

**PARENT PERSPECTIVES OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OUTDOOR PLAY SPACES
FOR THEIR YOUNG CHILD**

by

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Abstract

Participation in outdoor play is important for healthy development during the early years, as evidenced by numerous research studies linking participation in outdoor play with positive benefits for children. Previous research has found links between parent perceptions of their neighbourhood and children's participation in outdoor play, suggesting the importance of considering how parents view outdoor play spaces. The purpose of this study was to explore and better understand the perspectives of parents regarding the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood for their young child. An urban neighbourhood within the City of Vancouver was selected as the location for this study, and 7 parents (6 female, 1 male) of children ages 2 to 5 years old living within the selected neighbourhood participated in the study. The qualitative research methodology, photovoice was used to empower participants to share their knowledge and experiences of their community through photographing their community and participating in focus group discussions. Data was collected in the form of participant photographs and transcriptions of focus groups and interviews. Using thematic analysis, the themes that represent the perspectives of this group of parents were identified. The findings revealed two categories of outdoor play spaces *Designed Outdoor Play Spaces* and *Outdoor Play Spaces of Opportunity*. Parents perceived that anywhere outdoors had the potential to be an outdoor play space if it afforded opportunities for play. Outdoor play spaces were used in a variety of ways by parents and their children for *Play, Social Connections, and Outdoor Space*. Parents also described *Modifying Spaces* with the goal of *Enhancing Spaces* or *Reducing Concerns*. Parents discussed issues of quality related to the outdoor play spaces in their neighborhood, identifying *Supporting Factors, Limiting Factors, and Supporting and Limiting Factors* that influenced their perceptions of quality and their desire to use a space. The findings of this study suggest the value of

considering parent perspectives and indicate important considerations for the design of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces that meet the needs of families and support children's outdoor play.

Preface

The content of this thesis document is based on original unpublished work conducted by the graduate student, Rachel Phillips, under the supervision of Dr. Laurie Ford. The research conducted for this study was approved by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board (BREB) at the University of British Columbia under the certificate number H14-01179.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Outdoor play is critical for young children's learning and development. The outdoor environment provides a conducive setting for rich play experiences in early childhood, which provide children with the opportunity to develop new skills, test their current abilities, and form connections with nature (Fjørtoft, 2004; Little & Wyver, 2008; Tovey, 2007; Wilson, 1996). The numerous benefits associated with outdoor play are further explored in the literature review in chapter two of this proposal.

The discussion of children's outdoor play in early childhood is composed of two main contrasting discourses. The first of these discourses describes outdoor play as an important activity for children with numerous positive outcomes. Outdoor play is viewed as an important learning experience that contributes to children's physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Fjørtoft, 2004; Wells & Evans, 2003). In addition, outdoor play is described as an experience that children enjoy (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Stephenson, 2002). Many parents demonstrate an awareness of the value of outdoor play for young children's development. A survey about children's outdoor play, administered to mothers, found that the majority of these mothers recognized the positive impact of outdoor play on their child's development (Clements, 2004). This is a sentiment often heard in conversations with parents of young children, who typically describe outdoor play as an important childhood activity they intend to encourage for their child. Despite recognition of the value of outdoor play for child development, recent research has found that children's participation in outdoor play is currently limited (McFarland, Zajicek, & Waliczek, 2014; Tandon, Zhou, & Christakis, 2012).

Children's limited engagement in outdoor play corresponds with an alternative discourse, which focuses on fears surrounding children's outdoor play. In this discourse, outdoor play is viewed as a risky activity that could result in injury or harm. Anxieties about playground injuries, "stranger danger", and unsafe outdoor play spaces are frequently cited as perceived barriers that limit children's participation in outdoor play (Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008; Little, Wyver, & Gibson, 2011; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997). Overprotection and excessive risk avoidance in response to fears about outdoor play have been described as consequences of a culture of fear that exists in Western society (Herrington & Nicholls, 2007; Malone, 2007). Researchers have expressed concerns that children's decreasing participation in outdoor play is the result of this culture of fear in which outdoor play is viewed as unsafe (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012).

The existence of these two discourses raises questions about how parents view outdoor play spaces. Existing research on how parents perceive outdoor play spaces focuses almost exclusively on safety concerns. However, considering that many parents also recognize the value of outdoor play for their child's development, it would be surprising if parents only thought about outdoor play spaces in terms of safety concerns. Parents' views of outdoor play spaces are important, because they may have implications for children's participation in outdoor play. Previous research has found that parents' perceptions of their neighbourhoods and attitudes toward outdoor play are related to their child's engagement in outdoor play (Bringolf-Isler et al., 2010; McFarland, Zajicek, & Waliczek, 2014). Further research is needed that explores the multiple ways parents experience the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood, with consideration of both the strengths and limitations of these spaces.

Definitions of Key Terminology

Outdoor play space. For the purposes of this study, an outdoor play space refers to any public area outdoors where children engage in play. Outdoor play spaces typically refer to spaces intended for recreational use by children and families like neighbourhood playgrounds and parks; however, for this study, the definition of an outdoor play space is left open to include any public outdoor area that parents perceive as an outdoor play space for their child, regardless of whether this space was intended for play.

Parent. The term parent is used in this study to describe a child's primary caregiver, with whom the child resides, including both mothers and fathers, or other person identified as a primary caretaker.

Neighbourhood. In this study, the term neighbourhood refers to a geographical area defined according to the boundaries identified by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) for use with the Early Development Instrument. These neighbourhood boundaries were established by HELP through collaboration with neighbourhood residents. Therefore, it has been argued that these boundaries better represent local residents' lived experiences of their neighbourhoods than the neighbourhood boundaries defined by the Canadian census (Kershaw et al., 2009).

Photovoice. Photovoice refers to a specific photography-based research methodology used in qualitative research to explore the lived experiences of participants within a particular community. It is a participatory research methodology that enables participants to, "identify, represent and enhance their community" by sharing their knowledge and expertise about their community (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 369). In a photovoice study, participants take photographs

of their community in response to a question or topic of interest. These photographs are used to stimulate dialogue among participants during focus group sessions (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore how parents view the outdoor play spaces for children in their neighbourhood and how parents perceive these outdoor play spaces as supporting or limiting their child's outdoor play. By listening to parents' experiences of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood, insight was gained into how these spaces impact children's opportunities for outdoor play and how these spaces could better support children's outdoor play.

The main research question and sub-questions addressed in this study were: What are parent perspectives of the outdoor play spaces for children in their neighbourhood? More specifically, (a) What do parents perceive as an outdoor play space? (b) How do parents describe the use of outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood by themselves and their children? (c) What do parents view as the strengths and limitations of the available outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood? (d) What do parents wish for in an ideal outdoor play space?

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Overview

This chapter outlines the current literature that provides a basis for the proposed study. First, research that links outdoor play experiences with a variety of positive developmental outcomes for children is discussed. This is followed by a description of the current state of children's participation in outdoor play. Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory is presented as a framework for considering how child development occurs through interactions with the environment, specifically how both neighbourhood and family processes impact children's participation in outdoor play. Processes at the neighbourhood and family level that affect children's access to outdoor play and the interactions between these processes are highlighted. Finally, the influence of parent perspectives of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces on children's participation in outdoor play is discussed.

Outdoor Play

Children's participation in outdoor play is important for healthy development in early childhood, as evidenced by research identifying numerous benefits for child development that are associated with participation in outdoor play. The benefits of outdoor play, which are described in detail in the following sections, can be attributed to features of the outdoor environment and the ways that children engage with the outdoor environment in play. The outdoor environment is a conducive setting for rich play experiences that affords children different play opportunities not typically afforded by indoor environments. In addition, the presence of natural elements in the outdoor environment is associated with positive outcomes for child development.

Affordances. According to Gibson's (1979) theory of affordances, the environment affords animals different actions relative to the animal's own capabilities. Affordances refer to what an environment offers or provides an individual; however, affordances are not simply physical properties of the environment, but rather a relationship between an individual and the features of their environment. They are meaningful only in relation to an individual's abilities. For example, a tree provides a child the opportunity for climbing, but only if the height of the tree and the distance between the branches fits the child's size and abilities. The idea of affordances can be used to consider how the outdoor environment creates affordances for children to engage in particular play actions in relation to the child's own abilities. Previous research has examined how outdoor environments afford different types of play. For example, Little and Sweller (2015) used an online survey to examine links between affordances in the outdoor environment and children's physical activity and risk-taking in early childhood centres in Australia. Through a literature review, they identified particular elements of the outdoor environment that provide affordances for physical activity and risk-taking including natural elements like trees, large open spaces, and equipment such as climbing structures. Their findings revealed that the majority of the centres surveyed had outdoor environments that afforded these types of play. An ethnographic study of a garden-based summer camp program in Finland explored the affordances of the garden setting for children's learning and play. The garden environment provided affordances for social interactions and the development of social skills, as well as affordances for diversified types of play, like make-believe play and mud play (Laaksoharju, Rappe, & Kaivola, 2012).

Natural elements. An important feature of the outdoor environment that cannot be overlooked in a discussion of the benefits of outdoor play for child development is the presence

of natural elements. Many of the positive developmental outcomes associated with outdoor play are specifically linked to play that occurs in natural settings. In developing the Seven Cs, Herrington and Lesmeister (2006) identified connections between the natural elements of playground spaces and positive development in early childhood. The Seven Cs are guidelines for the design of child care centre outdoor play spaces that support early childhood development, which are comprised of seven key criteria: character, context, connectivity, change, chance, clarity, and challenge. Through observations of children's play on different types of playgrounds at child care centres in Vancouver, Canada, Herrington and Lesmeister found that natural outdoor play spaces promoted child development more effectively than less natural play spaces. For example, natural materials in the outdoor environment, like sand and dirt, encourage children's creative play, as these materials can be manipulated by children to form their own creations. Another study by Drown and Christensen (2014), compared preschool children's dramatic play across two different outdoor play spaces, a manufactured playground and a natural playground. Through a time-sampling observation procedure, children were found to engage in dramatic play more frequently on the natural playground compared to the manufactured playground.

Benefits of Outdoor Play

According to the current research literature on children's outdoor play, outdoor environments, particularly natural outdoor environments, afford numerous opportunities for valuable play experiences in early childhood. Through participation in outdoor play, children develop motor skills, engage in imaginative and creative play, take positive risks, experience decreased stress and increased attention, and develop personal connections with nature (Chawla, 2007; Dowell, Gray, & Malone, 2011; Fjørtoft, 2004; Stephenson, 2003; Wells & Evans, 2003).

Research supporting the value of outdoor play for child development is described in the following sections.

Physical development. Time spent playing outdoors has been shown to correlate with children's physical activity. Burdette, Whitaker, and Daniels (2004) investigated the use of a parental report measure of outdoor playtime as a potential measure of physical activity in preschool aged children and found that reported outdoor playtime significantly correlated with a direct measure of physical activity. In their review of correlates of children's physical activity, Sallis, Prochaska, and Taylor (2000) found that time spent outdoors was consistently positively related to physical activity. The correlation between physical activity and time spent outdoors suggests that children's participation in physical activity is related to outdoor play. Observations of children's outdoor play at childcare centres provides further evidence that outdoor play supports physical development. During their observations of children's outdoor play at four early childhood education centres, Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot (2011) frequently observed children running and engaging in other gross motor activities, and in a study comparing observations of children's indoor and outdoor play at a New Zealand childcare centre, Stephenson (2002) noted that more active physical play occurred outdoors.

Research has also demonstrated that children develop motor skills outdoors by engaging in different types of movement on varying outdoor terrain. Fjørtoft (2004) examined the affordances of natural outdoor environments for young children's motor development through a quasi-experimental study that compared the fitness and motor abilities of Kindergarten children who played in a forest area with Kindergarten children who played on a traditional playground. Children who played in the forest area scored higher on the EUROFIT: European Test of

Physical Fitness, the Motor Fitness Test, particularly on items requiring balance and coordination.

