

Identifying Playfulness: An Empirical Study on How Adults Recognize and Define Playfulness Across Culture

Keywords: Playfulness, Cross-cultural, Empirical, Qualitative, Definition

Biography: Leland Masek is a doctoral researcher at Tampere University in Finland. His work focuses on definitions and applications of playfulness and games. He has ten years' experience in game design for education and live events.

Abstract

Playfulness is a critical concept for the study of games, play and adult well-being. Empirical and theoretical works have argued for the major influence it has in adult lives around the globe. Despite these affirmations, one of the most commonly described barriers for further work is that there remains little clarity on how playfulness can be identified in diverse contexts. Most definitions are created for narrow applications with little evidence that they apply to other contexts. The inability to identify playfulness, especially across culture, thus remains a major gap for modern researchers. This work addresses this gap with 50 interviews by adults from 38 countries around the world on how they identify playfulness in their own life. Adults across culture identify playfulness with four characteristics: Active Behavior, Emotional Reinforcement, Social Sharing, and Non-Serious Framing. This four-part framework creates a clarifying and innovative vocabulary for future works on playfulness.

Introduction

Playfulness is a critical concept for understanding how individuals participate in their environments, social relationships, and greater lives. It is associated with various things including social connection (Guitard, Ferland & Dutil 2005), technology-use (Sledgianowski & Kulviwat 2009), and participation in medical interventions (Masek 2023). It has a growing literature connecting its presence with various forms of health and wellbeing. It has been widely associated with reduced psychopathology (Gray 2011), increased physical health (Proyer et al. 2018), workplace happiness (Bakker et al. 2020), relationship satisfaction (Brauer et al. 2021). Theoretical claims about playfulness include such strong affirmations as “playful adults live an average of ten years longer than their less playful peers” (Gordon 2014 p. 249) or that playful fun is akin to “choosing life, to embrace life, to be alive.” (De Koven 2013, p. 206). This level of optimism and growing evidence over a wide spectrum of results deserves careful consideration.

While these results are promising, there are also considerable barriers for applying this wide set of findings into future work. Theories of playfulness are so diverse in background and theoretical construct that at first look they may appear to be about separate topics (Masek & Stenros 2021). There are numerous criticisms on theories of playfulness and associated terms that emphasize that outsize claims without strong foundation undermine long-term understanding of the topic (Burghardt 2005, Sutton Smith 2009). Building such a strong foundation on playfulness however has proven to be a complicated task on several fronts.

One of the greatest reasons it has been difficult to consolidate academic work on playfulness has been the degree of diversity present in the phenomenon and resulting scientific literature. A foundational issue for such a diverse phenomenon is if its presentation is so diverse, how can scholars even reasonably recognize it. There have been considerable effort isolating differences between closely connected terms such as playfulness and games (Deterding et al. 2011), play and playfulness (Sicart 2014). While these endeavors are insightful, there is another equally valid theoretical goal in, before separating these concepts, consolidating how they overlap. Past foundational works such as *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga 2014 reprint), or *The Ambiguity of Play* (Sutton-Smith 2009) demonstrate the value in integrative theories of diverse presentations of game, play, playfulness, performance, or comedy. Yet, there is still no established tool on how to identify, in practice, such diverse presentations of playfulness.

Tools to identify various types of playful behavior in highly diverse forms have been created for animal play (Burghardt 2005) and the play of children (Bundy et al. 2001) but there exists no current tool that can help scholars identify adult human playfulness in its full diversity and forms. The above tools are helpful, but fundamentally focus upon how an external observer would see play behavior in animals or children. In the context of animals, and young children, this makes obvious sense, but for adults, perceived internal experience is a highly valuable source of information. Past works that study adult perspectives on playfulness, as will be discussed in depth later, are generally rather limited in cultural scope and assumptions that intentionally narrow their theoretical scope.

This leaves an interesting situation, where most scholars view playfulness and play as a universal component of the human species biologically (see Burghardt 2005), and thus almost certainly present in all human cultures, and probably across all ages, yet scholars do not really know how to identify it in its varying contexts. As one scholar put it “After reading much of the literature on play, one comes to the conclusion that play is like beauty — it is in the eye of the beholder.” (Stagnitti 2004, p. 5).

Considering the diversity of presentations of playfulness in theory, a critical question is begged: How do people, especially living in diverse cultural environments identify playfulness for themselves? How do these identifiable criteria line up or resist theoretical claims about playfulness?

In this way, a critical next step for the theoretical development of playfulness is an integrative theoretical endeavor bringing together diverse disciplinary conceptions with adult perspectives on playfulness across culture. This work presents such an integrative endeavor. It utilizes a qualitative semi-structured bottom-up interview of 50 adults from 29 countries around the world. The interview method was influenced most notably by Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1977) and Micro-Phenomenology (Petitmengin 2006). In conclusion it presents the systemic elements of how these people identified playfulness in their own lives.

Background

There have been several critical scientific works contributing to understandings of playfulness, especially in the last 15 years. These works are generally completely theoretical or tightly

focused upon an intentionally narrow expressions of playfulness. The most notable works are generally associated with a specific research community, mostly game studies (Sicart 2014; Stenros 2015), psychology (Barnett 2007; Proyer 2017), and occupational therapy (Bundy et al. 2001). Each of these fields and how they influence this study will be discussed.

There are certain theories meant to explain a broad spectrum of playfulness (De Koven 2013; Masek & Stenros 2021; Sicart 2014; Stenros 2015). There is a theoretical literature review on past academic definitions, concluding that most common definitions of playfulness defining it as “Playfulness prioritizes engagement over external consequence, realness, or convention.” (Masek & Stenros 2021, p. 23). Considering there is a standing review on past theoretical conceptions across discipline, but not so for empirical works, this work will build upon current literature in the following way-

Gap 1: A bottom-up empirical construction of playfulness rather than theoretical or top-down.

There are several past important works that empirically study playfulness. They generally focus on a specific presentation such as playfulness with user interfaces (Kuts 2009), tourist experiences (Cheng et al. 2015), or psychiatry (Berger et al. 2018). Psychology has several empirical works on adult understandings of playfulness. Barnett (2007) conducted a series of focus group interviews of young adult university students on what defines a playful person. Proyer (2017) developed a framework based upon a “linguistic corpus analyses of the German language” (p. 114) of *verspieltheit*. In these works, there is wide agreement that certain critical gaps are empirically under-explored. Most notably playfulness is not adequately understood across culturally diverse populations (see Barnett 2017; Shen, Liu, & Song 2021). Past empirical studies have studied American (Barnett 2007) Swiss German (Proyer 2017), Canadian (Guitard, Ferland & Dutil 2005) and Belgian (Minello 2014) understandings of playfulness. There is no widespread study analyzing how conceptions of playfulness may vary between adults around the world. This work contributes to this past research in the following way-

Gap 2: Culturally diverse groups of participants.

Empirical works on playfulness, especially across cultures, focus upon externally observed behavior. Occupational therapy has a widely used empirical tool identifying playfulness as can be seen observing a child’s play session (Bundy et al. 2001). There are several other works focusing on how adult observers categorize child’s play from recordings (e.g. Turnbull & Jenvey 2006). These conceptions critically do not apply to adults, where there is a generally accepted lack of data on the topic in the field (see Guitard, Ferland & Dutil 2005)¹. Past theoretical works on adults focus on describing/defining *other* people’s behavior or personality traits. For example, Barnett (2007), specifically asked individuals to “talk about people they knew whom they regarded as playful individuals, as well as those who they thought were not at all playful.” (p. 950). This frames an external perspective of playfulness of others rather than an internal perspective of playfulness for ourselves. Past studies have shown how adults have a robust view

¹ This work is an excellent example of adult self-understandings of playfulness. It is however quite culturally limited.

of playfulness in their own life (Guitard et al. 2005; Minello 2014). This work will build upon this approach to studying play/playfulness in the following way-

Gap 3: Adult self-understandings of playful experiences rather than how playful behavior may look like or how a playful person may behave.

