

# ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

## DECRIMINALIZING 'PLAY' & EDUCATING STAKEHOLDERS ON THE VALUE OF PLAY IN HEALTHY ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

Recreation, leisure, and play are necessary for the healthy development of children of all ages. However, youth of color are denied the opportunity to "play" through the criminalization of normal adolescent activities and over-policing of their play spaces. The articles in this annotated bibliography examine the importance of play for youth development and provide frameworks for understanding the impact of racism on access to play for Black youth.

**These articles are cited in reverse chronological order. Please find the most recent articles at the beginning of each section.**

### **I. Play and Race**

Harrison Pinckney, Nathaniel Bryan, and Corliss Outley, *Black PlayCrit: Examining the Disruption of Play for Black Male Youth*, 13(2) *Am. J. of Play* 210–229 (2021).

Harrison Pinckney IV, Corliss Outley, Aishia Brown, and Daniel Theriault, *Playing While Black*, 40(7) *Leisure Sciences* 675-685 (2018).

Rasul A. Mowatt, *The Case of the 12-Year-Old Boy: Or, The Silence of and Relevance to Leisure Research*, 40(2) *Leisure Sciences* 54–70 (2018).

### **II. Play in Healthy Adolescent Development**

Linda L. Caldwell and Peter A. Witt, *Leisure, Recreation, and Play from a Developmental Context*, 130 *New Directions for Youth Development* 13-27 (2011).

Linda L. Caldwell and Edward A. Smith, *Leisure as a Context for Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention*, 39(3) *Australian and New Zealand J. of Criminology*, 398-418 (2006)

## I. PLAY AND RACE

Harrison Pinckney, Nathaniel Bryan, and Corliss Outley, *Black PlayCrit: Examining the Disruption of Play for Black Male Youth*, 13(2) *Am. J. of Play* 210–229 (2021).

- In this article, authors offer Black PlayCrit (guided by critical race theory, Black critical theory, and Black male studies) as a framework through which to discuss Blackness and anti-Black violence in play. They call for the adoption of this framework in future studies and suggest researchers should develop questions that privilege the stories of Black male youth and consider racism a part of their everyday lived experience, including their participation in structured and unstructured play.
- Play has increasingly been recognized as vital for the development of children and youth into adults. Play has been recognized as a basic right and necessity across the world and is included in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31, which states “the State Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to play and to recreational activities appropriate for their age, and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.” This resolution has been adopted by international and national organizations such as the International Play Association, the US Play Coalition, and the Alliance for Childhood. Yet we still lack adequate research focused on inequalities in play and its consequences.
- In the United States, the current concept of play emerged during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries when modernization decreased the need for working-class child labor. However, for many children, especially low income and Black children, neighborhoods lacked areas in which to play. White immigrant children were deemed “delinquent” for their age-appropriate behavior in this newfound free-time and offered “services” by “reformer” organizations like Jane Addams’s Hull House. Black youth were not provided these opportunities and were deemed to be incapable of development beyond adolescence. This led many to perceive play as a privilege that could be enjoyed only by whites. Play, when viewed as a privilege, leads to exclusion and oppression of those deemed the “other.” These inequities contributed to an underlining anti-Blackness that creates the perception that childhood play and play-spaces belong to white children alone.
- U.S. history is filled with examples of how anti-Blackness and dehumanization have led to the reductions of protections for Black children, including slavery and the super-predator myth. Systemic racism continues to impact Black youth’s play experiences and excludes them from the developmental benefits of play while simultaneously denying their innocence and humanity. Protecting Black youth requires a shift in the way we view them and their play in schools and communities.
- There is a well-documented history of the judicial, financial, and housing systems working collectively to restrict where Black families are allowed to live. This created segregated neighborhoods that were resourced unequally and perpetuated the perception that there is no reason for Black people to drive, jog, or walk along streets in white neighborhoods
- The location of play services and facilities, along with the concentrated residential pockets of Black people, contributed to the increased police monitoring of Black people who engaged in play. Black individuals were harassed and monitored by law enforcement if they visited white neighborhoods to access the ostensibly public recreation facilities there. Simultaneously, police presence increased in Black neighborhoods and increased the monitoring of Black youth at play.