Imaginative and creative play. Children’s imaginative and creative play is also supported by outdoor environments. In their observations of outdoor play at four Canadian early childhood education centres, Blanchet-Cohen and Elliot (2011) noted the variety of rich learning experiences that occurred during outdoor play. In particular, they found that the outdoor setting provided many opportunities for children to engage in imaginary play. A study by Dowell, Gray, and Malone (2011) compared children’s play behaviours at two early childhood centers, one centre with an artificial outdoor play area constructed indoors and another centre with a natural outdoor play area. The children in the natural outdoor play area were observed engaging in more imaginative play compared to the children in the indoor play area; furthermore, the children in the natural play setting sustained their play longer than those in the indoor play setting. This is consistent with the findings of Herrington and Studman (1998), which indicate that fantasy play lasts longer in more natural outdoor settings. After introducing natural materials into an early childhood centre playground, Herrington and Studman observed children at the centre participating in more sustained fantasy play.

Risky play. The outdoors is a preferred setting for children’s risky play, defined as, “thrilling and exciting forms of play that involve a risk of physical injury” (Sandseter, 2009, p. 93). From observations of Norwegian preschool children’s play, Sandseter (2007) noted the affordances for risky play provided by the outdoor environment and developed six categories of risky play that children engage in outdoors: play with great heights, play with high speed, play with dangerous tools, play near dangerous elements, rough-and tumble play, and play where children can “disappear” or get lost. Risky play is considered an important form of play for

children's development. In their review of the literature on risk-taking in play, Little and Wyver (2008) identify beneficial outcomes associated with children's risky play. Through risky play, children learn to manage risk and build competence by testing their abilities. From observations of children's outdoor play at early childhood centres, Stephenson (2003) identified how risky play helps children build competence by providing children with challenges they must learn to overcome. Moreover, Stephenson's (2003) observations demonstrate that children enjoy and seek out challenging play experiences. Based on her previous research and other research on the topic, Sandseter (2011) theorizes that risky play serves the purpose of reducing children's anxiety by exposing children to typical fear-inducing experiences when they are developmentally mature enough to cope with these experiences.

Psychological well-being. Spending time in natural outdoor settings has been linked to improved psychological well-being through the reduction of stress and restoration of attention. Kaplan (1995) describes how natural environments contribute to the restoration of attention and reduction of stress under the framework of Attention Restoration Theory. According to Attention Restoration Theory, directed attention fatigue can be mitigated by certain types of restorative experiences. Spending time in natural environments meets the requirements for a restorative experience, thereby contributing to increased attention and reduced stress. Using a hierarchical regression analysis, Wells and Evans (2003) found that the presence of nature in rural children's residential environment buffers the impact of stressful life events on their psychological distress. Stressful life events had less impact on children's psychological distress when children were exposed to high levels of nature in their residential environment, even after controlling for the effects of socioeconomic status. The calming and focusing effect of play in natural outdoor settings was further documented by an action research study that examined the

impact of the redevelopment of a childcare centre playground on children's play. In this study, the researchers, teachers, and children at a childcare centre in Australia worked together to redevelop their playground, incorporating more natural features. Following the redevelopment, the teachers noted that children's play was calmer and more focused, and children appeared less agitated (Nedovic & Morrissey, 2013).

Other studies have linked outdoor play in natural settings to the reduction of symptoms of Attention Deficit Disorder in children. Wells (2000) investigated the impact of nature in the residential environment on the cognitive functioning of children from low-income families. This study employed a longitudinal design in which families moved from a low nature residential environment to a high nature residential environment, and children's cognitive functioning was measured pre-move and post-move using the Attention Deficit Disorders Evaluation Scale. Findings from this study indicate that children's cognitive functioning improved after moving to an environment with higher levels of nearby nature. A study of children from ages five to eighteen diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) found that regular play in green outdoor spaces was associated with less severe ADD and ADHD symptoms. Children who regularly played in green spaces were rated by their parents as demonstrating less severe symptoms than children who regularly played in built spaces (Taylor & Kuo, 2011).

Connections to nature. Direct experiences with nature through play in natural outdoor settings are important for developing children's ecological awareness and concern for the environment. By engaging directly with nature, children develop their ecological identity, which refers to their understandings of self in relation to nature (Wilson, 1996). Chawla (2007) conducted interviews with environmentalists and found that many of these environmentalists

attributed their commitment to protecting the environment to positive childhood experiences in nature, as well as significant adults who role modeled care and appreciation for the environment. Another study by Ewert, Place, and Sibthorp (2005) surveyed university students about their environmental beliefs and their memories of childhood experiences involving nature. The results of this study demonstrate an association between early-life experiences with nature and current environmental beliefs. Specifically, early-life outdoor appreciative experiences were positively related to eco-centric beliefs, indicating that positive experiences enjoying nature during childhood contribute to a person's appreciation of nature and understanding of its intrinsic value. Wells and Lekies (2006) explored this topic from a life course perspective, using structural equation modeling on survey data collected from 2004 adults in the United States to examine the connections between participants' childhood experiences with nature and their adult environmental attitudes and behaviours. Childhood participation with wild nature and childhood participation with domesticated nature were both shown to have significant direct impacts on environmental attitudes and environmental behaviours in adulthood. The above findings suggest the importance of childhood experiences with nature for the development of lifelong appreciation and care for the natural environment.

Declining Outdoor Play

Despite the links between outdoor play and positive child development, recent research indicates that children's opportunities for outdoor play are becoming increasingly limited. In his widely cited book, *The Last Child in the Woods*, Louv (2008) raises concerns that children no longer spend adequate time playing outdoors, and consequently, are becoming disconnected from nature. Louv's concerns are supported by a number of studies that attempt to capture an understanding of how much time young children today spend playing outside. A study by

Tandon, Zhou, and Christakis (2012) that used parental reports of their preschool child's outdoor play time, found that half of the children did not have one parent-supervised outdoor play time per day. In a national survey of 830 mothers in the United States that asked about the outdoor play experiences of themselves and their children, 85% of the mothers reported that they believe children today play outdoors less frequently than children a few years ago. Furthermore, 70% of the mothers surveyed reported playing outdoors every day as children compared to 31% of their children (Clements, 2004). A study by Karsten (2005) compared children's use of outdoor space in Amsterdam during the 1950s and 1960s with children's use of outdoor space today. A combination of oral histories, interviews with parents and children, statistical and archival research, and observations of city streets were used to investigate how children's use of outdoor space has changed. The results of this study found that children today spend less time playing outdoors and more time playing indoors compared to children growing up in the 1950s and 1960s. The authors also noted that the presence of children playing in the streets has been replaced by the presence of cars.

The 2014 Active Healthy Kids Canada Report Card, which presents a summary of research on the current status of Canadian children's active play, also raises concerns that children's participation in active outdoor play is limited. The findings presented in this report indicate that although resources and facilities for children's active outdoor play are readily available in Canada, these resources are underused. The most recent report card, the 2015 ParticipACTION Report Card on Physical Activity for Children and Youth, focuses on the topic of outdoor play. Outdoor play is described as a valuable form of physical activity for children, but the report reiterates concerns about Canadian children's lack of active outdoor play.

Children's limited outdoor play indicates a need to examine the factors that impact children's participation in outdoor play.

Ecological Theory

Children's participation in outdoor play can be considered within the framework of Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory. According to ecological theory, child development occurs through interactions with multiple systems in a child's environment and the interactions between these systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986). Ecological theory emphasizes the importance of considering children's development in context, as children are affected both directly and indirectly by the systems in their environment. This theoretical framework locates the developing child as the central focus and describes how the environmental systems surrounding the child influence development. The microsystem refers to environments the child interacts with directly, including the child's family and the outdoor play spaces where they play. The mesosystem encompasses the interactions between microsystems. At the mesosystem level, parents' decisions about taking their child outdoors are influenced by the available outdoor play spaces for children in their neighbourhood and their perceptions of these spaces. The exosystem refers to other environments that the child does not interact with directly; however, these environments affect the child indirectly by operating through the child's immediate environments. For example, the neighbourhood in which a child lives can have an indirect effect on the child through their family (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The macrosystem describes the broader cultural context in which children develop and includes cultural attitudes and beliefs. Western cultural attitudes that emphasize risk avoidance impact children's outdoor play opportunities and parents' beliefs about outdoor play. The chronosystem was added to this framework to explain how changes in environments over time influence development.

Considering the interconnections between families and the neighbourhood in which they live is an important component of understanding how the environment influences child development. Ecological theory provides a framework for understanding how different processes in the child's environment contribute to their development. In the context of outdoor play, children's outdoor play is influenced by both neighbourhood and family processes and the interactions between families and their neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood Processes

The neighbourhoods in which children live have a significant impact on child development. Numerous studies of neighbourhood effects have demonstrated the connections between neighbourhood characteristics, such as socioeconomic status and social climate, and child outcomes (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Sealand, 1993; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003; Lima, Caughy, Nettles, & O'Campo, 2010). Although a comprehensive review of the research linking neighbourhood effects with child development outcomes is beyond the scope of this literature review, several key studies from the research literature on neighbourhood effects are presented here to provide evidence of the links between neighbourhood characteristics and child development. A study by Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, and Sealand (1993), found an association between the presence of affluent neighbours and positive child outcomes, including higher childhood IQ scores. This finding is reinforced by a review of neighbourhood research findings by Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000), which identifies neighbourhood socioeconomic status (SES) as a factor that influences child development. High neighbourhood SES is associated with high achievement outcomes for children and adolescents, while low SES is associated with children's externalizing behaviours. In a randomized controlled trial study of 550 families, the influence of neighbourhood poverty

on child mental health outcomes was investigated through the Moving to Opportunity housing relocation program. Families living in social housing in high-poverty neighbourhoods were given vouchers to relocate to low-poverty or high-poverty neighbourhoods, or remained in their current neighbourhood. The results of this study found that children whose families moved to low-poverty neighbourhoods reported less anxiety and depression than children who remained in high-poverty neighbourhoods (Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2003). Another study that supports the effect of neighbourhoods on child development is a study by Lima, Caughy, Nettles, and O'Campo (2010) that investigated the cumulative effects of family and neighbourhood risks on the well-being and behaviour of first grade children. In this study, data was collected for 405 children living in Baltimore City using interviews with the child's primary caregiver and an assessment of the child in first grade. The results of multivariate analyses on this data found that neighbourhood risk, specifically perceived negative social climate in the neighbourhood, multiplied the effect of family risk on children's externalizing problem behaviours. Additional research literature that describes neighbourhood effects on child development include: Caughy and O'Campo (2006), Caughy, O'Campo, and Brodsky (1999), Goldfeld et al. (2014), and Sampson, Morenoff, and Gannon-Rowley (2002).

Children's participation in outdoor play is affected by the physical and social characteristics of their neighbourhood. Interviews with 142 parents living in different neighbourhoods across England revealed several factors that affect children's participation in outdoor play, including the availability of playgrounds suitable for children of different ages, the safety of outdoor spaces, and the cost of using outdoor spaces (Barns, 2007). Strife and Downey (2009) suggest that access to safe outdoor spaces may be more important than proximity and availability of neighbourhood outdoor spaces. A study by Aarts, de Vries, van Oers, & Schuit

(2012) investigated the relationship between outdoor play and physical neighbourhood characteristics, such as outdoor play facilities, the presence of sidewalks, and traffic safety. Data for this study was a combination of questionnaire data collected from 3651 parents of children ages four to twelve years old and neighbourhood observations, analysed using multilevel generalized estimating equations. The findings of this study show a positive association between outdoor play and the presence of sidewalks, as well as positive associations between outdoor play and particular indicators of traffic safety like the presence of pedestrian crossings. Another study by the same authors demonstrates that other neighbourhood factors, such as social cohesion, may also be associated with children's participation in outdoor play. A cross-sectional study of 6470 parents of children ages four to twelve years old in the Netherlands used questionnaire data to investigate the relationships between children's outdoor play time and neighbourhood and family characteristics. This study found a positive correlation between neighbourhood social cohesion and children's outdoor play for children across all age groups (Aarts, Wendel-Vos, van Oers, van de Goor, & Schuit, 2010).