In this way, we can see three major criteria that will best promote general understanding of playfulness. 1.) It is empirical or driven by a non-theoretical construction, 2.) it is diverse and integrative especially across cultures, and 3.) it is a self-reflection rather than a description of external behavior. This work aims to contribute under each of these three criteria using a culturally diverse semi-structured interview data set on definitions of playfulness, primed by recalling a specific playful memory had by the interviewee.

Methodology

This study used two primary methodological frameworks to guide the creation of a semi-structured interview protocol (Kallio et al. 2016), the selection of participants, and added a third framework to guide data analysis. These different research methodologies contributed important components to the interview process and data analysis, as explained in this section, and thus represent a triangulation of research design methodology (Thurmond 2001). The first framework was *Grounded Theory* (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) and the second was *Micro-Phenomenological Analysis* (Petitmengin, 2006). These two frameworks have shown considerable value in the study of complicated experiential phenomena. Both methodologies were influential and, by necessity, adapted during the course of this study. Data gathered through the subsequent interviews was then processed using a five-phase qualitative thematic analytic technique proposed by Yin (2015).

Grounded Theory techniques (Strauss & Corbin 1997) were utilized as a method of bottom-up elicitation of participant's interpretive views and the iterative creation of categories of analysis for those views across a theoretically chosen participant pool. Grounded theory is a long-standing set of tools and methods for "joint data collection and analysis in order to generate theory that 'emerges' and is grounded in empirical data" (Teppo 2015, p. 3). This method was selected to facilitate the bottom-up (Gap 1) construction of how a culturally diverse group of adults identify playfulness. The second influential framework was Micro-phenomenology (MP). This technique aims to conduct and analyze interviews in such a way that it brings

a person, who may not even have been trained, to become aware of his or her subjective experience, and describe it with great precision. It is focused on the difficulties of becoming aware of one's subjective experience and describing it, and on the processes used by this interview technique to overcome each of these difficulties. (Petitmengin 2006).

MP was used primarily to stabilize interviewees memories of playful experiences as a cognitive priming (Schacter et al. 2014). Participants were interviewed about a specific highly playful memory first, acting as a primer for their definition of playfulness to focus upon their own internal experiences (Gap 3) and enabling greater reliability in results (Schacter et al. 2014).

Combined, these methods take a rigorous, and highly inclusive approach to defining playfulness. In essence, all the techniques have a high degree of trust in the interviewees and their self-descriptions. The interviewer never corrected them on their interpretation of playfulness or guide them on the topic. Importantly, linguistic explanations do not explain these definitional criteria, as participants from similar linguistic backgrounds were not more likely to have similar definitions of playfulness compared to the other participants.

This may make certain scholars upset in the fact that many interpretations by individuals across culture openly conflict with theoretical claims of what playfulness is and is not. Interviewees presented no difference between play and playfulness and would use them interchangeably; thus this conception equally applies to a broad conceptualization of play. While it is certainly legitimate for future scholars to be interested in separating concepts such as games, play, humor, performance, and playfulness, this work does not focus on that. This work accepts however interviewees presented these concepts and their lived experiences. It is this work's position that it is valuable to observe the broad view of playfulness even if later work does indeed separate out more narrow subsections in the concept.

Sample

As in line with Grounded Theory, interviewees were selected for theoretical purposes, in this case national diversity. Fifty participants were interviewed, ages 18-39 (Mean- 26.65), predominantly university students studying at a mid-sized [Country] University (N=33) with 17 participants being non-students gathered through a snow-balling method of participants recommending others to be included in the study. These participants were from 29 different national backgrounds from every inhabited continent including Asia (N=26), Australia (N=4), Europe (N=9), North America (N=5) and South America (N=5). This work is not meant to be representative sample of the extreme diversity it depicts, and it will not spend time discussing cultural or linguistic differences in the sample, neither of which upon analysis affect the outcome of this paper. Due to the qualitative nature of Grounded Theory, this should not be seen as statistical or “weighted” towards any more represented culture. Rather, everyone was treated as potentially expanding or reinforcing the essential topics discussed. The topics finally included in the theoretical model were widely supported across culture.

Procedure

Each participant was recruited for the study by the researcher, or by past participants. They were selected at various international student events and told it would be an interview about playfulness, no matter what it meant for them. There was an emphasis that the interview was not targeting any particular view of playfulness (e.g. game experiences) but was fully up to their interpretation. This is a technique in micro-phenomenology called content-empty definitions (Petitmengin 2006, p. 248). They met with the researcher one on one, either in person or via a video call, filled out a data protection and explanation sheet as required by GDPR, and were interviewed for an average length of 85 minutes (40-257 minutes).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim by the researcher, pseudonymized, and read several times before being analyzed. Due to the degree of diversity in personal interpretations by participants, their quotations will be reported with an experience number, with no gender or age information, unless the participant themselves thought this was critical to understand the experience itself. Data was primarily processed through a five-phase thematic analytic technique (Yin 2015). All analysis was done by the author, without the use of qualitative analytic software. As in line with Yin (2015), the data was first 1. **compiled** into a larger database 2. Each interview was **disassembled** for meaningful quotations representing distinct ideas the participant was expressing with paired open codes for each quotation 3. These quotations and fragments were **reassembled** into connected thematic categories, with explanatory axial codes 4. These categories were **interpreted** with larger selective codes for what they seemed to be expressing in essence and finally 5. A **conclusion** was written. As is common in grounded theory this process was done in a constant comparative manner, with several iterations as data was collected.

Analytic Focus

This current work will focus on the section of the interview where participants had already described a highly playful experience from their life, acting as a cognitive priming (Schacter et al. 2014) and then explained how they would generally define or describe playfulness. This prepares the interviewee in a few important ways. Firstly, they are prepared to discuss playfulness as a component of a memory or experience. Interviewees thus universally discuss what makes an experience playful, rather than a state of mind or a personality trait. Secondly, they are primed to discuss highly playful experiences. This choice has a long psychological history, back to the foundations of “peak experience” research by Abraham Maslow (1971). Maslow’s work has a direct connection as he viewed playfulness as one of the “being values” for humans in peak experiences. Furthermore, Peak experience research has since been used to study a variety of complicated phenomena including spirituality (Scott & Evans 2010), wilderness experiences (Mcdonald et al. 2009), and love (Mouton & Montijo, 2017). Considering the long importance of studying self-identified “peak experiences” to uncover inductive phenomenological characteristics of highly subjective concepts, this was considered one of the most reliable starting points for an interview endeavor on the also highly debated concept of “playfulness”. In this way this data should present a personally grounded (Gap 3), Bottom-up (Gap 1) data set on how playfulness is defined across a variety of cultural backgrounds (Gap 2).

Results

This section provides a thematic analysis (Yin 2015) of 50 definitions of “playfulness” had by individuals originating from 29 countries around the world. After an interview regarding a specific playful experience from their life, individuals were asked “In general, how would you define or describe the concept of playfulness?”. Their answers are presented in Appendix 1. By analyzing their responses four different types of inclusion criteria were broadly agreed on by many different personal definitions of playfulness: 1) Active Behavior 2) Emotionally Reinforced 3) Socially Shared 4) Non-Seriously Framed. All these components should be seen as primarily inclusion criteria. Participants were focused on what was *likely* to be happening in all playful experiences, rather than criteria that would ensure something was no longer playful. In this sense, this model is a set of probabilistic criteria. The more the criteria are met, the more

likely the experience is playful. While each of these components were widely agreed on and individual definitions always featured one of these four, some would disagree with various components. Thus, these four criteria create a continuum of playfulness (Figure 1.) from less to more playful, rather than a required list of elements.

Figure 1. Continuum of Identifiable Playfulness

Active Behaviors

Active behaviors were described as external physical interaction with the environment in contrast to passive behaviors. This physical participation is described as interaction with an environment, active movement, and even sometimes physical intensity. The opposite of this criteria is passiveness: if someone was not moving, behaviorally non-interactive, not thinking actively, or mostly paying attention without other movement that would be seen as less playful. For example, if someone was watching a game be played and then decided to participate in the next round, the active participation round would be called more playful.