- The authors offer examples from history and the recent past, including the 1958 North Carolina “The Kissing Case” and a 2017 incident in Michigan where five Black boys ages 12-14 were stopped by police and held at gunpoint as they walked home from playing basketball at the local Kroc Center. The Michigan boys did not match the description of the people for whom the police were searching and did not formally arrest them, but the impact on the boys was clear. A year after the incident the boys rarely visited the Kroc Center and primarily limited their play to their front yard.
- In their Black PlayCrit framework, the authors present 4 key ideas to understand how anti-Blackness effects play, especially for Black boys:
  - Play-not: the dehumanization of Black boys leads to misperceptions of their play styles as violent, which is used to justify the criminalization of Black boys in their communities and schools.
  - Play past, play present, and future nexus: to better understand the perceptions of Black boys at play today we must look to history, which illuminates the ways Black youth were only given limited opportunities to play during enslavement and used those opportunities to learn to read and write in hopes of securing freedom in the future.
  - Public pedagogy of Black boyhood play: we must challenge anti-Blackness in perceptions of Black boy’s play, not only in theory but also in practice through action-oriented steps to dismantle the school playground-to-prison pipeline.
  - Play-spatial exclusion: we must also bring attention to the absence of resources in urban communities (including play spaces), exclusion through redlining, and potential dangers of Black youth participating in play activities in public spaces, while simultaneously acknowledging that Black communities have created safe haven play spaces for Black children.
- In their conclusion, the authors call for future studies to use this framework to examine the disruption of play for Black male youth.

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**Harrison Pinckney IV, Corliss Outley, Aishia Brown, and Daniel Theriault, *Playing While Black*, 40(7) *Leisure Sciences* 675-685 (2018).**

- In the United States, Black youth face unique challenges that shape "where" they recreate, "who" they participate with, and "how" they engage in recreation. Recent events around the country have highlighted the potential of racial profiling in leisure settings. As a result, Black youth and parents remain aware of the potential dangers of participating in recreation activities in public spaces.
- Using multiple contemporary examples to demonstrate the impact of race on the recreation of Black youth, the authors present three theoretical frameworks that help advance the discussion on race, recreation, and youth development.
- Adolescence is often marked as a period of time in which individuals experience increased autonomy and seek to establish their own identities. In a supportive environment, this exploration can lead to youth developing social, emotional, and behavioral competence, establishing self-efficacy and self-determination, and learning prosocial norms. Recreation can be a context for youth development and person-environment interactions, which facilitate growth. Young people might acquire social

skills or gain a clearer understanding of their identity through interaction with adult mentors through organized recreation.

- The authors identify two research gaps that, if addressed by the framework they suggest, could increase the understanding of the importance of recreation in Black youth development:
  - 1. There is little research on the cultural assets Black youth bring to recreation programs and characteristics of recreation programs, which support their unique needs, and
  - 2. Racism is not included in theoretical frameworks analyzing development and risk for Black youth, leaving an unjust social structure unexamined and reinforcing negative outcomes.
- The authors present 3 case studies:
  - At a McKinney, Texas suburban pool party, a white officer slammed a Black 15 year old girl wearing a bikini into the ground while another officer waved his gun at a group of Black youth. Less than an hour earlier, the Black youth were sharing a recreation experience with their white peers at the pool. The arrival of the police taught these teens they were in fact not equal and there was a level of guilt associated with race. This is a harsh reality that many, if not all, Black youth must face early in their development. As a result, Black youth are taught they cannot simply enjoy their recreation but must remain aware of their surroundings as well as who they interact with in those settings.
  - In Grand Rapids, Michigan, 5 Black boys were held at gunpoint by police as they walked home from the Kroc Center (described in the annotation above). While adolescence is a time for exploration for many youth, this example shows how that process can be cut short for Black youth. The autonomy afforded other teenagers to walk to the local basketball court, without adult supervision, is lost for youth like the ones in this scenario.
  - Tamir Rice, who was killed by police while playing with a toy gun in a park— racial ideologies played a major role in Tamir's death and the response to it.
- The authors use these examples to explain their call for:
  - an examination of how research and education in leisure studies can truly recognize the harsh realities of systemic racism
  - a closer look at the role of parents in racial identity development and how this can influence Black youth's recreation choices
  - more research on the impact these nationally known stories have on Black youth's recreation choices and their emotional wellbeing

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**Rasul A. Mowatt, *The Case of the 12-Year-Old Boy: Or, The Silence of and Relevance to Leisure Research*, 40(2) *Leisure Sciences* 54–70 (2018).**

- The author describes this article as a manifesto, calling for leisure-related research on race, social justice, quality of life, and leisure studies that confronts racism as structural and systematic.
- Tamir Rice's death and the response that followed demonstrates the silence on the structural nature of racism and an opportunity to assert a social relevance for leisure research.