Family Processes

Family-level variables have been shown to mediate the influence of neighbourhoods on child development, particularly for young children. In their review of neighbourhood research, Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) note that the effects of neighbourhood characteristics on child outcomes operate through proximal variables, like family characteristics. They suggest that neighbourhood effects are mediated more by family-level variables for young children, as parents typically supervise and manage their young children's interactions with their neighbourhood. In his study of children's experiences of their neighbourhood, Moore (1986) demonstrated that socio-ecological factors beyond the physical neighbourhood environment

impact children's use of their surroundings. Moore found that children living in the same neighbourhood, even on the same street, engaged in widely different patterns of use of their environment, which he determined to be the result of multiple factors, including children's relationships with their parents, perceptions of hazards in the environment, and cultural attitudes in the community.

On a family-level, parent perspectives on outdoor play affect children's participation in outdoor play. Research investigating mothers' perceptions of the impact of active outdoor play on child development found that most mothers recognized the value of these experiences for children's positive development (Clements, 2004). McFarland, Zajicek, and Wallczek (2014) administered a questionnaire to parents of preschool-aged children that asked parents about their attitudes toward nature and outdoor recreation. The results of their survey found that most parents have a positive view of outdoor recreation. Findings from the 2014 Bring Back Play Campaign Assessment cited in the 2015 Active Healthy Kids Report Card, show that 95% of mothers with a child aged five to eleven years old agree that unstructured activities, like outdoor play with friends, are an effective way for children to get physical activity.

While many parents recognize the value of outdoor play and view outdoor recreation positively, other factors at the level of the family may limit children's participation in outdoor play. Parental concerns about safety and fears of injury have been identified as major factors in children's declining access to outdoor play opportunities (Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, & Sleet, 2012; Malone, 2007). Neighbourhood safety concerns are frequently identified by parents as constricting their child's participation in outdoor play (Barns, 2007; Burdette & Whitaker, 2005). Little, Wyver, and Gibson (2011) interviewed twenty-four mothers of children attending early childhood centres in Australia about their attitudes toward risk-taking in children's outdoor play.

During these interviews, the mothers identified environmental hazards like broken equipment, negative social influences like bullies, and “stranger danger” as barriers to outdoor play at local parks. Perceived lack of resources for outdoor play may be another factor in declining outdoor play. A British study that surveyed 400 parents of children in middle childhood about their attitudes toward outdoor play, found that the majority of these parents were dissatisfied with the provisions for outdoor play in their neighbourhood (Valentine & Mckendrick, 1997). Parents living in urban areas expressed more dissatisfaction with the local provisions for outdoor play compared to parents living in rural areas. Interestingly, the study by Aarts, de Vries, van Oers, & Schuit (2012) cited above, found parental education to be negatively correlated with children’s participation in outdoor play.

Parent Perspectives

Previous research has linked parents’ perceptions of their neighbourhoods to their children’s participation in outdoor play (Bringolf-Isler et al., 2010; Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008; Kimbro, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan, 2011). One study employed both environmental data about neighbourhood characteristics, including street density and hectares of green space, obtained using geographical information systems software, and parent reports of neighbourhood characteristics, to investigate the link between neighbourhood characteristics and the amount of time children spend vigorously playing outdoors, as measured by parental report. The results of linear and multivariable regression analyses on this data revealed that both neighbourhood environmental data and parental reports of their neighbourhood were significantly correlated with the amount of time children spent vigorously playing outdoors; however, parental reports of certain neighbourhood factors, like street density, were found to be associated with children’s time spent playing outdoors independently and in addition to actual

environmental measures. This suggests that parent perceptions of their neighbourhood may be more influential than the actual neighbourhood situation for children's participation in outdoor play (Bringolf-Isler et al., 2010). While the safety concerns of parents may not be supported by actual data on neighbourhood safety, parents' perceptions of danger still constrict their behaviour (Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008). Mother's perceptions of collective efficacy in their neighbourhood have also been linked with outdoor play. Using data from the Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study, a national study of 1822 children in the United States, Kimbro, Brooks-Gunn, and McLanahan (2011) explored whether neighbourhood characteristics are related to children's outdoor play, television viewing, and trips to the park or playground. The results of their study indicate that higher maternal perceptions of neighbourhood collective efficacy are associated with more outdoor play and more trips to a park or playground. A study by McFarland, Zajicek, and Wallczek (2014) that used questionnaire data from parents of preschool-aged children to examine the relationship between parental attitudes toward nature and outdoor recreation and children's participation in outdoor play, found that parental attitudes toward nature and toward children's outdoor recreation were positively correlated with children's time spent playing outdoors.

The mediating role of parent perceptions on their child's participation in outdoor play within their neighbourhood indicate the necessity of exploring parent perspectives. Research on parent perspectives of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces is limited. The existing research focuses mainly on neighbourhood safety concerns, with little to no research on parental perspectives of outdoor play spaces. Given that limited research currently exists on parent perspectives, further research is needed that provides an in-depth understanding of how parents of young children view the outdoor play spaces for children in their neighbourhood.

Summary

Previous research links outdoor play in natural outdoor play spaces with positive outcomes for child development. In the outdoor environment, children participate in more physical activity, engage in imaginative and creative play, develop motor skills, engage in positive risk-taking, experience psychological benefits, and develop a connection with nature. Despite these benefits, children's participation in outdoor play in their neighbourhood is limited. Ecological theory provides a framework for understanding how child development is influenced by environmental processes. This framework can be used to explain how children's participation in outdoor play is mediated by their neighbourhood context, family context, and the interactions between their family and their neighbourhood. Neighbourhood processes, like the availability and proximity of safe outdoor play spaces affect children's opportunities for outdoor play. Family processes, including parent perspectives of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, also affect children's participation in outdoor play.

The Present Study

The impact of parent perceptions of their neighbourhood on children's engagement in outdoor play indicates the importance of exploring parent perspectives of outdoor play spaces. Considering that young children's interactions with their neighbourhood are more likely to be mediated by their parents, this is particularly important for participation in outdoor play during early childhood. While previous research has asked parents about neighbourhood safety concerns that may impede children's outdoor play, parents have not been asked to share their perspectives of the outdoor play spaces for children in their neighbourhood. This research study aimed to address this gap within the current literature by exploring how parents of young children view the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood in order to provide a deeper

understanding of the multiple ways parents perceive outdoor play spaces, including perceived strengths and limitations. The methodology employed in this study to achieve the research goals is described in detail in chapter three.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview

This chapter outlines the design of this qualitative research study, including the methodology used and the specific details of the study procedures. First, the methodology photovoice is described and its suitability to address the research questions of this study is highlighted. This is followed by an explanation of the criteria used to select the study neighbourhood and participants, as well as a detailed description of the steps taken to recruit participants. Next, the process of data collection is outlined, including the types of data collected and the procedures of data collection. The ethical considerations relevant to this study, including ethical considerations specific to photovoice methodology are then examined. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the data analysis procedures and decisions made during the analysis process.

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to better understand how parents view the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood and how parents perceive these spaces as supporting or limiting their child's outdoor play. The main research question and sub-questions addressed in this study were:

What are parent perspectives of the outdoor play spaces for children in their neighbourhood?

More specifically, the following sub-questions guided the study inquiry:

- What do parents perceive as an outdoor play space?
- How do parents describe the use of outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood by themselves and their children?

- What do parents view as the strengths and limitations of the available outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood?
- What do parents wish for in an ideal outdoor play space?

Methodology

Photovoice background. The methodology photovoice was employed in this study to explore parent perspectives of the outdoor play spaces for young children in their neighbourhood. Photovoice is a participatory approach to research based on the understanding that participants have knowledge and expertise of their own communities. Participants capture aspects of their daily lives or communities through photographs and these photographs are then used to facilitate dialogue about the topic of interest. This process gives participants the opportunity to share their experiences through images and words. There are three main goals of photovoice: to enable participants to record and reflect on the strengths and challenges within their community, to promote dialogue around community issues, and to share participant reflections with other community members and policymakers (Wang & Burris, 1997). Through photovoice, participants are able to, “identify, represent, and enhance their community” (Wang and Burris, 1997, p. 369).

The theoretical basis of photovoice is a combination of Freirian problem-posing education, feminist theory, and documentary photography (Wang & Burris, 1994, 1997). Photovoice is based in Paulo Freire’s philosophy of problem-posing education and adaptations of this philosophy to health education (Freire, 1970; Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988). This philosophy emphasizes the importance of dialogue for people to construct social knowledge and think critically about their place in society. Freire (1970) identifies the use of visual images as a

method for promoting critical dialogue. A key aspect of problem-posing education is social action and positive change as an outcome of dialogue.

Feminist theory also informs the photovoice methodology. Maguire (1987) identifies a male bias within participatory research methods, including Freire's problem-posing education, which is criticized for its focus on men as the creators of social knowledge. In alignment with feminist theory, the importance of listening to all perspectives, including women's perspectives, is emphasized in photovoice methodology. Both feminist research and photovoice studies attempt to reduce the hierarchy between the researcher and participants by conducting research with, rather than on, participants and viewing all participants as possessing their own knowledge and expertise (Reinharz, 1992; Wang & Burris, 1994).

Finally, photovoice evolved from documentary photography, which uses images to convey the lived experiences of people and communities (Time-Life Books, 1972). In conventional documentary photography, the photographs are taken by trained photographers, but concern has been raised about disparities in power between the photographers and the subjects they are photographing, which may result in the exploitation of photographed subjects (Rosler, 1989). This concern led to the development of new methods that promote the use of cameras by members of the community to capture images of their daily lives. Since community members are integrated within the community and familiar with their surroundings, their perspective is different than the perspective of a professional photographer from outside the community. The use of photographs taken by participants is a core aspect of the photovoice methodology (Wang & Burris, 1994).

Photovoice is a recent development in research methodology. It arose from the use of visual methods in research and has since been developed into a specific research methodology by

researchers in the United Kingdom and the United States (Emme, 2008). Research using photovoice methodology has been referred to using the term photonovella; however, photonovella is also used to describe other photograph-based processes, thus the term photovoice was created to convey the distinct aspects of this research methodology (Wang & Burris, 1997). Photovoice has been used in a variety of research studies, including change-oriented research with marginalized populations, health and development research in developing countries, and public health research in the United States (Walton, Schleien, Brake, Trovato, & Oakes, 2012; Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Pies, 2004).

Photovoice methodology has also been used in community participatory research, including participatory needs assessments and community health research, as a way to involve community members in discussions on issues within their community (Wang & Burris, 1997; Wang & Pies, 2004). By taking photographs and participating in dialogue about their communities, participants have the opportunity to share their personal insights into aspects of their community. Photovoice can be used as a tool to assess needs, as well as identify assets and resources within a community (Wang & Pies, 2004).

Photovoice and the present study. The participatory approach and community focus of photovoice make it a suitable methodology for exploring parent perspectives on the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood. Photovoice has been used previously to examine related topics, including community perspectives on neighbourhood green spaces and children's recreation opportunities (Seaman, Jones, & Ellaway, 2010; Wang & Pies, 2004). This methodology proved to be a valuable framework for the current study as it encouraged parents to share their experiences of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood in the form of both visual images and vocal descriptions, resulting in rich descriptions of outdoor play spaces. The sharing of

participant photographs of outdoor play spaces stimulated richer focus group dialogue as participants reacted to each other's photographs and often recognized the spaces captured in the photographs. Moreover, since photovoice can be used to identify the assets as well as the needs of a community, it allowed for an exploration of both the strengths and the limitations parents perceive with regard to their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. More details about the process of using photovoice in the present study are described below.