Respondents had varying degrees of emphasis for this criterion. On one end, some individuals defined playfulness in contrast to passivity for example saying playfulness was

play with a meaningful act... it is not only play, not automatic play, that gives you some dopamine. But, you need to have thought, you need to have a decision, something needs to come out, it has to be meaningful. Like for example, you're watching a short video and short articles and they are trying to attract a lot of your attention, and that's not playfulness. (D28)

This example is interesting for two reasons. The first is that it contrasts meaningful playfulness with watching short videos and reading short articles. In this depiction active thinking is placed with real-playfulness and is contrasted to simple attentional behavior. Several participants described active thinking as associated with active behavior (N=5). Other definitions similarly contrast playfulness with watching behaviors by describing it as “go and play and don't watch a movie, at least to have some endorphin rush.” (D5) or others with the word “physical” (D15).

The most common way for this criterion to be discussed was defining playfulness as a type of activity. For example, one participant defined playfulness as “it's when you are doing a set of actions that are not related to your real world, somehow, or the context of life...” (D44). This above definition puts playfulness as a special *sub-set of actions*². Other definitions similarly define playfulness as “it's like doing activities that make you feel good and enjoying.” (D18). This description is subtly important because it puts the locus of emotional reinforcement into the doing of an activity. They imply that without the specific qualitative activity, and their behavioral participation in it, it would not be a playful experience. In this way, we can see an important element of playfulness for many individuals was a discrete activity or set of active behaviors.

² The separation from everyday life will be discussed further in non-serious framing.

Active behavior, as contrasted with passivity or attentional participation is also an important feature in several past theoretical and empirical definitions of playfulness. For example, in a literature review of definitions of playfulness for social psychology concluded “Playfulness is a dispositional tendency to engage in play (i.e., an inclination to pursue activities with the goal of amusement or fun, with an enthusiastic and in-the-moment attitude, and that are highly-interactive in nature” (Van Vleet and Feeney 2015, P. 632). This final component of highly interactive seems to emphasize a behavioral interactivity. It would not be sufficient for someone to watch a playful situation and enjoy it to be called highly interactive. Similarly, other authors discuss such a criteria through defining playfulness as requiring “Active Engagement” (Sanderson 2010, 31), being “involved and active” (Cermak-Sassenrath 2018, p.xi), as associated with being active and energetic. (Barnett 2007) or physically active (Barnett 1990). This form of active engagement can also be associated with theories of playfulness as player’s engaging in *persistent action* in challenging situations (Bundy et al. 2001; Guitard et al. 2005; Keskitalo et al. 2018; Kumar et al. 2017). In these theories playfulness is associated with a continued willingness to interact in a situation that includes failure, or other reasons that normally reduce individuals’ willingness to continue interacting. In this way, we see an important criterion for how playfulness is defined for individuals as well as in academic literature:

Active Behavior: Playfulness is associated with active experiences of movement, interactivity, physical participation, and cognitive involvement commonly contrasted with passive or purely attentional behavior.

Emotional Reinforcement

Emotional reinforcement describes an internal hedonic desire to continue to participate or increase participation with the experience. While Emotional Reinforcement is most commonly synonymized with positive emotions such as joy and fun, some individuals also described non-positive tone to certain reinforcing internal emotions. This was commonly described in the emotions created by challenging experiences, and also engagingly sad, scary, or angry moments in play. For example, a highly beautiful sad storytelling moment in a game may not be labeled as “joyful” but was still described as a wanted experience and an emotion that the participant would seek again. In all cases, these emotions were described as likely to induce participation in the activity again, and thus are well described as *emotionally reinforcing* in a behaviorist sense (Goldiamond 1976). Several participants described that if a situation is highly enjoyable, or otherwise emotionally reinforcing it was considered more playful. The opposite of this criteria would be emotional aversion, or experiencing an emotion that makes you wish to end, avoid, or not repeat the experience. For example, if two people are playing a game and one of them deeply enjoys the game, while the other does not emotionally want to play the game, the person enjoying the game would be considered more playful.

Emotional reinforcement was frequently described with common positive emotion words such as “joy/enjoyment” (N=16), “fun” (N=12), happiness (N=5), or feeling good (N=2). For example, a one participant described this well by defining it as “it’s like doing activities that make you feel good and enjoying.” (D14). In addition, sometimes individuals would specifically highlight an

emotionally appealing experience that they directly contrasted with phrases such as happiness or joy. As one individual described

My interpretation of playfulness is not just about being happy or joyful but about challenging yourself, doing something you might lose, that's an eventual fact and then you don't feel joy. You feel devastated, angry, sad... (D23)

This example uses the concept of “challenging” to refer to a form of internal emotional sensation, that is appealing but qualitatively different from joy or happiness. Challenging is an insightful concept that is used in two other definitions one of which mentions no positive hedonic tone defining playfulness as “An activity that is like a challenge or a purpose to achieve” (D24). The third example phrases it as “You're looking back into those happy days, where you had fun, where it was challenging, but you're still learning and you're having fun.” (D31). This third example is useful because it says challenging and immediately contrasts challenging with the word “but” with learning and fun. This implies that the person viewed the challenge as fundamentally different from the learning or the fun.

In practice the word “fun” seemed to be a flexible concept that sometimes carried a positive tone, being used synonymously with words like joy and other times being directly tied to the emotions of risky yet appealing situations. For example, one person discussed playfulness as “you go rogue, from your culture and you experience that, and you don't get caught: it's fun. So, this is the definition of fun that I have. Not rogue most of the time, but having some experience that you enjoy.” (D33) This framing seems to emphasize that most playful experiences are joyful but “going rogue” is a separate kind of experience tied to not being caught and also associated with fun. Other definitions similarly present fun as open to positive or negative consequences such as “engaging in an activity which is kind of fun? Maybe there are some outcomes, good outcomes, or bad outcomes you don't know. Take it as a surprise.” (D11) In this interview the ability for things to go bad was not described as joyful, but unpredictability was key to the emotional appeal of the situation. Other examples of non-positive emotional reinforcement include individuals discussing the feelings of playfulness with words such as “A feeling of just like adrenaline, a feeling of achieving something” (D26), and “When you are eager to do any activity...to have the eager willingness, a strong will to do that” (D35). This was also present in the number of definitions that associated playfulness to competitive experiences (N=3). In this way, it is important to have a broader term to address playful experiences that are appealing and compelling but not clearly emotionally positive.

Non-positive emotional reinforcement is quite contentious in past theoretical discourses on playfulness. *Emotional reinforcement* is a concept created in a past literature review to describe this controversy in theoretical literature on playfulness (Masek & Stenros 2021). As previously written

a major academic conflict over the nature of engagement and positivity. One of the most common factors to define the experience of being within a playful engagement are the terms ‘enjoyment’, ‘pleasure’ or ‘fun’. Several other authors have directly criticized this analysis of universal positivity within playful experiences as unjustified. These critics argue that playfulness can have a negative hedonic tone and that negative emotional

experience can reinforce the act of play. There is no direct *bottom-up* research that analyzes whether individuals would self-identify negative hedonic tone as potentially “playful”. Thus, rather than using terminology with positive connotations we argue that the more neutral term ‘emotional reinforcement’ is more appropriate than terms such as ‘enjoyment’ or ‘fun’ (Masek & Stenros 2021, P. 36-37)

This current analysis stands as qualitative bottom-up work that reinforces the conclusion that individuals do self-perceive certain emotional experiences as playful, compelling, and not positive. The most common type of emotional reinforcement is described as joyful or fun, but also includes challenge, anger, sadness, and motivating loss. In this way, we can see an important criteria individuals used to define playfulness in daily life as well as in academic literature.

Emotional Reinforcement: Playfulness is associated with a perceived emotional experience that encourages further or deeper interaction with the situation, most commonly joy or fun but also challenge or other not traditionally positive reinforcing emotional states.

Social Sharing

Social sharing as a component is defined by sharing the same behavioral activity and emotional reinforcement with other people in the environment. It was common for individuals to describe social sharing of playfulness as maybe not an absolute requirement for all people’s playfulness, but as a requirement for their personal playfulness. Participants described that a situation where a group of people are sharing the same playful experience is definitive of a playful situation for them. The opposite of social sharing would be isolation or having no one who shares the same experience. For example, if a child was playing a video game alone, and then several of their friends came and started to play with them, participants would describe it as more playful after the friends came. In addition, if a group of people were doing separate things that would also be seen as less playful than them doing the same thing. This was the fourth most common criteria presented in the definitions (N=15).

