what I play.	1	2	3	4	5

23	I experience a sense of belonging and connection to others through my play.	1	2	3	4	5
24	I prefer to play with objects (e.g., canvas, ball, cards, etc.) that I'm most familiar with.	1	2	3	4	5
25	Play provides me with the opportunity to share my creative self with others.	1	2	3	4	5
26	I persevere through challenges in my play because I know I'll grow.	1	2	3	4	5
27	Playing establishes some rhythm and harmony in my life.	1	2	3	4	5
28	I have the opportunity to make choices with respect to the way I play.	1	2	3	4	5
29	It is more important that my play produces something than that it is enjoyable.	1	2	3	4	5
30	I am aware of my limitations in my play.	1	2	3	4	5
31	My play is an expression of gratitude towards God.	1	2	3	4	5
32	Playing with others is the best way to build relationships with them.	1	2	3	4	5
33	It is important that I experience play in my work.	1	2	3	4	5
34	The more I play, the more my creativity increases.	1	2	3	4	5
35	If I don't improve at my play, I feel less satisfied.	1	2	3	4	5
36	My play often seems trivial and unimportant to me.	1	2	3	4	5

Comments:

Part 4: Dispositional Flow – *WHAT DO YOU EXPERIENCE IN PLAY?*

Please answer the following questions in relation to your experience in your chosen activity. These questions relate to thoughts and feelings you may experience during participation in your activity. You may experience these characteristics some of the time, all of the time, or none of the time. There are no right or wrong answers. Think about how often your experience each characteristic during your activity, then circle the number that best matches your experience.

In general, when I take part in playful activity...

		Never	Rarely	Someti mes	Freque ntly	Always
1	I feel I am competent enough to meet the demands of the situation	1	2	3	4	5
2	I do things spontaneously and automatically without having to think	1	2	3	4	5
3	I have a strong sense of what I want to do	1	2	3	4	5
4	I have a good idea about how well I am doing while I am involved in the task/activity	1	2	3	4	5
5	I am completely focused on the task at hand	1	2	3	4	5
6	I have a feeling of total control over what I am doing	1	2	3	4	5
7	I am not worried about what others may be thinking of me	1	2	3	4	5
8	The way time passes seems to be different from normal	1	2	3	4	5
9	The experience is extremely rewarding	1	2	3	4	5

Part 5: Sources of Spirituality

Please indicate what you associate your spirituality with, rating your agreement with the following items from 1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree.

		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither	Agree	Strong Agree
1	Feeling near to God.	1	2	3	4	5
2	A sense of something infinite	1	2	3	4	5
3	Feeling entirely authentic.	1	2	3	4	5
4	Feeling close to nature.	1	2	3	4	5
5	Feeling connected to all of humanity	1	2	3	4	5
6	Feeling close to God.	1	2	3	4	5
7	Feeling a bond with an indescribable force of being.	1	2	3	4	5
8	Having a sense of integrity.	1	2	3	4	5
9	Feeling connected to nature.	1	2	3	4	5
10	Feeling near to all of humanity.	1	2	3	4	5
11	Feeling a sense of oneness with something I cannot describe with words.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Feeling completely genuine.	1	2	3	4	5
13	Feeling near to nature.	1	2	3	4	5
14	Feeling as if I were one with humanity.	1	2	3	4	5
15	Knowing that God is with me.	1	2	3	4	5
16	A sense of something from another realm or dimension.	1	2	3	4	5
17	Having a sense of wholeness.	1	2	3	4	5
18	Sensing God's presence.	1	2	3	4	5

Part 6: Socio-demographic Information

Please check the most appropriate boxes, or answer the questions in the spaces provided.

1. Gender. Female Male

You don't have an option that applies to me. I identify as (please specify) _____

2. Current age.

13-18 19-29 30-39 40-49
50-59 60-69 70+

3. Religious/Spiritual Affiliation: If you currently have an active religious/spiritual affiliation, please write it on the line below.