Setting and Participants

Neighbourhood selection. In order to better understand how parents' experiences of their neighbourhood impact their perceptions of outdoor play spaces for their child, this study explored the experiences of parents living within one neighbourhood. The selected neighbourhood was defined according to the boundaries identified by the Human Early Learning Partnership, as these are clearly marked boundaries that were chosen to be reflective of people's perceptions of their neighbourhood (Kershaw et al., 2009). This definition of the neighbourhood also aligns with the boundaries as described in the City of Vancouver Planning Department's (2010) community plan for the neighbourhood. Several criteria were established to guide the selection of the target neighbourhood, which are outlined below.

1. The neighbourhood is an urban neighbourhood within the city of Vancouver, British Columbia. For practical reasons, the research setting needed to be accessible to the researcher. The urban setting is an important feature of the current discussions surrounding outdoor play, as an increasing number of people live in urban areas and the majority of the research connecting parent perceptions of their neighbourhoods with children's outdoor play focuses on urban settings (Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008; Kimbro, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan, 2011; United Nations

- Population Division, 2014). The City of Vancouver is a particularly interesting location for this study since it is an urban area where most of the population still lives within a five minute walk of outdoor green space (City of Vancouver, 2013).
2. The presence of families with children ages 2 to 5 years old residing in the neighbourhood. Since the focus of the study was children's outdoor play spaces and the desired participants were parents of children ages 2 to 5 years old, the presence of young families in the neighbourhood was critical for the study.
 3. There is a community development plan in place for the neighbourhood at the onset of the study. Since photovoice is a participatory approach to research, it is vital that members of the community are invested in the research (Wang & Burris, 1997). To increase the likelihood of community investment, a neighbourhood with a strong sense of community where residents are currently engaged in exploring the needs, assets, and resources within their community was desired. The City of Vancouver website lists Vancouver neighbourhoods with current community development plans in place.
 4. Community organizations in the neighbourhood expressed interest in the research project. As mentioned above, the commitment of community members to the research project is important to the success of photovoice studies. Wang and Burris (1997) recommend that research is conducted in a community where community members or grassroots organizations have expressed an interest in the research topic; therefore, a neighbourhood should be selected where community organizations have expressed interest in exploring the topic of outdoor play spaces.

Based on the established criteria, one neighbourhood was selected as the setting for the study. First, the City of Vancouver website was used to identify neighbourhoods in Vancouver with current initiatives or community development plans in place related to the topic of neighbourhood outdoor spaces and/or community involvement in neighbourhood planning. At the time the study was proposed, three neighbourhoods were listed on the City of Vancouver website as currently having community development plans in place. From these neighbourhoods, one neighbourhood was selected as a potential setting for the study, based on the presence of young families, as well as the research supervisor's existing connections with community organizations in the neighbourhood. Prior to confirming the neighbourhood setting for the study, the neighbourhood house in the area, an organization known well in the community and serving many families, was contacted in order to gauge community interest in the study. Their response was very positive and this neighbourhood was confirmed as the setting for the study.

Participant selection. Participants for the study were recruited based on inclusion criteria established to fit the goals of the study, as well as practical considerations. Specific criteria for the participants were:

1. They were the parent of at least one child between the ages of 2 and 5 years old. The existing research on outdoor play focuses on the positive outcomes associated with outdoor play in early childhood, providing a strong rationale for promoting outdoor play in early childhood. In addition, young children are usually supervised by their parents while playing outdoors and typically visit neighbourhood outdoor play spaces with a caregiver. In their review of research on the effects of neighbourhoods on child outcomes, Leventhal and Brooks-Gunn (2000) note that the impact of

neighbourhood resources on young children is more indirect, as neighbourhood effects are mediated by parents who monitor and supervise young children's behaviour. As such, young children's participation in outdoor play may be more closely connected to their parents' perspectives regarding outdoor play and neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. Thus, parents of children in early childhood were selected as the target participants for this study.

2. They must live within the target neighbourhood. One neighbourhood was selected as the setting for this study in order to better understand the interactions between parents and their neighbourhood and how parents' experiences of their neighbourhood impact their perspectives of the outdoor play spaces for their child. Since the neighbourhood context is a key component of this study, it was important that study participants live within the target neighbourhood. This allowed participants to make meaning of their neighbourhood experiences together as they shared photographs and stories about the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood with each other during the focus group sessions.
3. They have lived within the target neighbourhood for at least one year. The researcher wanted to ensure that participants were familiar with their neighbourhood and the available outdoor play spaces; therefore, a year was selected as a reasonable amount of time for parents to become familiar with the neighbourhood in which they live.
4. They were fluent enough in English to take part in an interview in English. This criteria was made for practical reasons, as the researcher lacks proficiency in languages other than English. Furthermore, in order to engage in dialogue during the

focus group sessions, it was critical that participants were able to converse fluently in a common language.

Recruitment. The neighbourhood house, the community centre, and the family centre in the target neighbourhood were contacted as sites for participant recruitment. While the community centre provided minimal support by offering to post study flyers, both the neighbourhood house and the family centre became key community locations for participant recruitment. The neighbourhood house offers several programs for children in the desired age range including a daycare, a preschool program, and a family drop-in program. With permission from the neighbourhood house staff, the researcher was able to visit these programs to talk to parents and hand out recruitment cards (Appendix A). From these visits, several parents expressed interest in the study, and an initial meeting with these participants was scheduled. This first meeting did not go as anticipated, as only one expected participant attended; however, this participant offered to share the study information with a friend. The researcher held another initial meeting with two more participants and a first focus group session with three participants. Several participants who initially expressed interest in the study were unable to attend these scheduled sessions and attended a later session, or in the case of one parent, participated in an individual interview.

The family centre in the neighbourhood was an additional site for participant recruitment. This centre offers a drop-in program for families with young children, which includes an outdoor play time following the program. The researcher was invited by family centre staff to attend the outdoor play time to talk with parents about the study and give out recruitment cards (Appendix A). This resulted in further interest from parents, and a second initial meeting and focus group were held with three participants. Efforts were made by the researcher to recruit an additional

participant, however these efforts ultimately proved unsuccessful, as potential participants withdrew their interest in the study, neglected to return contact with the researcher, or could not follow through with the phases of the study due to personal time constraints.

Visits to neighbourhood programs serving young children and their families proved to be the most effective method for recruiting participants, as these visits allowed the researcher to connect with parents in person. Snowball sampling was also used, whereby current participants shared information about the study with friends and acquaintances. This method attracted one additional participant. The researcher had anticipated that this method of recruitment would be more effective, since parents are likely to know other parents with children of the same age living in their neighbourhood. Another strategy for recruitment employed by the researcher was to post flyers about the research study at locations in the target neighbourhood where parents were likely to visit, including the community centre and local coffee shops. The posted recruitment flyers are included in Appendix B.

Participants. Consistent with qualitative research and other photovoice studies, a small number of participants were included in the study. This allowed for an in-depth exploration of these participants' experiences of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood. Seven parents participated in this study, six mothers and one father. Efforts were made to recruit one additional participant, but these efforts were ultimately unsuccessful after several potential participants declined to participate due to personal time constraints. After reviewing the research data and consulting with the researcher's supervisory committee, it was decided that these seven participants provided rich and varying experiences of outdoor play spaces. Efforts were made to recruit both mothers and fathers to the research study, however since mothers were more likely to be at home with their children, they were more likely to spend time engaging in outdoor play

experiences with their child and were more likely to have time to take part in the research. One father was successfully recruited for the study. Some participants were known to each other prior to participating in the focus group sessions, which was expected as participants live within the same neighbourhood. Demographic information for each participant obtained from the background questionnaire (Appendix E) is provided in the following table.

Table 1.
Characteristics of Parents Participants

Code	Age	Gender	Family Ethnic Background	Relationship to Child	Child Age	Child Sex	Siblings	Years lived at current address
P1	37	Female	European	Biological/ adoptive mother	5 years, 6 months	Female	Sister - 3 years	5
P2	39	Female	European	Biological/ adoptive mother	4 years	Female	Brother - 20 months	7
P3	35	Female	Caucasian	Biological/ adoptive mother	4 years, 6 months	Female	Sister - 2 years, 9 months Sister - 6 months	3
P4	39	Female	Canadian/ European	Biological/ adoptive mother	4 years, 7 months	Male	Sister - 18 months	7
P5	40	Male	Canadian/ European	Biological/ adoptive father	3 years, 11 months	Male	None	6
P6	32	Female	Canadian/ European	Biological/ adoptive mother	4 years, 6 months	Male	Brother - 19 months	3
P7	39	Female	Korean/ Chinese	Biological/ adoptive mother	4 years, 3 months	Female	Sister - 18 months	2

Data Collection

Overview. The forms of data collected in this study included photographs of outdoor play spaces taken by participants, transcripts from initial meetings, focus groups, and interviews

with participants, and notes taken by researchers. These methods of data collection are consistent with the methods typically used in photovoice studies, as the use of participant photographs and focus group dialogue are considered critical components of the methodology. The notes taken by research assistants during the initial meetings and focus groups were compared to the transcripts and the primary researcher's notes in order to provide another researcher's perspective and ensure rigour.

Initial meetings. An initial training session with participants, prior to the photography phase of the research, is recommended by Wang and Burris (1997). This training session allows researchers to explain the photography phase of the study to participants in detail, including explaining participants' roles as photographers and discussing the ethical issues regarding photography in public spaces. In this study, a total of four initial meetings were held at the neighbourhood house within the participants' neighbourhood. Attendance for each meeting ranged from one participant to three participants. The primary researcher facilitated the meetings and a research assistant took notes during the meeting. During the initial meeting, the details of the study were explained to participants, participants were prepared to take photographs, and participants responded to a few preliminary questions related to the research topic. First, the researcher and participants reviewed the informed consent form, which was provided to participants prior to the initial meeting, and participants submitted their signed consent forms to the primary researcher. Next, the researcher reiterated the purpose of the study and introduced key terms for the study, "outdoor play space" and "neighbourhood". Participants were asked to describe what they viewed as outdoor play spaces, as well as what they considered to be their neighbourhood. Participants' responses to these questions were transcribed and became part of the collected research data. Finally, the role of participants as photographers of their

neighbourhood outdoor play spaces was discussed. Participants were asked to take photographs of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood and send their photographs to the primary researcher, a process that is described in greater detail in the following section. Basic digital cameras were offered to participants, but most participants opted to use their own cameras. Ethical considerations related to taking photographs in public outdoor spaces were also discussed. Throughout the initial meeting, participants were offered opportunities to ask questions or raise concerns, which were then addressed by the researcher. See Appendix F for the interview schedule used to guide the initial meetings.

Photographs. Photographs of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces taken by participants were one of the main sources of data for this study. Photographs are a powerful and immediate medium through which participants can express their views and experiences of their community (Wang & Burris, 1997). Visual images are also an effective means for promoting reflections and critical dialogue among community members that enable people to make meaning of their experiences (Freire, 1970). By asking participants to photograph their own communities, the images produced reflect participants' perspectives of their own communities, rather than a view of the community captured through the perspective of an outsider (Wang & Burris, 1994).

Participants were given at least two weeks between the initial group meeting and the focus group session to take photographs of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood. To guide their photography, participants were given a photographing information sheet with four questions to focus on while taking photographs (Appendix G):

1. What are the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood?
2. What outdoor play spaces do you and your child use?
3. What do you like about these outdoor play spaces?