This criterion appears to focus on having *a group* of people to share the experience/activity with, not necessarily sharing it with *all* people present. For example, a group of friends with an inside joke do not find the joke less funny because other people not in the group would find it offensive. A community sharing a playful activity was the most common presentation of this and it was accepted that certain others were not involved in the same way.

Socially sharing was often discussed as essential to the participants personal view of playfulness, while acknowledging non-social experiences may still be akin to play. As one participant described

you can play on your own, like you can play computer games and whatever, but I wouldn't call that playful because to me, playful is more like, like interaction between people rather than just describing your behavior.... Playfulness is generally social, whereas just play can be either alone or social. (D42)

Others similarly depicted this tension by saying “There are different types of games like basketball, or football, I would not use playfulness for those kinds of games. But like, games with other people, with words and interaction with words.” (D43). Other participants were more accepting of playful experiences as potentially non-social for example saying, “you are doing something interacting with people, but you could also play alone” (D29). This above quotation is interesting as the participant seemed to first share their association with playfulness as social, and then correct themselves and say it is possible to be playful alone. This implied that they first imagined playfulness as social, but they would not exclude non-social situations from playfulness.

The most common way for this criterion to be discussed was a group of people sharing the same experience. For example, one participant defined playfulness as “It's about an experience in which everyone who is involved is understanding it and responding to it. And it creates a kind of lighter environment for everyone involved.” (D34). Other definitions similarly emphasized a group-understanding such as “my definition of playfulness is when we experienced something together as a group” (D33). Several definitions also used the word friends to signal the social relationships that were being playfully shared with (N=5). In this way, the presence of socially connected friends was seen as definitive of playful situations.

Social sharing is also a common component of playfulness criteria in academic literature. Social interactivity has a long history in theories of playfulness, including Lieberman’s foundational conception that includes social spontaneity as a key factor (see Lieberman 2014 for reprint). This social spontaneity is described by “To be comfortable in a group setting and move freely in and out of such a social structure was considered the hallmark of social spontaneity in both kindergartners and adolescents in assessing their playfulness” (Lieberman, 2014, p. 90). This idea of social comfort and freely moving into social structure aligns with participants’ descriptions of sharing playful experiences with others. This construct seems to view easefully moving out of a social structure as equally playful as moving in, which is not present in participants’ views, and is also an unusual component compared to other theoretical constructs of social playfulness. For example, the Children’s Playfulness Scale is meant to empirically measure Lieberman’s theory and defines social spontaneity as one criterion with statements like “The child initiates play with others” (Barnett 1991 Appendix 1). In this way, Playful experience with others is presented as fundamentally more playful than having those experiences alone. This social sharing criteria can be seen in theories that define playfulness as accommodating play behavior over rejecting potentially problematic play partners (Møller, 2015), enabling individuals to fit their private experiences with public conceptions (Parker-Rees 2014) generally sociable (Barnett 2007), directed towards others (Proyer 2017) or measured by playing with others (Bundy et al. 2001). In this way, we see an important criterion for how playfulness is defined for individuals as well as in academic literature:

Socially shared: Playfulness is associated with sharing experiences and interacting with others.

Non-Serious Framing

Non-serious framing refers to a contextual understanding that the current situation is explicitly not about other priorities other *Active Behavior*, *Emotional Reinforcement*, or *Social Sharing*.

This negation of anything seen as “serious” reinforces the ability to identify the experience as probably playful. There were several different ways participants described the manner of this contextual understanding. Sometimes this was described as an internal frame of mind, a reduction in focusing on certain priorities described with phrases such as feeling carefree, no longer considering potential negative consequences, or not worrying about rules. It was also sometimes described as structural feature of a playful environment being obviously a “not serious” situation. This framing was described on a continuum from playfulness actively opposing seriousness to being different than serious, to diminishing a degree of seriousness. The opposite of *non-serious framing* is an activity that is fully defined by something that is dissociated from participation in any form, most commonly called “seriousness”. An example for this is if a doctor was very seriously trying to save a patient’s life, many would describe the situation as clearly not about the doctor’s desire to participate, their socialness, or even how active the doctor is: it is about the consequence of the person’s life being saved, and thus it is not playful. If instead, this was a live action role-playing game where no one’s life was being saved, but someone was acting like a doctor pretending to save someone’s life, then this *non-serious framing* would enable it to be more clearly playful. This was the third most common criteria used to define playfulness (N=16).

There were a variety of elements that defined “non-seriousness”. This criterion was most commonly presented by participants defining playfulness as being contrasted to the word “serious” (N=5). For example, Definition 45 exclusively used this criteria to define playfulness as “it's the lack of seriousness I guess... like you're in a situation where it's not only okay to be not serious but it's encouraged”. Non-seriousness was also typified as different than “normal life” (N=2), not associated with work (N=3), not real or fictional (N=3), not connected with normal goals or consequences (N=2), as different than externally defined importance (D1), not having restrictive rules (N=2), or contrasted to stressfulness (N=2). Interestingly, *non-serious framing* was sometimes contrasted from “everyday life” (D44). The same non-seriousness was also described as a lifestyle choice by other participants to focus on playfulness over seriousness (D3). In essence, people have differing views on whether non-serious things have a role in normal life.

Non-serious framing was also sometimes described as more of a continuum where playful experiences are perceived as on the not *too* serious side [Figure 2]. This allows a certain degree of seriousness in playful experiences if it is not perceived as too much. For example, Definition 4 describes this continuum by emphasizing playfulness as not considering consequences too much saying it is like a group that “play in a way where nothing really matters... They don't really consider consequences. They might [consider consequences] but for the most part, they probably don't.”. Phrases like *probably* not considering consequences, and not *really* considering consequences, seem to allow for brief moments of serious consideration, as long as they play a diminished role that does not ultimately *define* the situation. Other definitions used similar mediating concepts around non-serious framing such as “I stopped caring *so much* about rules” (emphasis added, D1).

Figure 2. Continuum of Non-Seriousness

Seriousness is importantly not a hedonic tone of experience. Seriousness was not defined by a facial expression, competitiveness, anger, sadness. It was sometimes defined through concepts such as “stressful” (D46) or overwhelming, such as Definition 48 which argued playfulness “should just be things that you don't struggle with”. This seems to be a similar idea to how others argued playfulness should be a “lighter environment” (D34). A few participants used a metaphor of *light* situations versus *hard* situations to grasp similar concepts. It was described as if an emotion becomes “heavy” when it is no longer reinforcing. A “light” emotion was described as hedonically motivating and thus not requiring perceived labor to endure. In contrast, if an emotion is not reinforcing, it is perceived as “heavier”, and any further interaction is probably a signal of a “serious” situation that justifies a form of enduring labor.

This is similar to how seriousness is sometimes used in academic literature on games. The term serious games was originally defined as “these games have an explicit and carefully thought-out educational purpose and are not intended to be played primarily for amusement.” (Abt 1987, p.9). This fits well with several participants’ use of the non-serious criteria. If a situation was clearly labeled as about “education” above anything else, then that would be a serious framing. However, for Abt to be in-line with this conception of playfulness two additional implications would have to be true. 1) This act of education is not fundamentally perceived as involvement-inducing by the players and the game is not trying to make that so. This criterion is required because several individuals view “learning” as fundamentally playful and bring it up in their definition of playfulness (N=3). If a player synonymizes learning with amusement, then the above definition means very little. 2) Amusement can include a broad set of emotions. As discussed earlier, the emotional tone of playful experiences can be non-pleasant yet reinforcing, in that way it’s important that readers do not imagine playfulness is restricted to situations of smiling or laughing. Players also view intense competition as playful and it's important for that to be considered amusement.