4. Highest Level of Education Achieved

Some high school	<input type="checkbox"/>	University Graduate	<input type="checkbox"/>
High school completed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Some graduate school	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some university or college	<input type="checkbox"/>	Graduate school completed	<input type="checkbox"/>
College graduate	<input type="checkbox"/>		

5. Current Occupation: Please write your current occupation on the line below.

6. Current Income

\$0 - \$24 999	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$75 000 - \$99 999	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$25 000 - \$49 999	<input type="checkbox"/>	\$100 000 +	<input type="checkbox"/>
\$50 000 - \$74 999	<input type="checkbox"/>		

7. Marital Status

Married	<input type="checkbox"/>	Separated/Divorced	<input type="checkbox"/>
Widowed	<input type="checkbox"/>	Never Married	<input type="checkbox"/>
Common law	<input type="checkbox"/>		

Appendix G: Phase 3 Information Letter and Consent Form

Information Letter

Title of Study: Examining the Relationship between Spirituality and Play.

Principle Researcher: Carl Nienhuis, MHK
School of Human Kinetics
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Ottawa
125 University Private, Ottawa, Canada, Montpetit 428

Supervisor: Dr. Paul Heintzman
Associate Professor
Faculty of Health Sciences
University of Ottawa
125 University Private, Ottawa, Canada, Montpetit 331
(613) 562-5800 ext. 4251

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a study that investigates the spiritual features of play. The research is part of the researcher's (Carl Nienhuis) Ph.D. thesis at the University of Ottawa and is under the supervision of Dr. Paul Heintzman.

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between spirituality and play, aiming to understand why people play and what they love about it.

Participation: You will be asked to take part in an in-depth interview consisting of approximately 10 questions. The interview should last between 15 to 30 minutes depending on the answers you provide. During the interview, you will be asked about your experience with play, and asked to reflect on Christian attitudes concerning play and how playful activities can be integrated into ecclesiological practice.

Benefits: Thanks to your feedback, we will gain a better understanding of the relationship between spirituality and play. Your feedback will help in understanding appropriate Christian attitudes in play and the significance that play should have in the life of a Christian. Reflecting on your own playful experiences may also help you gain better knowledge and appreciation for the role that play has in your life.

Risks: Your participation in this study will consist of you anonymously answering questions concerning your experiences and opinions on play, spirituality and Christianity. A chance of emotional discomfort does exist as you will be asked to reflect on emotional experiences in your life. In the unlikely event that you do feel emotional discomfort, sensitive questions will be skipped and you will not have to answer them.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: For analytical purpose, the interview will be audio recorded. The information that you share will remain strictly confidential and will be used solely for the purposes of this research. The only people that will have access to the research data are the researcher, Carl Nienhuis, and the supervisor, Dr. Paul Heintzman. Your answers to open-ended questions may be used verbatim in presentations and publications but you will not be identified. In order to ensure anonymity, pseudonyms will be used in the final report. The audio recording will be safely kept in a computer protected by a password.

Data storage: The data will be conserved on an encrypted memory stick placed in the researcher's locked office for a period of five years. After the conservation period, all data will be securely destroyed.

Voluntary Participation: Although your participation in this study is encouraged, it remains totally voluntary. You are under no obligation to participate and if you choose to participate, you may refuse to answer questions that you do not want to answer. Even after the interview, it will be possible to withdraw from the study by contacting the researcher. The data you have provided will then be destroyed and removed from the research.

Information about Results: The research findings can be made available to you if you wish. If you are interested, please contact the researcher at the email or phone numbers mentioned above and the researcher will send you a copy of the results.

If you decide to participate in this study, please sign the consent form. There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is yours to keep.

If you have any questions or require more information about the study itself, you may contact the researchers at the numbers mentioned above.

If you have any questions with regards to the ethical conduct of this study, you may contact the Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research, University of Ottawa, Tabaret Hall, 550 Cumberland Street, Room 159, Ottawa, ON K1N 6N5, tel.: (613) 562-5841 or ethics@uottawa.ca.