4. What do you dislike about these outdoor play spaces?

Participants were invited to take as many photographs as they wanted, and then select two or three photographs to share in the focus group. As a method for sending their photographs to the primary researcher, the photograph sharing website www.snapfish.ca was recommended to participants. This website was chosen because it is a Canadian website that is password protected and easy to use; however, several participants opted to use other photograph sharing methods which they were familiar with already. In total, 74 participant photographs were collected, with each participant submitting between three and twenty photographs. Consistent with the photovoice methodology, these photographs were then used in the following focus groups or individual interviews to facilitate discussion about parent perspectives of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Focus groups and interviews. The other main source of data in this study was the focus group sessions and interviews. Focus groups are typically used in photovoice studies to enable participants to reflect on their photographs through shared dialogue. Through the process of sharing and discussing their photographs, participants make meaning of their experiences and identify key issues in their communities. It is critical to the participatory nature of photovoice research that participants interpret the significance and meaning behind their own photographs, rather than leaving the interpretations of photograph data to the researcher (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Two focus groups were conducted with three participants attending each session. The focus groups were held at the neighbourhood house in the participants' neighbourhood and facilitated by the primary researcher. The sessions lasted between 90 minutes and 2 hours, during which participants shared their perspectives on the outdoor play spaces in their

neighbourhood through their photographs and group dialogue. First, participants took turns sharing their selected photographs with the group, explaining why they took the photograph and what it represents. The photographs were projected as a slide show, to make them easily visible to the entire group. Participants then reflected on their reactions to the experiences captured in each other's photographs. After discussing the photographs, further dialogue was facilitated through the use of guiding questions. The photographs and guiding questions were used to stimulate dialogue around what outdoor play spaces are available in the neighbourhood, how participants and their children use these spaces, what strengths and limitations participants associate with these outdoor play spaces, and what parents want in an ideal outdoor play space. The questions used to guide the focus group discussions are included in Appendix H. The intention was not to achieve consensus regarding neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, but rather to encourage discussion about these spaces in order to construct a rich description of parents' varying experiences of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood. The focus group sessions were audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher prior to the process of data analysis. Field notes were also taken during the focus groups in order to capture aspects of the focus groups that may be missed in the audio recordings.

One participant was unable to take part in either of the focus group sessions; therefore, the researcher conducted an individual semi-structured interview with this participant. This interview lasted approximately 90 minutes, until all topics had been explored. A similar process of discussing the participants' photographs was used in the interview, and the same questions used in the focus group were used to guide the discussion. The interview was also auto-recorded and transcribed for analysis

Initially, two focus group sessions had been planned with participants; however, many parents expressed concerns that they could not make that time commitment. In order to meet the needs of participants and maintain their interest in participating the study, the primary researcher and research supervisor decided to reduce the time commitment required of participants to one focus group. To offset the elimination of a follow-up focus group session, the researcher instead conducted follow-up phone interviews with participants, which are described in the next section.

Follow-up phone interviews. Consistent with qualitative research, the researcher intended to collect data until the level of saturation is reached, when the data is rich and descriptive and further data collection does not provide new material (Flick, 2006). In order to achieve saturation of the research data, the researcher followed-up with participants in individual phone interviews after most of the initial data analysis had been completed. This allowed the researcher to check their interpretations of the research data with participants and ask additional questions to further explore the themes that emerged in the focus group sessions.

The researcher conducted a follow-up interview over the phone with each of the seven participants. The purpose of these interviews was to achieve saturation of the research data by returning to topics that had not been fully explored, and to conduct member checks with participants. First, the researcher shared the emerging themes and sub-themes from their analysis of the research data with the participant in order to receive feedback regarding whether these themes accurately represented the participant's experiences and whether any key aspects of their experiences were missing. Next, the researcher asked each participant a series of follow-up questions to address unresolved questions from the focus groups. The interview guide used for the follow-up interviews is included in Appendix I. These interviews were auto-recorded and transcribed and then incorporated into the research analysis.

Ethical Considerations

There were a number of ethical considerations related to the research in general, and to the methodology photovoice specifically that needed to be addressed in this study. To ensure ethical rigour, this study complied with the guidelines for ethical research outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2010)*. Ethics approval for the study was obtained from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia. In the following paragraphs, the specific measures taken to address ethical concerns related to the study are described.

Ethical considerations using photovoice. In a photovoice study there are a number of ethical issues surrounding the creation of photographs and the use of these photographs to be considered. First of all, there are concerns about the privacy of participants, the privacy of photography subjects, and the privacy of the community being photographed. To address these privacy concerns, consent forms and anonymity were used in this study. Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) recommend the use of three types of consent forms that protect the privacy rights of those connected to the study: one form indicating the participant's informed agreement to participate in the study, a second form obtaining permission from other members of the community to be photographed by participants, and a third consent form asking participants for permission to use their photographs in the dissemination of research findings.

To address privacy concerns, participants all signed a consent form indicating their informed consent to participate in the study, including permission for the researcher to use their photographs for the purpose of this research study. Obtaining written informed consent from participants is consistent with the requirements of consent outlined by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2010)*. To protect the privacy of other members of the community, participants were asked to avoid including other people in

their photographs when possible, with the exception of their own children. Since the focus of the study was outdoor play spaces, the inclusion of other community members was not necessary for the research data. The majority of the photographs taken by participants did not include identifiable images of other people, with the exception of a few photographs that included other children. These photographs were not shared in the focus group sessions, and the primary researcher used photograph editing software to blur the faces of children before including the photographs in this final thesis document.

In order to protect the identity of the study participants and their community, identifying features, such as names, were removed in any subject writing, presentation, or publication, including this final thesis document. Due to the use of focus groups, participants were known to each other; however, pseudonyms were used for participants outside of the focus group setting. Codes were also assigned to each participant, which were used for identifying participants on demographic questionnaires and transcripts. To protect the identity of the community where the research was conducted, the names of public parks and playgrounds mentioned by participants were replaced with generic descriptions. The use of codes and pseudonyms to protect the identity of participants is consistent with the requirements of confidentiality outlined by the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2010)*.

Another ethical consideration of photovoice related to privacy, is the use of images that disclose embarrassing facts about a person or portray them in a false light (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). Researchers are advised to use their judgement when selecting photographs to include in publications or public exhibitions, and photographs that could be incriminating or depict people in a negative way should not be included. This ethical concern was minimized by asking participants not to photograph other people. The researcher did not believe that any of the

photographs submitted by participants would be considered to incriminate or negatively portray community members.

Ethical concerns related to the use of cameras by participants also arise in photovoice studies. Wang and Redwood-Jones (2001) recommend a group discussion about the use of cameras and ethics before participants begin taking photographs in their community. They also advise researchers to remind participants to be aware of their surroundings and ensure their own safety while taking photographs in their community. During the initial meeting with participants, the primary researcher discussed ethical issues related to taking photographs in public spaces with participants. In addition, participants were reminded to prioritize their own safety and be aware of their surroundings when taking photographs in their neighbourhood.

Finally, a major ethical consideration with the use of photovoice concerns the ownership of photographs that result from the study. Typically in photovoice projects, the participant owns their photographs. Participants sign a consent form giving permission for their photographs to be used for the research study in focus groups and in the dissemination of the research findings. Any further use of participants' photographs requires additional permission (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001). In this study, written consent was obtained from participants allowing the researcher to use their photographs for the purpose of the research study, including dissemination of the research findings. If the researcher plans to use the photographs for other purposes in the future, additional consent will first be gathered from participants.

Ensuring Scientific Rigour

In this study, scientific rigour was ensured through the use of multiple sources of data, member checks and peer debriefing sessions. The collection of *multiple sources of data* provided opportunities for participants to explore and express their understandings through

different mediums. The multiple sources of data collected in this study include participants' photographs of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood, as well as the initial meeting, focus group, and interview transcripts. In addition, the transcripts from the focus group discussions were supported by *field notes* taken by the primary researcher and research assistants when possible. *Member checks* were conducted with research participants to check the researcher's interpretations of the data. In the focus group sessions, the researcher shared their understandings of the data collected in the initial meetings with participants and asked for their feedback. This process was then repeated in the follow-up phone interviews, when the researcher shared their interpretations of the research data from the initial process of data analysis (Merriam, 1998). *Peer debriefing sessions* were held between the lead researcher and other researchers assisting with the study following the initial meetings and focus groups. These debriefing sessions allowed the researchers to discuss and reflect upon the key ideas that emerged during the sessions, which contributed to the research by adding the perspectives of multiple researchers to the interpretation of data (Merriam, 1998). Through these multiple ways of ensuring rigour, triangulation was achieved. *Triangulation* contributes to a more detailed understanding of the social phenomenon being studied, adding credibility and validity to the findings of this research study (Mathison, 1988).

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis. Thematic analysis was selected as the most appropriate method of analysis for this study, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method of qualitative data analysis is a widely used and flexible approach to data analysis that aims to identify, analyse and report the patterns, or themes, within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a process of analysis, it involves searching for themes within individual data items and across entire data sets. Thematic

analysis was selected for this study, because it fits with the goals of analysis cited for photovoice studies. According to Wang and Burris (1997), the analysis of photovoice data involves identifying the common issues and themes that emerge from the photographs and the focus group sessions. In addition, thematic analysis is considered a suitable method for novice qualitative researchers, as it is a foundational method of qualitative data analysis. In this study, an inductive form of thematic analysis was used, which involves working from the data to identify themes, rather than fitting the data into a pre-existing theoretical framework. The process of thematic analysis is described in detail the following section.

Process. Thematic analysis was conducted on the transcripts from the initial meetings, the participant photographs, and the focus group and interview transcripts. The goal of the analysis was to identify the key themes that capture important aspects of parents' views of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood. The process of data analysis was completed according to the phases outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Phase 1. The initial phase of data analysis involved the researcher familiarizing themselves with the collected data. Transcription of the focus group and interview data from the audio-recordings was considered an important part of this process and was completed by the primary researcher. Transforming audio data into written form is an interpretive process through which meanings are formed (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Repeated close readings of the transcripts, along with examinations of participant photographs, were conducted in order to gain an understanding of the depth and breadth of the content of the research data. During the reading of the transcripts, notes were made to highlight key ideas and terms of significance related to the research questions.

Phase 2. In the second phase, initial codes were generated from the data. Codes identify features of interest in the data, and represent the most basic segment of raw data that can be assessed meaningfully (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of creating initial codes involved working systematically through the data set, electronically highlighting segments of data and noting codes beside each segment. Codes for this study were data-driven, created from the research data, rather than from an existing theoretical framework. After generating codes, the data extracts for each code were organized in the format of a table containing the initial codes and corresponding segments of data. At this stage, several codes that were determined to represent the same idea were combined.

Phase 3. In this phase of the analysis, the search for broader level themes in the data began. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), a theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research questions and represents a pattern of meaning within the data. The codes formulated in phase two of the analysis were considered in terms of how they fit together into overarching themes and sub-themes. The table of codes was then rearranged to group together the data extracts attached to each code under the identified candidate themes. In order to support this process, thematic maps of candidate themes and sub-themes were created to provide a visual representation of the connections between themes, as recommend by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Phase 4. The fourth phase involved reviewing and refining the themes. The process of refining themes involved collapsing similar themes into each other, breaking apart themes into separate themes, and eliminating themes that were determined not to be themes due to insufficient or incoherent data. Through this process, the researcher ensured that the data within themes fit together meaningfully, and that each theme was distinct from other themes (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). This phase involved the continuous revision of the tables of themes, subthemes, codes, and corresponding data extracts in order to reflect the revision of themes, which was done both electronically and on printed versions of the tables. The thematic maps were also continually revised as themes were combined, separated, or dissolved.

Phase 5. Following the creation of the thematic map, the identified themes were further refined, defined, and named. Defining the themes requires determining the essence of each theme, as well as what aspect of the data is captured by the theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A final version of the data table was created listing each theme, corresponding sub-themes and codes, and all the extracts of data for each theme. Key quotations and photographs from the research data were selected to provide examples of the essence of each theme, and names were selected that clearly convey what each theme is about. When possible, names were chosen from phrases used by research participants to keep themes representative of participants' experiences.