Non-seriousness is importantly often a subjective view rather than an objective analysis of a situation. This is different from how especially biologists conceive of non-seriousness in play. For example, Bateson writes “most psychologists and biologists use play for non-serious activities that may have no immediate utility.” (Bateson 2014 p. 99). Immediate utility is a concept meant to describe behaviors that have a clear survival benefit for an animal, for example eating because they are hungry. Bateson defines this kind of criteria for play of many species as “The player is to some extent protected from the normal consequences of serious behavior. The behavior appears to have no immediate practical goal or benefit” (2014 p. 100). This definition aligns with non-serious environments but fails to capture non-serious attitudes discussed in the interviews. A number of interviewees emphasized concepts similar to “you could take any situation and turn it into a playful situation” (D48), emphasizing an approach to the situation as “carefree” (D17), or occurring when they “stopped caring so much about rules” (D1) or as one participant defined it as “behaving out of the frames that you set for yourself to be safe. Playfulness is going outside of those frames just to learn more, as the child who just was exploring the world” (D18). Many other academic disciplines contrast playfulness to a variety of things defined as serious, such as external consequences, accurate reality, and normal rules or restrictions (Masek & Stenros 2021). Non-seriousness is also closely aligned to how play and playfulness are typified as paratelic (Kerr & Apter 1991), autotelic (Csikszentmihályi 1975), or done for its own sake (Stenros 2015).

In this way, we see an important criterion for how playfulness is defined for individuals as well as in academic literature:

Non-Serious Framing: Playfulness is explicitly framed as not about various normative priorities, including stress, conventionality, reality and consequences, typically referred to as being “not serious”. Through this negation the three previous forms of involvement: *Active Behavior*, *Emotional Reinforcement*, and *Social Sharing* remain as the only defining aspects of the situation.

Discussion

These four criteria provide a pragmatic and common-sense tool for understanding of what is likely to be seen as playfulness from adult human perspectives across a diverse selection of cultures. If we focus on the most normative description, most people identify playfulness as “*An active experience that you like, share with others and is not too serious either in manner or context.*” It would be rare for such an activity to be described as not playful. In defining contrast, the opposite of playfulness would be seen as “*A passive experience that you dislike and share with no one and is very serious in both manner and context.*” It would be equally rare for someone to have an experience like the one above and call it playful.

These four criteria present a method by which individuals identify playfulness. Due to the priming that the participants received, where they remembered an experience that they would call “highly playful”, these criteria should also be seen as primarily defining *highly* playful experiences. In this way, the criteria are more useful as ways to identify clearly or essentially playful things rather than determining technically or edge-case playful experiences. We can imagine (Figure 3) a theoretical circle of what experiences should be seen as playful. The edges of this circle are a gradient, where the further away an experience gets the less playful it seems, until there is no evidence of playfulness. This theoretical paradigm thus more clearly describes things that are clearly or highly playful for individuals, rather than phenomena near the edge of possibly playful.

Figure 3. Playfulness vs. Non-Playfulness

This does not mean that types of playfulness that are more ambiguous are not interesting to analyze utilizing these four criteria. This paradigm creates a vocabulary illustrating discrete parts of why certain playful situations could be ambiguous. For example, if an experience is missing one of the four criteria, but matches the other three, this presents a specific subset of potentially playful experiences, that may be contentious, and may be difficult to directly label, depending on which criteria are felt to matter more to the person analyzing.

The following four types of controversial playfulness³ are inferable to the paradigm and furthermore are demonstrative of conflicting views of playfulness in both academic literature and

³ Experiences could also lack multiple of these criteria, compounding the complexity of labeling it clearly as playfulness or not.

in the interviews: *passive playfulness*, *repulsive playfulness*, *isolated playfulness*, and *serious playfulness*. Each of these categories offer rich material for further understanding complicated playful experiences and deserve their own treatment. They also demonstrate the potential value of this kind of paradigm, and thus a brief introduction is worthwhile. Examples for these non-normative playful experiences are drawn from parts of the interview where individuals recounted specific playful memories.

Passive Playfulness refers to *emotionally reinforced, socially shared, non-serious* situations that are not experienced as *behaviorally active*. This is most commonly watching behaviors, such as enjoyably watching a game-stream with a romantic partner (Interview 49) or watching children play (Interview 42). Most passive playful experiences do include more active moments of discussion or laughing about what's being watched, but also include moments of perceived non activity.

Repulsive Playfulness refers to behaviorally active, socially shared, non-serious situations that are emotionally aversive or repulsive. This is most commonly situations where an interviewee feels like they were coercively “forced” into play by other people or they just “played along” even though they didn't like it. This includes situations like groups of friends who are daring each other into doing more and more dangerous activities (Interview 79) or workplace environments where someone feels immense pressure to perform the part of successful even though they are not (Interview 51). While they are seen as repulsive memories, they were labeled as one of the participants most playful experiences in their life.

Isolated Playfulness refers to behaviorally active, emotionally reinforcing, non-serious situations, that are not shared with anyone. These often is described as getting fully absorbed in a non-social activity such as interesting work (Interview 57) or video games (Interview 15). Many of these experiences include other people before or after the playfulness but it is still felt as if no one shared that playful experience with them.

Serious Playfulness refers to behaviorally active, emotionally reinforcing, socially shared experiences, that are ultimately still defined by something serious. These may be workplace experiences that while very engaging also never stop being seen as important or work (Interview 18) or when someone is making an insightful joke about serious life situations (interview 74). These experiences were described as integrating the seriousness of a topic with playful frames and possibly heightening both.

These four categories would be seen as oxymorons to many people, while presenting other peoples lived highly playful experiences. By opening how these operate with this theoretical construct, we have the potential to deconstruct a deeper understanding of why these tensions exist and thus what is playfulness really about. These controversial forms of playfulness deserve deeper unpacking in later work.

Conclusion

Combining these four identifying criteria we see a reinforcement that by most people, playfulness can be seen as the principle of prioritizing engagement. This is a relative position

where *how* engagement occurs is treated as more definitive of the situation than other things. This more-than position could be clear because engagement is very high, or because other explanations are explicitly removed. If a situation is clearly about something else besides engagement, it is probably not playful, if it is unclear as to whether the situation is about-engagement or not, then it is unclear whether the situation is playful. This implies a rather higher-order relationship between people and playfulness. The construct of a generalized pathway by which individual's experiences are defined by participation and desire to participate is similar to long standing constructs in Psychology often termed *approach motivation* (see Harmon-Jones et al. 2013) also similar to definitions of positive emotion such as Fredrickson and Cohn's conception that "the function common to all positive emotions has been conceptualized as facilitating approach behavior or continued action" (2008 p. 778-779)⁴. The idea that playfulness is an organizing principle that prioritizes such experiences is a novel and critical idea.

Engagement here is the suggested word for the qualitatively diverse set of participation and involvement combining *Active Behavior*, *Emotional Reinforcement*, and *Social Sharing*. Firstly, persistent *interactivity and thinking* in a situation is an externally obvious form of engagement through behavior. Secondly, most people define it for themselves emotionally, in essence *emotionally desiring* to be involved. Finally, *socially sharing* this involvement and participation with other people is seen as engagement. The more a situation is defined by the above three elements, the more likely it is to be seen as playful. All three have clear forms of anti-engagement which also typify individuals' views of anti-playfulness: *Passivity*, *aversion*, and *isolation*. *Non-Serious Framing* explicitly labels other *normative* priorities as *not* the priority and thus reinforces that the situation is probably prioritizing engagement. This *non-serious framing* could be an internal state of mind, such as choosing to playfully play a game or a external boundary, such as safety features for skydiving that prevent serious outcomes.

In conclusion, this work has brought a culturally diverse bottom up, qualitative data set to question how playfulness is identified in diverse contexts. It furthermore has aligned and contrasted these views with major definitions and theories of playfulness from academic literature. It has finally clarified an image of what is generally seen as playful and what is generally seen as not playful. Finally, four forms of non-normative and potentially controversial styles of playfulness were presented that deserve greater attention.

References

Abt, C. C. (1987). *Serious games*. University press of America.

Bakker, A. B., Scharp, Y. S., Breevaart, K., & De Vries, J. D. (2020). Playful work design: Introduction of a new concept. *The Spanish Journal of Psychology*, 23, e19.

⁴ This definition of positive emotion is broader than others that contrast them to "negative emotions—such as anxiety, sadness, anger, and despair." (Fredrickson 2001, p. 218). Participants viewed "anger, devastation, sadness" (Definition 28) as behaviorally reinforcing in the sample.