Please keep this form for your records. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Consent Form

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in an in-depth interview conducted by Carl Nienhuis of the School of Human Kinetics in the Faculty of Health Science at the University of Ottawa under the supervision of Dr. Paul Heintzman. Also, I consent to the interview being audio-taped. I have made this decision based on the information I have received in the Letter of Information and have had the opportunity to receive any additional details I wanted about this study.

Participants Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researchers Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix H: Phase 3 Qualitative Interview Guide for Pastors

1. Which activities do you participate in that you would call play?
 - a. Which activities do you play? How often?
 - i. Which activities do you play with other people? Which do you play alone?
 - ii. Do you participate in any other hobby, recreation, or leisure activities that you would not consider play?
2. To what extent is there a relationship between Christian faith and how someone plays?
 - a. What values should be promoted in game/sport/music/dance/artistic environments? Why? Are they currently promoted?
 - i. Why are they promoted? How are they promoted?
 - ii. Do these values change? If so, how?
 - b. How would you characterize or describe appropriate Christian play?
 - i. What behaviours, attitudes and expressions would be noticeable?
 - ii. What does it include?
 - iii. What does it exclude?
 - c. Can you identify any spiritual qualities, features or characteristics of the play activities you have mentioned?
 - i. What kind of personal or spiritual qualities do you think would contribute to appropriate participation in playful activity?
3. How can playful activities be integrated into ecclesiological practice?
 - a. What significance should play have in the life of a Christian?
 - i. Why should Christians play? (or why not)
 - ii. What should Christians play? How often? With whom?
 - iii. Does play's significance change with age?
 1. To what degree does play impact how you structure your life?
 2. How would you describe the relationship between play and work?
Is one more important than the other? Why or why not?
 - b. Do you believe coaches and teachers should help facilitate and develop spirituality in athletes/musicians/dancers/artists? If so, how?
 - c. What would be a Christian approach to leading others in play contexts?
4. Previous study results indicate that non-Christians participate in play more frequently than Christians. How do you react to this?

Appendix I: Ethics Approval Notice

File Number: H11-16-21

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 02/17/2017



Université d'Ottawa **University of Ottawa**
 Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

Certificate of Ethics Approval

Health Sciences and Science REB

Principal Investigator / Supervisor / Co-investigator(s) / Student(s)

<u>First Name</u>	<u>Last Name</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>	<u>Role</u>
Paul	Heintzman	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Supervisor
Carl	Nienhuis	Health Sciences / Human Kinetics	Student Researcher

File Number: H11-16-21

Type of Project: PhD Thesis

Title: Examining the relationship between spirituality and play

Approval Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

02/17/2017

Expiry Date (mm/dd/yyyy)

02/16/2018

Special Conditions / Comments:

File Number: H11-16-21

Date (mm/dd/yyyy): 02/17/2017



Université d'Ottawa
Bureau d'éthique et d'intégrité de la recherche

University of Ottawa
Office of Research Ethics and Integrity

This is to confirm that the University of Ottawa Research Ethics Board identified above, which operates in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement and other applicable laws and regulations in Ontario, has examined and approved the application for ethical approval for the above named research project as of the Ethics Approval Date indicated for the period above and subject to the conditions listed the section above entitled "Special Conditions / Comments".

During the course of the study the protocol may not be modified without prior written approval from the REB except when necessary to remove participants from immediate endangerment or when the modification(s) pertain to only administrative or logistical components of the study (e.g. change of telephone number). Investigators must also promptly alert the REB of any changes which increase the risk to participant(s), any changes which considerably affect the conduct of the project, all unanticipated and harmful events that occur, and new information that may negatively affect the conduct of the project and safety of the participant(s). Modifications to the project, information/consent documentation, and/or recruitment documentation, should be submitted to this office for approval using the "Modification to research project" form available at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

Please submit an annual status report to the Protocol Officer 4 weeks before the above-referenced expiry date to either close the file or request a renewal of ethics approval. This document can be found at: <http://research.uottawa.ca/ethics/submissions-and-reviews>.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the Ethics Office at extension 5387 or by e-mail at: ethics@uOttawa.ca.

Germain Zongo
Protocol Officer for Ethics in Research
For Daniel Lagarec, Chair of the Sciences and Health Sciences REB