- The author first looks to “racial threat theory,” which holds that in white-dominated societies, institutions (like law enforcement) are used to control communities of color when they are perceived to threaten existing power and privileges. Racism (perpetuated through the media and other cultural sources), promotes stereotypes that result in the association of Black people in public spaces, even a child in a park like Tamir Rice, as criminal. This engenders a response focused on removing the Black person from the space either through arrest, detention, or summary execution.
  - The author then questions the relative silence from the leisure studies academy, his own field, and calls upon color-blind racial ideology (which consists of the denial of racial differences in society while emphasizing sameness and the denial of the impact of racism while highlighting the significance of various examples of equal opportunity). Within a color-blind racial ideology, the death of Tamir Rice is understood by breaking down each action that should or should not have been done by the victim (Tamir). This color-blind racial ideology is both a tool and by-product of racism.
  - Leisure research and recreation programming must acknowledge the ways structural racism destroys the lives of youth of color, in particular Black youth, far greater than the idea that children “destroy” themselves, which runs counter to the ways we have articulated “at-risk” youth programming over the decades.
  - Black youth’s safety is threatened in leisure spaces and recreation not only by law enforcement but also by citizens who act as vigilantes and informants. The author presents several examples from the news that highlight this, including the hanging of 17-year old Lennon Lacey on a swing set, the McKinney, Texas pool party (described in the above annotation), and a 2009 incident where youth of color were denied access to a private pool despite the fact that their summer camp had paid for their access.
  - The author suggests several potential areas for ongoing research:
    - First, a renewed focus on “soft enforcement” (education about caring for the space, prevention, and community relations) as a preferred way (instead of arrest or citations) to ensure parks as a place of public enjoyment. Soft enforcement was used historically in the national park system, but more research needs to be done on the transition from the current regime of “hard enforcement” back to soft enforcement.
    - Experts should examine where “pockets of peace” (vs. “pockets of crime”, i.e. spaces where there is relatively no crime) already exist in neighborhoods and invest in those. This challenges researchers and practitioners to look for solutions outside of formal forms of youth supervision and programming to address delinquent behavior.
    - Leisure scholars should look to the “public trust doctrine,” which stresses that public lands ought to remain a place where all have a right to access.
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## II. PLAY IN HEALTHY ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

\*The following research is also summarized and applied in chapter two of Kristin Henning's book *The Rage of Innocence: How America Criminalizes Black Youth*.

**Linda L. Caldwell and Peter A. Witt, *Leisure, Recreation, and Play from a Developmental Context*, 130 *New Directions for Youth Development* 13-27 (2011).**

- This article examines how play, recreation, and leisure contribute to adolescent development and the conditions that facilitate healthy development.
- A large portion of a nonworking adolescent's day is considered "free time," by some estimates up to 40 percent of their day. The way they fill this time has important developmental and health implications.
- Leisure includes both organized programs (scouting, sports, etc.) and non-structured time that is self-managed or with family. Adolescents may fill their time with activities that adults view as negative (e.g. vandalism or experimenting with alcohol or drug), but some research suggests these activities can also contribute to healthy development if they are experimental rather than addictive.
- The authors discuss an example of a leisure program that benefited youth development, called Plugged In. Through the program, teens worked together to select a charity and raise funds through music concerts and the sale of CDs. This anecdotal story supports the substantial empirical evidence of the powerful development outcomes that are associated with positive leisure-time activities. The benefits include increased self-esteem, confidence, compassion, and hope. Leisure activities create a safe place for youth to take risks, learn to work in a group, share their opinions and ideas, try new things, and build their own voice.
- Adults can support the development of youth through leisure by creating these kind of opportunities, respecting adolescents' capabilities and providing a supportive push to learn skills. The most successful adult-youth partnerships occur when adults adopt a scaffolding model, providing the appropriate amount of support and the resources that adolescents need at each stage of their development to be successful.
- Research shows that adolescents who participate in structured extracurricular activities are less likely to engage in antisocial behavior and more like to have higher academic achievement and positive psychosocial functioning. Unstructured activities can have value for expressing identity or contribute to informal learning.
- One of the defining elements of leisure is that it is characterized by free choice and self-determination. As young people mature, developing behavioral and emotional autonomy is an important task. This is linked to developing initiative, intrinsic motivation, and goal setting skills, which are important throughout life. Conversely, participation driven solely by external factors is unlikely to help adolescents reap important developmental and health benefits as much as internally motivated action, which are likely to be sustained over time.
- Leisure allows youth to deal with stress in a healthy way and can also contribute to educational success through both informal learning that later benefits them in the classroom and by giving young people a sense of confidence in their own abilities.
- Leisure also helps youth to develop their identities, both independently and as part of a larger community. This can lead to continued civic engagement throughout life.