- Barnett, L. A. (1991). Characterizing playfulness: correlates with individual attributes and personality traits. *Play & Culture*.
- Barnett, L. A. (2007). The nature of playfulness in young adults. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 43(4), 949-958.
- Barnett, L. A. (2017). The inculcation of adult playfulness: from west to east. *International Journal of Play*, 6(3), 255-271.
- Bateson, P. (2014). Play, playfulness, creativity and innovation. *Animal Behavior and Cognition*, 1(2), 99-112. doi: 10.12966/abc.05.02.2014
- Bateson, P., Bateson, P. P. G., & Martin, P. (2013). *Play, playfulness, creativity and innovation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Berger, P., Bitsch, F., Bröhl, H., & Falkenberg, I. (2018). Play and playfulness in psychiatry: a selective review. *International Journal of Play*, 7(2), 210-225.
- Brauer, K., Proyer, R. T., & Chick, G. (2021). Adult playfulness: An update on an understudied individual differences variable and its role in romantic life. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 15(4), e12589.
- Bundy, A. C., Nelson, L., Metzger, M., & Bingaman, K. (2001). Validity and Reliability of a Test of Playfulness. *The Occupational Therapy Journal of Research*, 21(4), 276–292. doi:10.1177/153944920102100405
- Burghardt, G. M. (2005). *The genesis of animal play: Testing the limits*. MIT press.
- Burghardt, G. M. (2014). A brief glimpse at the long evolutionary history of play. *Animal behavior and cognition*, 1(2), 90-98.
- Caillois, R. (2001). *Man, play, and games*. University of Illinois press.
- Cheng, T., Chen, M., & Hong, C. (2015). Fun in work: tour guides' playfulness. In The 5th Advances in Hospitality & Tourism Marketing and Management (AHTMM) Conference, Beppu, Japan, 18-21 June 2015 (pp. 295-299). Washington State University.
- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1975). *Beyond boredom and anxiety*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- De Koven, B. (2013). *A playful path*. Lulu. com.
- Deterding, S., Dixon, D., Khaled, R., & Nacke, L. (2011, September). From game design elements to gamefulness: defining "gamification". In Proceedings of the 15th international academic MindTrek conference: Envisioning future media environments (pp. 9-15).

- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American psychologist*, 56(3), 218.
- Fredrickson, B. L., & Cohn, M. A. (2008). Positive emotions. *Handbook of emotions*, 3, 777-796.
- Goldiamond, I. (1976). SELF-REINFORCEMENT 1. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 9(4), 509-514.
- Gordon, G. (2014). Well Played: The Origins and Future of Playfulness. *American Journal of Play*, 6(2), 234-266.
- Gray, P. The decline of play and the rise of psychopathology in children and adolescents. *American Journal of Play*, 3(4), 443-463. (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ985541.pdf>) (2011).
- Guitard, P., Ferland, F., & Dutil, É. (2005). Toward a better understanding of playfulness in adults. *OTJR: Occupation, Participation and Health*, 25(1), 9-22.
- Harmon-Jones, E., Harmon-Jones, C., & Price, T. F. (2013). What is approach motivation?. *Emotion Review*, 5(3), 291-295.
- Huizinga, J. (2014). *Homo ludens: A study of the play-element in culture*. Routledge.
- Kerr, J. H., & Apter, M. J. (1991). Adult play: A reversal theory approach. (*No Title*).
- Kuts, E. (2009, September). Playful User Interfaces: Literature Review and Model for Analysis. In *DiGRA conference*.
- Lieberman, J. N. (2014). *Playfulness: Its relationship to imagination and creativity*. Academic Press.
- Masek, L. (2023). How Playfulness Can Enable Greater Understanding of Game-Based Adult Mental Health Interventions. In *International Simulation and Gaming Association Conference* (pp. 171-184). Springer, Cham.
- Masek, L., & Stenros, J. (2021). The meaning of playfulness: a review of the contemporary definitions of the concept across disciplines. *Eludamos: Journal for Computer Game Culture*, 12(1), 13-37.
- Maslow, A. H. The farther reaches of human nature (Vol. 1971). New York: Viking Press. (1971).
- McDonald, M. G., Wearing, S., & Ponting, J. (2009). The nature of peak experience in wilderness. *The Humanistic Psychologist*, 37(4), 370-385.

- Minello, K. (2014). Exploring Play and Playfulness in the Everyday Lives of Older Women (Master's thesis, University of Waterloo).
- Møller, S. J. (2015). Imagination, Playfulness, and Creativity in Children's Play with Different Toys. *American Journal of Play*, 7(3).
- Mouton, A. R., & Montijo, M. N. (2017). Love, passion, and peak experience: A qualitative study on six continents. *The journal of positive psychology*, 12(3), 263-280.
- Parker-Rees, R. (2014). Playfulness and the co-construction of identity in the first years. *The SAGE Handbook of play and learning in early childhood*. Los Angeles/London: SAGE, 366-377.
- Petitmengin. 2006. Describing one's subjective experience in the second person: An interview method for the science of consciousness. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive sciences* 5, no. 3. 229-269.
- Proyer, R. T. (2017). A new structural model for the study of adult playfulness: Assessment and exploration of an understudied individual differences variable. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 108, 113-122.
- Proyer, R. T., Gander, F., Bertenshaw, E. J., & Brauer, K. (2018). The positive relationships of playfulness with indicators of health, activity, and physical fitness. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 9, 1440.
- Schacter, D. L., Dobbins, I. G., & Schnyer, D. M. (2004). Specificity of priming: A cognitive neuroscience perspective. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 5(11), 853-862.
- Scott, D. G., & Evans, J. (2010). Peak experience project. *International Journal of Children's spirituality*, 15(2), 143-158.
- Shen, X., Liu, H., & Song, R. (2021). Toward a culture-sensitive approach to playfulness research: Development of the Adult Playfulness Trait Scale-Chinese version and an alternative measurement model. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 52(4), 401-423.
- Sicart, M. (2014). *Play matters*. mit Press.
- Sledgianowski, D., & Kulviwat, S. (2009). Using social network sites: The effects of playfulness, critical mass and trust in a hedonic context. *Journal of computer information systems*, 49(4), 74-83.
- Stenros, J. (2015). Playfulness, play, and games: A constructionist ludology approach.
- Sullivan, F. R., & Wilson, N. C. (2015). Playful talk: Negotiating opportunities to learn in collaborative groups. *Journal of the Learning Sciences*, 24(1), 5-52.
- Sutton-Smith, B. (2009). *The ambiguity of play*. Harvard University Press.

Teppo, A. R. (2015). Grounded theory methods. *Approaches to qualitative research in mathematics education: Examples of methodology and methods*, 3-21.

Thurmond, V. A. (2001). The point of triangulation. *Journal of nursing scholarship*, 33(3), 253-258.

Turnbull, J., & Jenvey, V. B. (2006). Criteria used by adults and children to categorize subtypes of play. *Early Child Development and Care*, 176(5), 539-551.

Van Vleet, M., & Feeney, B. C. (2015). Play behavior and playfulness in adulthood. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 9(11), 630-643.

Appendix 1

Definition 1	I think the moment when I breach into playfulness, was the moment when I stopped caring so much about like rules and about how everything is going and just wanting to enjoy the moment and make sure everyone's also enjoying it.
Definition 2	Game and like, just the concept of game. Not just like the computer game video, game kind of game, but like hunting. And like any kind of like, board games, the game of life. Playfulness is part of the game, and the game is a part of playfulness. So, you can be playful with the game. And the game includes some playfulness in it as well. So, what else? I think enjoyment. One of them I mean, playfulness is usually attributed to enjoyment in my head. Competition. That is one of it. It's a I think it's a huge part of like, playfulness as well.
Definition 3	I think that a serious important thing is very much related to what we learn to make important. So we see throughout life you see how adults behave and how society moves forward and what you learn that people expect you to do so you have to kind of like study and then go to university get a job this kind of form a family this kind of thing so it's important and like serious they are the steps you are supposed to make in life, while the playful importance is something that like you develop yourself kind of like parallel to this serious importance. So, one is important because you need it for life like you need to pay bills and stuff and the other one is important because you made it important. Otherwise, you would go mad if you only did the serious stuff
Definition 4	They play in a way where nothing really matters. There's their friends and fun. They don't really consider consequences. They might but for the most part, they probably don't.
Definition 5	You have to enjoy something. And you know, some people have hobbies, like, you know, they go, and they watch birds with, you know, or they collect stamps, but they're still doing something that makes them feel good. And I think movies are really easy. less time demanding.