Phase 6. In the final stage of analysis, the report of the findings was prepared for inclusion in this thesis document. The researcher prepared a detailed summary of the research findings as they relate to the research questions addressed in this study, by outlining and providing an explanation of each identified theme. Compelling extracts of data, in the form of both quotations from the transcripts and participant photographs, were selected as specific examples of the themes and included in the report. The final report of the findings is presented in chapter four.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methodology and procedures used in this qualitative research study to explore the perspectives of parents of young children with regard to the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood. One urban neighbourhood within the city of Vancouver was

selected as the setting for this study and 7 parents (6 female, 1 male) of children ages 2 to 5 years old living within the neighbourhood were recruited to participate. Photovoice was chosen as the ideal methodology for this study as it enables participants to share their knowledge of their own communities, reflecting on both community strengths and challenges. Through photographs and dialogue, this participatory methodology allowed participants to express their perspectives of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood. Research data was collected in the form of photographs taken by participants, transcripts from interviews and focus groups, and field notes, and scientific rigour was ensured through the use of multiple sources of data, member checks, and peer debriefing sessions. Thematic analysis was conducted on the research data to determine the key themes and sub-themes that represent these parents' experiences of their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. The methodology and procedures used in this study provided a rich understanding of parents' perspectives of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood for their young child. A comprehensive and detailed description of the findings of this study is presented in the following chapter.

Chapter 4: Findings

Overview

In this chapter, a comprehensive description of the study findings is presented. The themes and sub-themes that capture parents' different perspectives of their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces are summarized and evidence for the identified themes is included in the form of participant photographs and quotations. Themes are grouped into three overarching categories, related to the research questions addressed by the study, what is an outdoor play space, how do families use outdoor play spaces, and supporting and limiting factors of outdoor play spaces. A critical discussion of these research findings is included in chapter five.

Neighbourhood Context

Since the neighbourhood context was a key element of this study, parents were asked to describe the boundaries and characteristics of their neighbourhood in the initial meetings to gain insight into how parents conceptualize their own neighbourhood. Parents' descriptions of what they considered the overall boundaries of their neighbourhood were similar to the defined boundaries used for the study, with slight variations of a couple blocks. A notable exception was the southern boundary of the neighbourhood, which many parents (4 of 7) believed to extend farther south than the defined boundary. Parents also described the areas they travel to on a daily basis, including both smaller subsections of their neighbourhood, as well as areas outside of their neighbourhood. Only one parent said she did not spend much time in her neighbourhood.

For the most part, parent participants described their neighbourhood positively as a place with friendly neighbours, a sense of community, other families, and community resources. Parents also described their neighbourhood as "diverse" or a "mix" of people, which was viewed as a positive quality by most parents. Change, in the form of gentrification, was another main

characteristic of the neighbourhood according to participants. Despite using descriptors such as, “low budget” or “terrible” when discussing their neighbourhood, participants still expressed positive feelings toward their neighbourhood. One father explains,

My neighbourhood is not—maybe not so sketchy, but it’s definitely low budget. You sort of get that feeling of the neighbourhood, but I really like it.

What is an Outdoor Play Space?

The first category of findings relates to what parents perceive as an outdoor play space. Through their photographs and dialogue, parents described and offered examples of a variety of outdoor spaces their children used for play. These spaces ranged from the expected parks and playgrounds, to more unexpected spaces like bike racks. From parents’ descriptions of outdoor play spaces, two themes were identified, *Designed Outdoor Play Spaces* and *Outdoor Play Spaces of Opportunity*. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of these themes.

Figure 1.
Thematic Map for Types of Outdoor Play Spaces



Theme 1. Designed outdoor play spaces: Parks and playgrounds. Parents’

discussions of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces centered on park and playground spaces, and the majority of the photographs taken by participants featured parks and playgrounds. Figures 2 and 3 are examples of photographs of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces that feature parks with playgrounds. All parents included parks and playgrounds as examples of outdoor play spaces either in their photographs or when asked to define an outdoor play space. This theme is evident in parents’ responses when asked what spaces they thought of as outdoor play spaces, “Yeah, I guess, mostly playgrounds...” and, “generally parks and playgrounds.”

In addition to parks and playgrounds, other examples of designed outdoor play spaces discussed by parents include school playgrounds, sporting fields, outdoor pools, beaches, and community gardens. One parent identifies beaches as an example of an outdoor play space,

Yeah, generally I just find Vancouver has a lot of outdoor play space, either parks like that picture there [referring to the projected photograph], or beaches.

Another parent describes outdoor pools as a type of outdoor play space she will travel outside of her neighbourhood to visit, “And then in the summertime we use some outdoor pools.”

Community gardens, mentioned by several parents (3 of 7) as examples of outdoor play spaces, were initially considered as a separate theme, however in further discussions of outdoor play spaces, parents referred to community gardens as a feature within their neighbourhood parks and playgrounds.

Figure 2.
Photograph of a Designed Outdoor Play Space



“Oh yeah, so this is the park that we do go to frequently.”

Figure 3.
Photograph of a Designed Outdoor Play Space



“So that’s (name of local park), and we spend more time in (local park) than any other park.”

Theme 2. Outdoor play spaces of opportunity: Children play anywhere. Beyond parks and playgrounds, parents also described how their children find opportunities for play in unexpected spaces not intentionally designed for children’s play. A common theme represented in parents’ conceptualization of the term outdoor play space was the idea that children will play anywhere and that anywhere outdoors can be an outdoor play space. As one participant explains,

Probably the same thing, though kids also play anywhere, right. Like when it’s raining a lot and we’re walking down the lane and there’s a big river down the lane, my kids would stop there and play with it and move sticks around and stuff. So sometimes outdoor play spaces are not just parks and playgrounds, but there’s— you know, they find all sorts of places to play in.

Several parents noted that their child’s definition of an outdoor play space seemed to differ from what they typically consider to be an outdoor play space. While they tend to look for a park or playground for outdoor play, their children found invitations for play in unlikely spaces, anywhere that was accessible and interesting in some way. In response to an outdoor play space being described as “anywhere that kids are playing outdoors” a parent agrees,

Yeah, I think that’s a great definition, because I guess I tend to look for a play structure, but I don’t think that’s what my kids look for. [laughs] They just look for a hill, or anything really, some dirt, some garbage.

Parents shared examples of spaces their children found to play that were not necessarily intended for play. Bike racks were a prominent example of outdoor play spaces of opportunity described by parents as an attraction for their children (Figures 4 and 5). Bike racks were such a common site for children’s play that one parent suggested someone should look into what makes them so interesting. Puddles that formed in parks and playgrounds due to the rain also created unintentional spaces for children’s play. Other examples of these spaces include public art, sidewalks and laneways, railway tracks, and edible attractions like blackberry bushes. Examples of these spaces are presented in Figures 6 through 10.

Figure 4.
Photograph of an Outdoor Play Space of Opportunity



“I just like it because it shows them using something that is not really intended for them to use, but they played in there a long time.”

Figure 5.
Photograph of an Outdoor Play Space of Opportunity



Figure 6.
Photograph of an Outdoor Play Space of Opportunity



Figure 7.
Photograph of an Outdoor Play Spaces of Opportunity



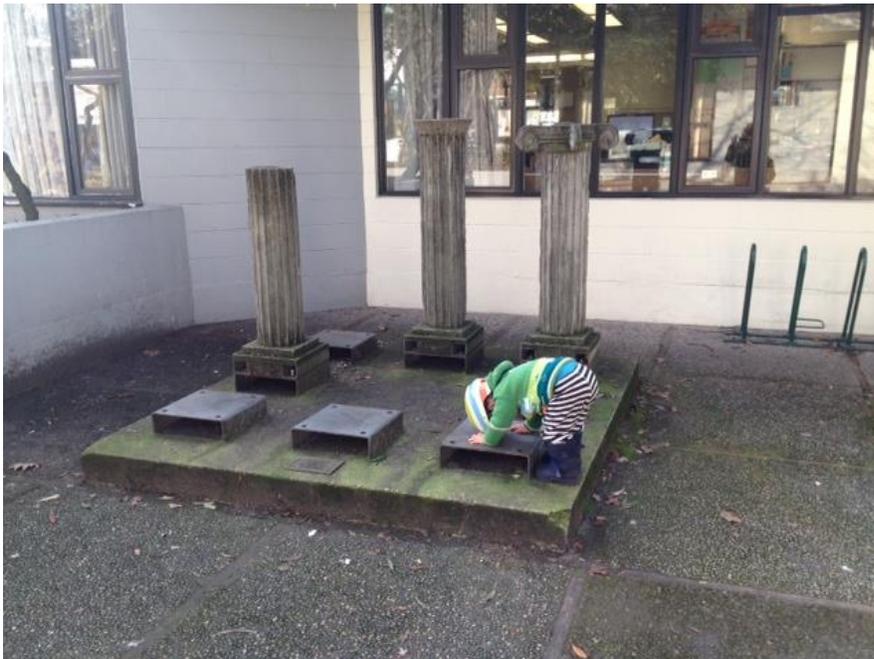
“So this is a bit of a—you know, potentially could be a design flaw, but also is a great play space.”

Figure 8.
Photograph of an Outdoor Play Space of Opportunity



“I guess this is an example of just something that you wouldn’t expect to be an attraction that is for kids.”

Figure 9.
Photograph of an Outdoor Play Space of Opportunity



“It’s a statue that invites children to come play on it. So that’s why I took that photo...”

Figure 10.
Photograph of an Outdoor Play Space of Opportunity

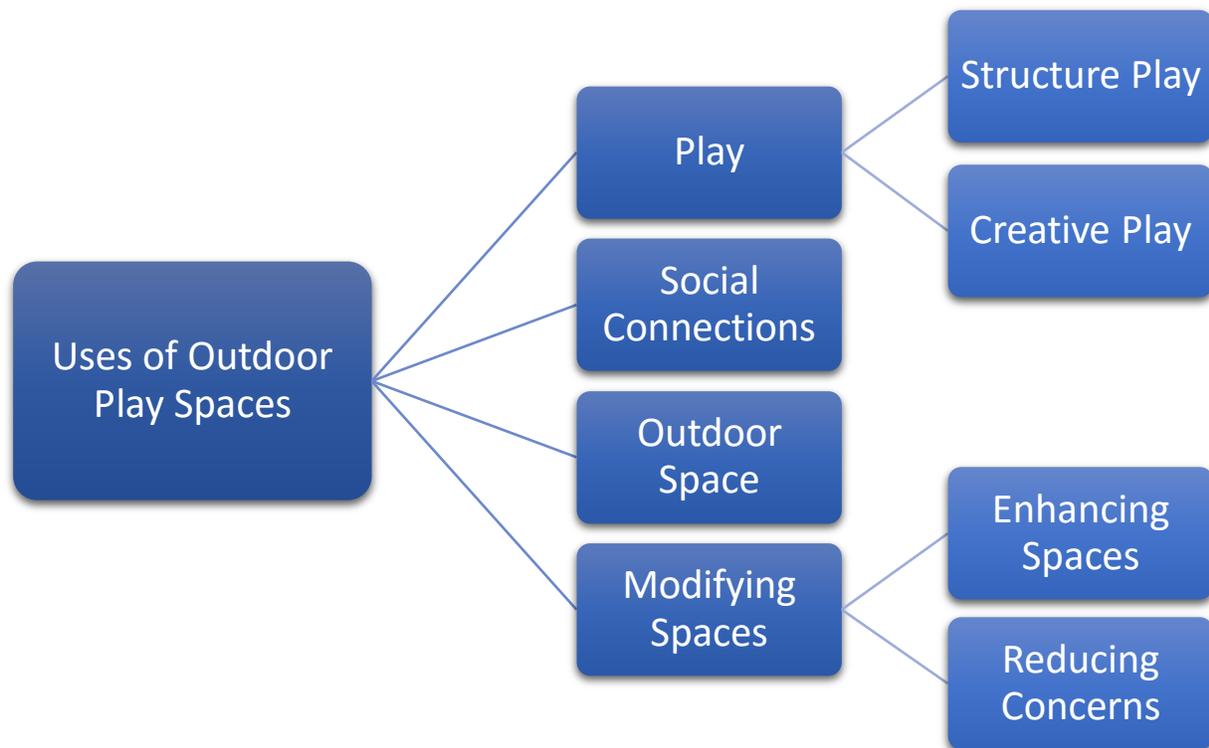


“And to me it’s the exact opposite of everywhere I played as a child. So I played in the bush as a child, and here we’re playing in an industrial railroad park, basically, and it’s awesome.”