- Social activities give youth a safe place to try out different roles, interact informally with members of the opposite sex, and learn about dealing with romantic relationships. Socialization in leisure can be beneficial in both structured and unstructured environments and online as well as face-to-face.
- The science of adolescent brain development also explains why leisure is so important to overall teen development. During this time of increased sensation seeking, leisure allows adolescents to experience novelty and exciting/stimulating situations. Youth can practice their emotional regulation and executive functioning skills (like decision making and problem solving) through leisure activities.

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**Linda L. Caldwell and Edward A. Smith, *Leisure as a Context for Youth Development and Delinquency Prevention*, 39(3) Australian and New Zealand J. of Criminology, 398-418 (2006).**

- This article highlights the importance of leisure as a context for human development as well as for prevention of risky behavior, including crime and delinquency.
- The authors begin by reviewing existing literature, which suggests that from a criminology perspective, research that relates to leisure and crime among adolescents can be summarized by four related perspectives:
  - Filled time perspective — Time filled with prosocial activities cannot be filled with deviant activities.
  - Association with deviant peers perspective — Certain activities are more likely to instigate deviant behavior or association with a deviant subculture.
  - Activity structure perspective — Time spent in informal and/or unsupervised activities is likely to promote deviance, while time spent in supervised activities protects against it.
  - Person–environment interaction perspective — Self-control and attachment to conventional norms and activities protect against deviant behavior.
- From a prevention perspective, researchers have focused on protective factors related to delinquency. These ‘mitigators of deviance’ include positive peer relations, good school achievement, positive response to authority, and effective use of leisure time and participation in extracurricular activities. Past research concluded that participation in extracurricular activities leads to reduced levels of delinquency because participation leads to the acquisition of human capital (individual’s level of skills, knowledge, and educational attainment), social capital (one’s network of relationships), and cultural capital (acquisition and possession of more intangible things such as art, culture, attitudes, values).
- In this article, the authors integrate these theories from criminology into their work in leisure studies. They begin by looking at activity and the structured (formal/organized) and unstructured (informal/unorganized).
  - Structured activities have been linked to academic achievement, lower levels of anti-social behavior, competence, and socialization.
    - The best structured activities (a) are goal-oriented and/or creative and expressive in nature, (b) require discipline and focused attention; (c) offer challenges to overcome; (d) build skills and increase competence; and (e) require persistence, commitment, and continuity to participation over time.

They help with the transition to adulthood by teaching youth to be self-regulated and develop internal capacities that can be transferred to other contexts in the future.

- The positive value of unstructured activities has been largely overlooked. They offer freedom to experiment with roles, behaviors, and ideas that aid in shaping identity and develop personal control and autonomy. They help youth learn to negotiate with peers and develop cooperative behaviors.
- Too much or too little adult supervision in leisure can lead to disinterest, lack of intrinsic motivation, or otherwise impede the developmental value of the activity. Authors note that theoretically youth who lack motivation (whether intrinsic or extrinsic) may be more likely to engage in risky or negative behaviors and less attached to prosocial norms and more likely to be influenced by peers.
- Boredom and stress may also be linked to problem behaviors (like alcohol and drug use, higher rates of dropping out of school, and vandalism). Positive leisure experiences can release stress and help youth overcome boredom.
  - The authors suggest that structured activities are more likely to lead to these positive experiences. Conversely, too much parental control and lack of autonomy support are linked with boredom and negative outcomes.
  - Parents may need to provide additional support to encourage autonomy and engagement in positive activities for youth who are either not motivated or only extrinsically motivated.
- The authors then analyzed a study done on a program, called TimeWise, designed to educate youth about positive leisure activities.
  - They implemented the TimeWise program in nine middle schools in rural Appalachia (475 students participated).
  - They found that youth who participated in the curriculum were significantly less likely to engage in property damage compared to youth who did not participate.
  - They concluded that leisure and leisure education may be effective in preventing delinquent acts.
  - They also theorized that youth may actually be engaging in property damage as a source of leisure and indicated that a broader discussion about what is deviance/crime vs. what is leisure was necessary.
- The authors recommend that further research be done on the intersection between various types of leisure activities and delinquency prevention.