	Exercise activity, less time demanding and like not strenuous activity, where it's like, you know, a book, it will take 12 hours of your fast a couple days, a couple of weeks, you really don't have the time. But you can usually cut out three hours of your time to go watch a movie and just relax. I think I think that's important. I think it's important to realize that your nine to five whatever you're doing isn't like the end all be all. Everyone you know, we get 80 years max. A real good life. So why are we wasting so much of it? not enjoying things, you know, go and play go and don't watch a movie, at least to have some endorphin rush.
Definition 6	If I just take the word playfulness, literally, to my own culture, it's all about being funny, having this funny moment together, and then creating a certain kind of good attachment to this group of people who are around you.
Definition 7	I have a mental model of somebody doing something with their hands. Like to do something like an activity and then having joy from an activity... playfulness is more of a mental state of whatever it is happening that can provoke joy.
Definition 8	It's more about like being responsive to life. It's like, people tend to connect playfulness with irresponsibility, but I think being irresponsible is like putting your sad face and walking around, you know, it's, it's like not fair to your life. That's like playfulness is like, enjoying the moment... It's like enjoying making your life happy.
Definition 9	Playfulness for me, it's being about expressing yourself and feeling happy and stimulated. all of your senses are stimulated
Definition 10	Reframing an activity or thoughts to interact in a way that is engaging within a boundary
Definition 11	Engaging in an activity which is kind of fun? Maybe there are some outcomes, good outcomes or bad outcomes you don't know. Take it as a surprise.
Definition 12	I would say it's like any act, or maybe thought to do something just in the sake of doing it. Not for like a specific reason.
Definition 13	You are doing something interesting and enjoy engaging someone. You are engaging with someone in a positive way.
Definition 14	It's like doing activities that make you feel good. and enjoying.
Definition 15	Physical activity that makes you happy.
Definition 16	It as like a way of being, like a way of approaching things. Like enjoying a process or treating it in a glass half full type of stuff, but not just like tolerance more like positively approaching things, finding enjoyment in things, finding joy in things that are mundane maybe.
Definition 17	I would say playfulness is being carefree.
Definition 18	Behaving out of the frames that you set for yourself to be safe. playfulness is going outside of those frames just to learn more, as the child who just was exploring the world.
Definition 19	Do some activities in your spare time and not related to your job or schoolwork. You feel happy and relaxing when you're doing that kind of activity.

Definition 20	Doing anything fun as long as I'm with some friends
Definition 21	Expressing yourself, and, trying stuff that comes into your mind, like, immediately, and not like trying to think about stuff rationally. But actually, try to think about it in the opposite way.
Definition 22	I would think outdoors when it comes to playfulness, but that's me, I think... people who are very energetic... competitive, but in a healthy way.
Definition 23	My interpretation of playfulness is not just about being happy or joy but about challenging yourself, doing something you might lose, that's an eventual fact and then you don't feel joy. You feel devastated, angry sad. Playfulness is something that intrigues your mind, something that gets you interested, something that excites you, but not in a very stressful way. There is a threshold of stress, and of responsibility that if you pass this threshold, you're not playing you're doing adult life, that applies to work for example.
Definition 24	An activity that is like a challenge or a purpose to achieve
Definition 25	You find excitement, you find joyfulness and you find motivations in anything that you do. And it's not something very hard to do anymore. Because it becomes like a game.
Definition 26	I would say playfulness is a feeling. A feeling of just like adrenaline, a feeling of achieving something. And sometimes a feeling of manipulating the situation you're in to fit into what you desire the most.
Definition 27	You're trying to create a game situation, in which you have a set of rules, you have some outcomes, and then you have rewards for that.
Definition 28	Play with meaningful act... is not only play, not automatic play, playfulness gives you some dopamine. but not only this, you need to have thought, you need to have a decision, something needs to come out, it has to be meaningful. Like for example, you're watching a short video and short articles, and they are trying to attract a lot of your attention, and that's not playfulness.
Definition 29	When you're engaging in an activity that pleases you and at the same time you are doing something interacting with people, but you could also play alone, that occupies your time in a pleasing manner.
Definition 30	Creating fictitious premises in order to study and create social rules
Definition 31	You're looking back into those happy days, where you had fun, where you were, where it was challenging, but you're still learning and you're having fun.
Definition 32	It's a kind of emotions, which you feel when you are in a kind of a game. But not like a video game, but with words, so talking, it's a kind of game with other people's interaction with other people's words. There are different types of games like basketball, or football, I would not use playfulness for those kinds of game. But like, games with other people, with words and interaction with words. For me it's really connected to something like acting.
Definition 33	My definition of playfulness is when we experienced something together as a group, or individual level but it would be not following the routine,

	<p>or had some funny consequences, or when we try to achieve something and you know, in a very bad, not bad, but naughty way. And we achieved that. Whether it be anything, whether it be kissing your girlfriend during university in the open hours, and you kind of succeed, you don't get caught. It was a lot of fun. You experience doing sex for the first time. Because in this culture, it's forbidden. And you go rogue, from your culture and you experience that, and you don't get caught it's fun. So, this is the definition of fun that I have. Not rogue most of the time, but having some experience that you enjoy, and you can remember. So, it's fun. Yeah. And you had a good laugh at the end of it.</p>
Definition 34	<p>It's about an experience in which everyone who is involved is understanding it and responding to it. And it creates a kind of lighter environment for everyone involved.</p>
Definition 35	<p>When you are eager to do any activity...to have the eager willingness, a strong will to do that</p>
Definition 36	<p>Whenever there's a fun activity, that kind of activity then we call that gentle fun. playfulness.</p>
Definition 37	<p>A lived experience that gives you certain positive emotions and also enriching experiences that you can remember and for a longer period of time...Yeah lived experiences that provides you with the opportunities to have positive emotions and engage in an activity that gives you satisfaction internally and that you can remember for the longest period of time</p>
Definition 38	<p>I think I would define it personally as an experience where you can interact with others or with your environment and have joy or a feeling of fun.</p>
Definition 39	<p>I would say being with friends, doing what you like, being comfortable. This is very specific, but losing sense of time is what I would say. If I lost sense of time while doing a certain something, I would say I definitely had fun, like, even If I'm studying, for example. And if I'd completely lost a sense of time. I would be like, okay so this session of studies I had fun today</p>
Definition 40	<p>When I think of playfulness, well, I think of primarily two things. One is thinking outside of the box. So, anything that's related with trying new things, or coming up with new things or, or anything that's out of your norm, anything that's out your, you know, daily habits. So, if you connect that to studies or if you connect that to anything else, then it's something that you're not used to doing, something that is outside of the box, and something that has joyfulness in it. So those two together who I think would be playfulness in my definition.</p>
Definition 41	<p>It's when you are doing a set of actions that are not related to your real world, somehow, or the context of life... like for example, when you're playing soccer, it's not related to to your everyday life</p>
Definition 42	<p>Doing things for enjoyment rather than serious goals, just being in the moment and not being serious? Just doing something because it's fun, or it's funny. Generally, involving others, like I mean, you can, you can be</p>