Use of Outdoor Play Spaces

The second category of themes captures the range of experiences shared by parents in terms of how they use outdoor play spaces and how they observe their children using outdoor play spaces. Also represented by these themes are parents’ perspectives of the various purposes of visiting outdoor play spaces, extending the concept of how spaces are used to include how they can be used. The uses of outdoor play spaces discussed by parents are represented by four key themes: *Play*, *Social Connections*, *Outdoor Space*, and *Modifying Spaces*, and their related sub-themes. A visual representation of these themes and sub-themes is provided in Figure 11.

Figure 11.
Thematic Map of Uses of Outdoor Play Spaces



Theme 1. Play. Unsurprisingly, children’s participation in different forms of play was a key use of outdoor play spaces described by parents. Parents shared numerous examples of the different types of play their children engaged in at outdoor play spaces, noting what they viewed as their child’s preferences for certain types of play. A main purpose of outdoor play spaces perceived by parents was to provide a space for children to play in ways not supported by the indoor environment, such as active physical play and messy forms of play. Children’s play was initially grouped into five sub-themes based on different types of play, such as structure play, nature play, active play, imaginary play, and manipulative play, however, as the themes were revised, it was determined that these different types of play were actually representative of two core sub-themes. According to parents’ descriptions, their children either used the playground structures as designed for play, or used the space around, below, or beside the structure in their

own creative forms of play. Therefore, children's play is divided into the sub-themes of *Structure Play* and *Creative Play*.

Sub-theme 1.1: Structure play. When discussing how their children use outdoor play spaces, parents described their children playing on playground structures. Structure play is also depicted in a number of participant photographs that feature children playing on playground structures (Figures 12 and 13). Although some parents focused more on this type of play, most parents provided at least one photographic example of structure play. Children's enjoyment of structure play was highlighted by parents as they interpreted their child's preferences for particular playground features. Swings featured heavily as a favourite playground feature in one focus group, in which parents agreed, "My kids love the swings." According to two parents, slides were another favourite playground structure for their children. One mother expressed her children's particular enjoyment of the side-by-side slides featured in Figure 13, as they provided the opportunity for her children to have races. Parents reflected on the potential value of structure play as they identified how this type play contributed to their child's learning. One parent noted how a playground structure encourages children to learn balance, while two other parents described how their children challenged themselves on a large climbing structure (Figure 14).

Figure 12.
Photograph of Structure Play



“They love the swings here.”

Figure 13.
Photograph of Structure Play



“Though, in the background I’m thinking of those side-by-side slides, and they quite like having slides that are next to each other... you can do races or go together or whatever.”

Figure 14.
Photograph of Structure Play



“Well, my oldest daughter, (name), just loves to climb. She’s been climbing for a long time, so she’ll go all the way up.”

Sub-theme 1.2: Creative play. While parents described their children playing on playground structures, they also emphasized how their children used outdoor play spaces in other ways, playing in areas beyond the playground structure or repurposing features of the playground to use in creative ways. This concept, that features of outdoor play spaces are used by children in open-ended, creative ways is key to this sub-theme of play. Parents shared examples of their children playing underneath the playground structure, using it as a fort or a castle, or pretending the woodchips or gravel used as playground surfacing are coins or food,

Yeah. Like they’ll pretend it is coins or something. They’ll pretend it is money, or whatever, or food, “Here you go, here’s some food.”

Descriptions of children using playground surfacing like woodchips, sand, or pebbles as a manipulative material for their imaginative and creative play were common. See Figure 15 for another example of children using playground surfacing pebbles in their play. Children's imaginative play, nature play, and manipulative play were found to fit within this sub-theme, since these forms of play are not determined by the playground structure in the same way as playing on the swings or the slide. Rather, these forms of play are open-ended, requiring children's creative use of space.

Another component of this sub-theme is the idea of the playground structure as secondary to children's play. One focus group in particular, brought up the idea that although their children use the playground structure, they perceived it to be of secondary importance for their children compared to all the other elements of outdoor play spaces. These parents noticed that their children typically spent more time playing in areas other than the structure, such as the bushes or trees. One parent describes her children's desire to play beyond the playground structures, engaging in more open-ended play in the bushes and trees,

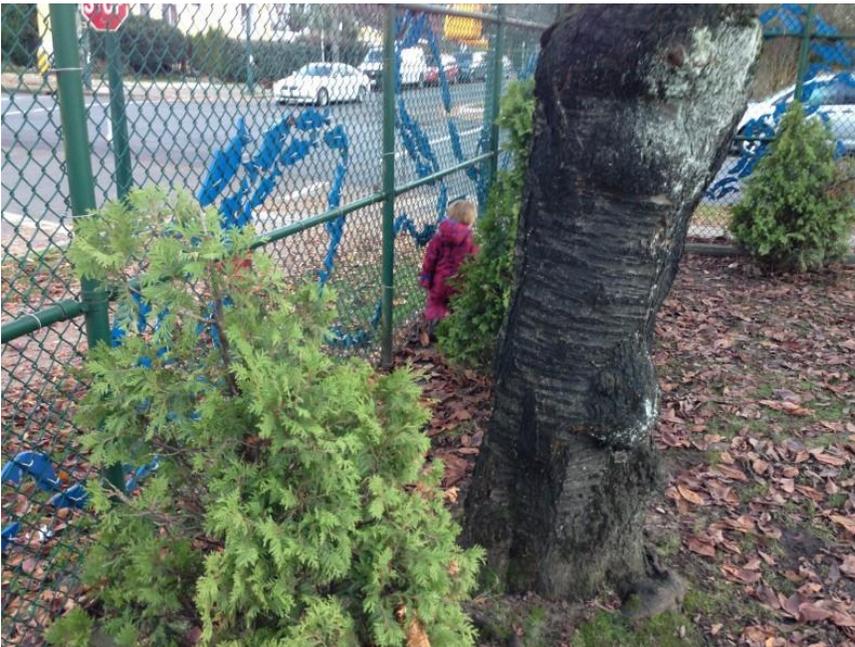
I find my kids often gravitate towards places, not so much the structures, but places that are just more natural that they can make up their own games.

Figure 15.
Photograph of Creative Play



“So, yeah, having different things—like sand is fun and then the pebbles are fun and other kind of moveable things are fun.”

Figure 16.
Photograph of Creative Play



Theme 2. Social connections. Outdoor play spaces were viewed a space for social connections for both children and adults. Parents described how outdoor play spaces provided opportunities for their child to meet and interact with other children. For the parent of an only child, social interactions with other children were a desirable feature of outdoor play spaces. These social interactions were seen a valuable learning experience by some parents, who felt these opportunities helped their children learn how to interact with others. However, one parent did express dissatisfaction with the social interactions her children encountered at playgrounds, describing the quality of socialization as “not actually what I want”. As well as a space for meeting new children, outdoor play spaces also served as a space for meeting up with existing friends.

Interestingly, parents placed an even greater emphasis on the use of outdoor play spaces as a place for them to connect with other adults. They described how visiting outdoor play spaces with their children provided them with opportunities to interact with other adults, an uncommon occurrence for parents who were at home with their children every day. One parent expresses this sentiment,

Because we go to the same parks a lot, we know a lot of people in the neighbourhood. I very often see someone we know. I bump into other parents of the kids at the preschool at parks and talk with them, or neighbours, or people that I know from the family centre. So it's a chance that I might actually have an adult human being to talk to.

According to the experiences of many of these parents, outdoor play spaces are one of the best places to meet neighbours. As one father says,

And other times, a lot of our neighbours that's how we meet them, that's how we become neighbourly with them, is through interactions with them in public play spaces.

Theme 3. Outdoor space: Extension of our yard. Parents described outdoor play spaces as substitutes for their own backyard space or extensions of their current backyard space.

For those without backyards, neighbourhood outdoor play spaces were their backyard. One parent commented that he had no need for a backyard with all the available outdoor play spaces in his neighbourhood. Even parents with backyard space described how public outdoor play spaces can offer opportunities their backyard cannot,

But it's even in our current backyard, which is amazing to have, it's not enough space for them to really run, right? They can run a little bit, but not the way that they can in a park.

Another parent reflected on the differences in use of space between the city where the study took place, Vancouver, and another Canadian city, noting that personal living space in Vancouver is limited, thus people have to go outside of their own space to find a place to be outside.

The use of outdoor play spaces as a place for families to simply be outside, was related to parents' perceptions that being outdoors has value and importance. Parents described going outside as being important for the well-being of themselves and their children. This is represented by statements like, "...also for mental health too, getting out of the house", and "...they'll go crazy, and I'll go crazy if we're inside all the time". In the words of another parent, "I think outside is good for you, I guess in some ways. That's what I keep hearing."

Theme 4. Modifying spaces. Another theme related to families' use of outdoor spaces is the modification of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, evident in parents' descriptions of actions taken to improve outdoor play spaces. The ways in which parents modify outdoor play spaces can be grouped into two categories, modifications aimed at *Enhancing Spaces* and modifications aimed at *Reducing Concerns*.

Sub-theme 4.1: Enhancing spaces. Parents described ways they added to outdoor play spaces in order to support their child's play opportunities. One parent brought up the idea that it is not always about what is provided by an outdoor play space, but instead the quality of a space is influenced by how parents use spaces. With creative thinking, a "boring" space could offer

ample opportunities for play. This idea is evident in several parents' explanations of bringing along toys from home in order to enhance outdoor play spaces (Figure 17). By adding a few toys, parents are able to extend how their children play with the space and the amount of time their children remain interested in a space. According to one parent,

Yeah, yeah, I find that if they have a couple of little toys, like even a shovel or whatever with them, they just will play in places longer, because they are able to interact with their environment a bit more.

In addition, two parents told stories of how they contacted the city to ask them to make modifications to neighbourhood playgrounds. One parent explained how she contacted the city and asked them to change the swings at a local playground in order to better accommodate families with children of different ages,

And it used to be, at (local park), that this one was the baby swings, and the other one, fifteen feet away was the bigger kid swings, so if you had one of each children, you couldn't put them on the same swing set. So I called (city services number), and they switched it within a week.

Another parent was inspired by this story to contact the city when she noticed broken equipment at a local playground.

Figure 17.
Photograph of Enhancing Spaces



“We have a bag of cheap, dollar store finds over the past couple years... and it just means that all the kids are playing and interacting.”