	playful on your own. But like I think there's a difference there in terms of how I see the words. Like, you can play on your own, like you can play computer games and whatever, but I wouldn't call that playful because to me, playful is more like, like interaction between people rather than just describing your behavior.... Playfulness is generally social, whereas just play can be either alone or social.
Definition 43	I would say something like, makes you somehow enjoy with happiness. Something like you're not taking very serious but you are enjoying that.
Definition 44	That sense of ease enjoyment while participating in some form of activity... that kind of educational, social family piece comes into it as well. But I'm a bit of an extrovert myself, so I think a lot of that social piece comes into it because I get enjoyment and kind of energizing power out of social engagements where I'm sure, introverts might have a vastly different view on it
Definition 45	I guess it's the like the lack of seriousness I guess is the probably the right place to start with like like you're in a situation where it's not only okay to be not serious but it's encouraged
Definition 46	Being de-attached from reality being de-attached from the ugly reality if you can say that, not the ugly, the stressful. Yeah. And this feeling of disconnection This is what makes it playful
Definition 47	Having fun, wanting to do more of the thing you're doing and also evoking some kind of, having some kind of liking to life, like wanting to have people close to you and just go, you know, go do some positive social stuff, like reconnecting with old friends or just seeing your friends again, or just visiting your close ones. And so, on it will make you feel like doing stuff like this.
Definition 48	I guess playfulness is it is contextual. Like you could take any situation and turn it into a playful situation. So, I guess playfulness would be something that elicits excitement one. Number two, I feel like it should have some sense of competition that has to be there. And it has to be very, like on very light. Like, it has to be not a serious situation like very light situations, I would say. I don't know what to say. So yeah, it doesn't, it shouldn't be like heavy topics, heavy, heavy situations, heavy, heavy activities. It should just be things that you don't struggle with. Like, if you ask me climbing, like mounting is not playful, it is something that it takes a lot from you. So someone else might consider that playful but I consider, I think it's a lot of work. If you have to train and then and then climb in slipping the wheel in the wild in the cold that's not playful for me. But so it shouldn't be something for me it shouldn't be something that you're that you're taking a lot from you in terms of physical and mentally even though like the banter it does take a lot mentally but it's it's it doesn't seem like fun when you're doing it for me. When I'm doing it doesn't seem like it's taking a mentor but for someone else it could be very mentally taxing and it is but if it is something playful for me then it doesn't it shouldn't take it shouldn't make me use more energy than i i Would that bang and make me notice that I'm using a lot of energy. So

	yeah, even if I am using a lot of energy I should notice that I am using lots of energy then that becomes playful for me.
Definition 49	It involves creativity. It involves spontaneity. And it involves certain degree of freedom to, to do stuff... for me, it doesn't necessary have the rules or written rules
Definition 50	For me, would have to be something pretty social, like the socialization of the experiences is what makes it playful. It's playful, when there's interaction, it's playful. When you get a reaction. Making something fun out of the ordinary

Figure 1. Continuum of Identifiable Playfulness

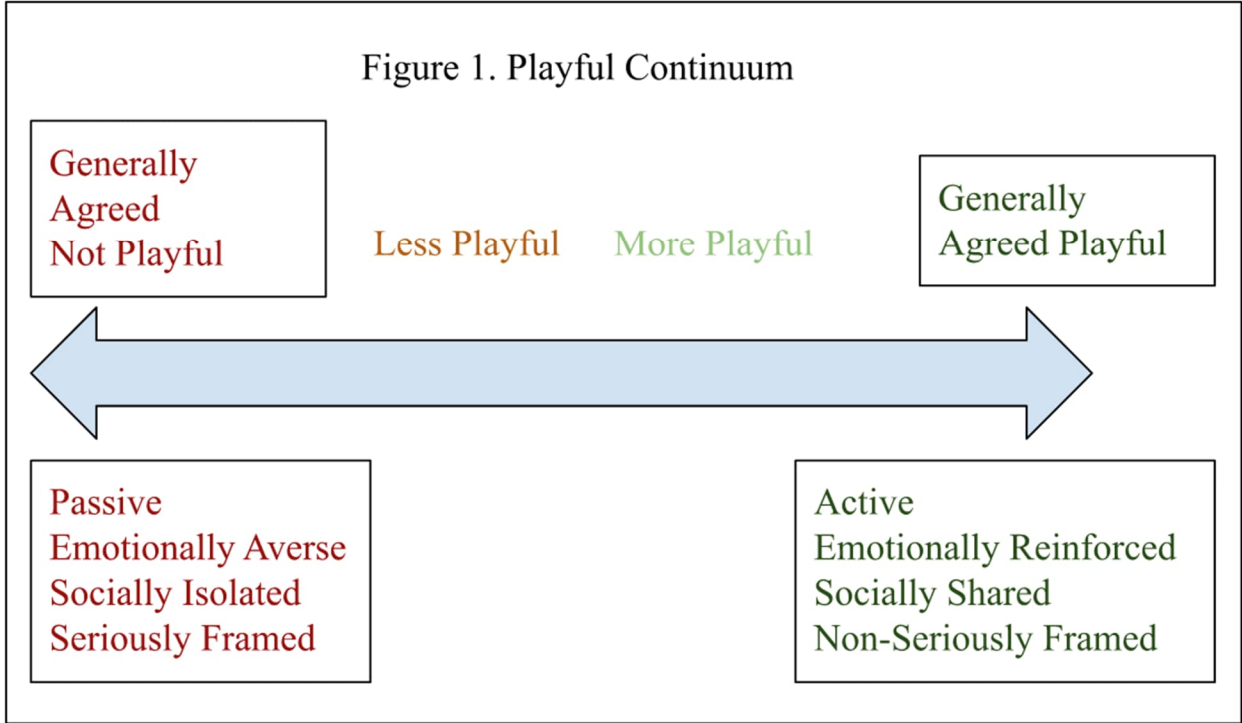


Figure 2. Continuum of Non-Seriousness

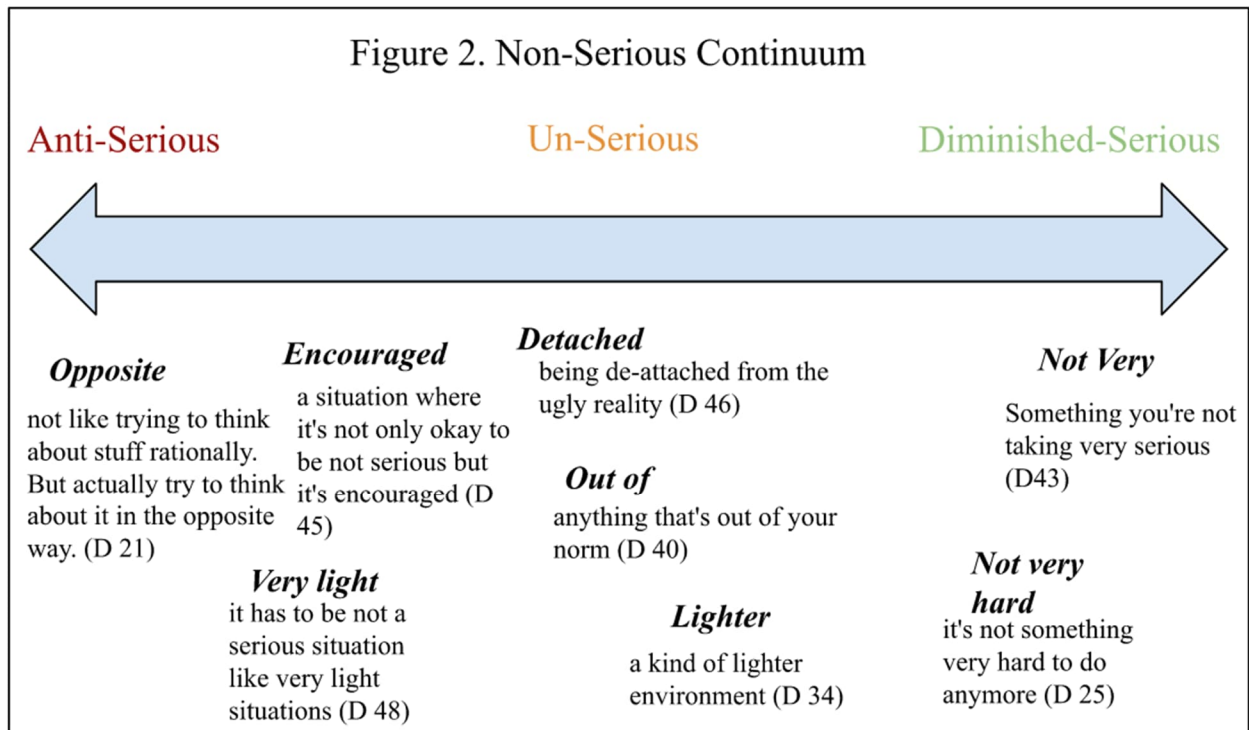


Figure 3. Playfulness vs. Non-Playfulness