Sub-theme 4.2: Reducing concerns. Parents also took actions to eliminate or reduce safety concerns they encountered at outdoor play spaces. As discussed later in this chapter, parents perceived safety as a limiting factor that impacted their use of outdoor play spaces, however, rather than avoid these spaces entirely, many parents described taking specific actions to reduce their safety concerns. For example, parents recalled experiences of picking up dangerous litter from neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, “We carry tongs down. We carry tongs and a plastic bag for picking stuff up.” Other strategies used by parents included adjusting their supervision based on the situation, such as increasing supervision when their children were playing amongst the bushes or doing “triage” when supervising both their children at the same

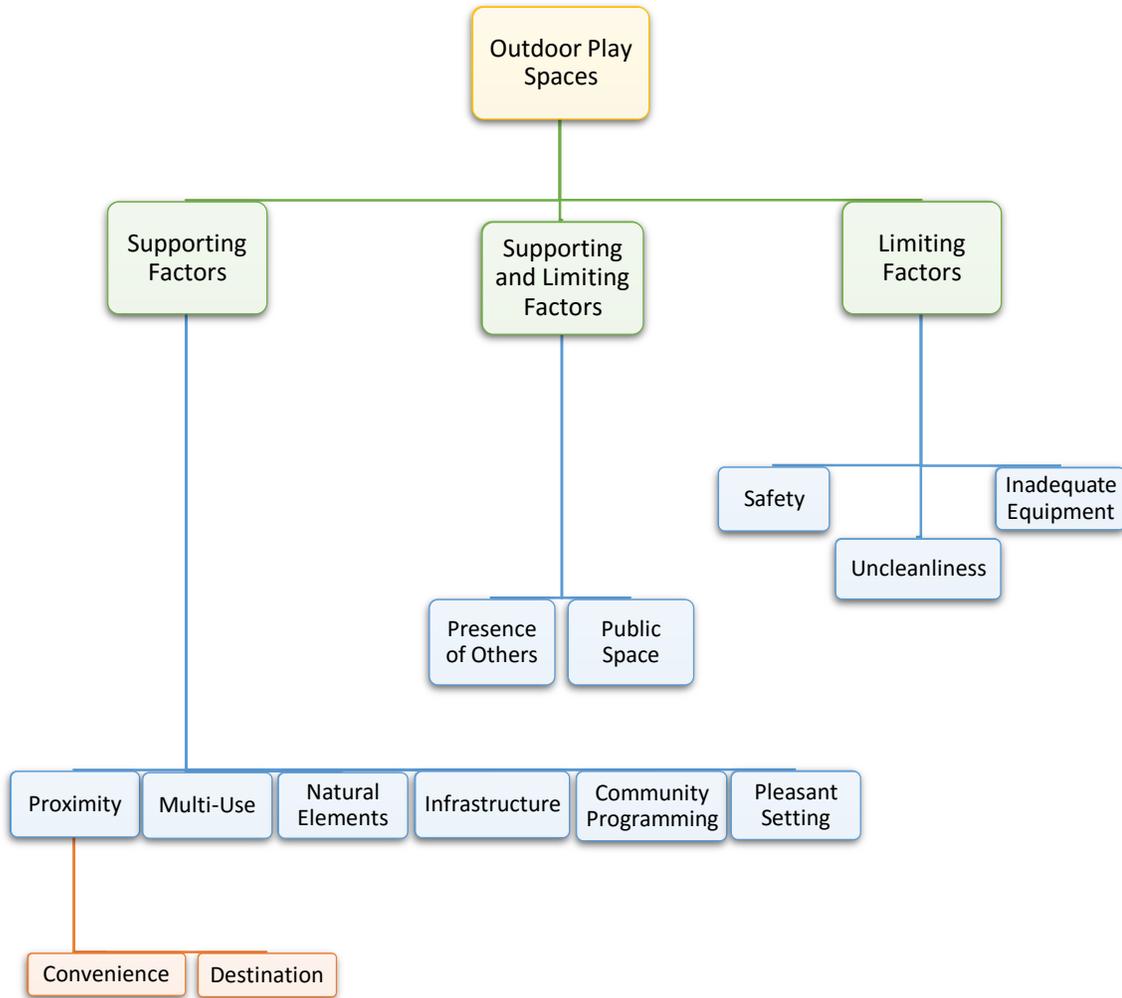
time. Another parent explained that she chose to visit bigger playgrounds only when her husband was with her to help supervise. Several parents described reducing their concerns by educating their children about hazards or turning potentially limiting situations into learning experiences. One parent explains how she was able to turn the presence of beer cans at an outdoor play space into a learning experience for her child,

But, I mean, it wasn't—this wasn't bad. There's a lot of—you know, the garbage cans around the city have spaces for cans, so that's the same idea. So that was great, that I got an opportunity to show my kids that.

Strengths and Limitations

During the focus group sessions and interviews, parents were asked to reflect on the strengths and limitations of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood and share their desires for an ideal outdoor play space. These discussions provided a rich understanding of the factors parents view as supporting or limiting their use of outdoor play spaces with their children. In general, all the parents reported being satisfied with the quantity of outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood, however, there were discrepancies in parents' perceptions of quality. Most parents felt quality varied depending on the park. This perspective is summarized by one parent's statement, "Sometimes there's quality issues, but certainly quantity issues are not." The following themes represent the specific features of outdoor play spaces that parents' perceived as impacting outdoor play spaces quality, as well as encouraging or discouraging them from using certain spaces. These features are grouped into three overarching themes: *Supporting Factors*, *Limiting Factors*, and *Supporting and Limiting Factors*, and their accompanying sub-themes. See Figure 18 for a visual representation of these themes.

Figure 18.
Thematic Map of Strengths and Limitations of Outdoor Play Spaces



Theme 1. Supporting factors. Supporting factors refer to the features of outdoor play spaces that were viewed positively by parents. These factors encouraged parents to use a space or caused them to perceive a space as better quality. In addition, these factors featured significantly in parents’ descriptions of their ideal outdoor play space. The supporting factors parents focused on in this study are: *Proximity*, *Multi-Use*, *Natural Elements*, *Infrastructure*, *Pleasant Setting*, and *Community Programming*.

Sub-theme 1.1: Proximity. Parents placed a high level of value on the proximity or convenience of outdoor play spaces. When asked what makes them choose particular outdoor play spaces, many parents responded that more than any other factor, proximity was the main reason why they visited certain spaces. The following quotations convey the emphasis parents placed on proximity of spaces, “Proximity is the main—yup, my main choice,” and, “Most—yeah, I mean, the top ones we got to, it’s just because they’re close.” Parents’ understandings of proximity included spaces that were close to their home, as well as spaces that were close to other activities they attended with their children. Participant 1 explains,

Yeah, pretty much. I mean, like she said, not just proximity, but where you are going in your day.

In addition to choosing outdoor play spaces based on proximity, parents said an ideal outdoor play space would be close to their house.

Related to the theme of proximity, parents differentiated between two types of spaces they visited with their children depending on their reasons for visiting an outdoor play space. While parents usually chose spaces based on convenience, they also described being willing to travel a further distance to visit a space they considered better quality. Parents commented that these spaces were more of a “destination”. Spaces chosen for convenience and spaces chosen as a destination worth traveling to, comprise the sub-themes, *Convenience Outdoor Play Spaces* and *Destination Outdoor Play Spaces*.

Sub-theme 1.1.1: Convenience outdoor play spaces. These are outdoor play spaces that are close in proximity to a participant’s house or other activities they attend with their children. As described above, parents frequently described visiting these types of outdoor play spaces. The key motivation for using these spaces is that they are convenient for parents, easy to travel to, and fit into their daily routine.

Because it's the park we spend all of our time in. Probably seventy-five percent of our park play is in this park, because it's the most convenient.

Sub-theme 1.1.2: Destination outdoor play spaces. Destination outdoor play spaces refer to spaces that are farther away, often outside of the study neighbourhood, but worth traveling to visit. The term “destination” was used to describe spaces parents were willing to travel to, typically because they considered them to be better quality. In an excerpt from one focus group, parents discuss how some playgrounds are worth the effort of getting there,

P2: Well usually the ones that I'll make the effort to go to are very good playgrounds.

P3: Good. Yeah, they're worth it.

P2: Oh, (list of parks outside of neighbourhood), yeah they're all good playgrounds, or I wouldn't bother getting in the car to go.

P3: So you'll drive, you'll drive to go there. Yeah, you wouldn't get in your car to go to (neighbourhood park).”

Even though most parents (6 of 7) placed great importance on the convenience of outdoor play spaces, destination spaces also fulfilled a purpose for children's outdoor play. Besides better quality spaces, other reasons parents gave for visiting these spaces included meeting up with friends, making their visit into a day trip, or visiting new spaces. One parent, the only parent to prefer destination outdoor play spaces, describes why she prefers to travel farther afield,

I tend to often—when we go to play somewhere, I try to drag it out to make it more. Like I would go further away on purpose, to (neighbouring city) or something, to make a proper trip, and match it up with naps times too.”

Sub-theme 1.2: Multi-use. When parents described their favourite outdoor play spaces or outdoor play spaces they perceived as being good quality spaces, a common theme in their descriptions was the presence of a variety of play features. One parent used the term, “multi-use” to convey the idea that these spaces can be used in multiple ways by different members of the family, because as he points out,

Yeah, parks that aren't like this is the kid's park, and then this is the dog's park, and then this is the adult's park. Often I've been all three of those things at the same time, and so it's nice that the parks are all of those things.

Parents expressed a preference for parks with a lot to offer, such as different playground features, varied terrain, natural areas to explore, space to ride bikes, and specific features like a community garden or a waterpark. In fact, community gardens and water features were frequently identified by parents as positive additions to outdoor play spaces. Multi-use parks were preferred by parents, because they offered lots of options, as one parent explains, “You know, you’re not limited there. There’s options when you’re there.” The desire for multi-use spaces also surfaced in parents’ descriptions of their ideal outdoor play space.

Within the theme of multi-use spaces, is an understanding of the importance of spaces that accommodate children of multiple ages. Most parents who participated in the study (6 of 7) had more than one child, therefore, they valued spaces that provided suitable play opportunities for both their children. Parents spoke positively about outdoor play spaces with playground structures for children of different ages or swing sets with swings of different sizes, and mentioned selecting outdoor play spaces based on this quality. According to one parent,

So I'll go to that one, because (younger child) can go on the little slides by herself, and (older child) can go on the bigger one, and they're close enough together that I can watch both of them. So yeah, we go to that one.”

Sub-theme 1.3: Natural elements. Natural elements were emphasized by parents as a supporting factor of outdoor play spaces. Parents pointed out natural elements such as trees, logs, grass, and other plants as positive features of outdoor spaces and expressed preferences for more natural spaces, even if these spaces were man-made natural spaces. According to several parents, natural elements offered benefits for their children, in the form of play opportunities and

learning experiences. Moreover, parents described how their children “gravitate to those spaces”.

Living in an urban environment, parents valued spaces that allowed their children to experience nature in the middle of the city. Several parents (3 of 7) used the word “love” to express their appreciation for these city experiences of nature. In the words of one parent,

Yeah, it’s great. I love having that little bit of nature blended in with the rest of the city, and places where they can go.

Figure 19 offers a visual portrayal of this concept, showing a child experiencing a moment of connection with nature in the middle of a traffic round-a-bout.

Since parents valued natural elements, they described seeking out these elements in outdoor play spaces. Unfortunately, many parents felt these spaces were hard to find within their neighbourhood. One parent went as far as to say they were almost “non-existent”. Therefore, parents expressed a desire to see more natural elements incorporated into their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. When asked to envision an ideal outdoor play space, the most common response from parents, mentioned by six parents, was the desire for more natural elements. One parent expresses her thoughts about the most important consideration for park design,

Hum, um, I think definitely having some natural aspects to it, whether man-made or not, but some areas that are left up to—like to be imaginative spaces and to allow for creativity, letting kids kind of design what they want to do with the space.

Figure 19.
Photograph of a Supporting Factor: Natural Elements



“I like the photo because it looks like (oldest child) is in the middle of a mountain kind of setting, eating blueberries, having this lovely in nature experience, but she’s actually basically in a traffic round-a-bout.”

Sub-theme 1.4: Infrastructure. The presence of infrastructure at parks was another common theme within parents’ discussions of the strengths and limitations. Parents noted the presence of particular infrastructure features as positive elements of parks and their descriptions of what they considered to be good outdoor play spaces frequently included mention of infrastructure. Bathrooms, fences, benches and tables, water fountains, garbage cans, and bike racks were all cited as specific infrastructure parents looked for at outdoor play spaces. The presence of bathrooms was considered a major strength, especially since bathrooms were perceived as a rare feature of their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. The excitement of finding a park with a bathroom is expressed by this parent,

There's bathrooms, there's bathrooms! Woo! Flush toilets. That's so exciting. So I don't have to always worry about trying to convince my kid to pee in the bushes, because he doesn't like doing that.

Parents considered benches and tables to be another important feature of outdoor play spaces, providing them with somewhere to sit while watching their children play, as well as providing a place for families to have a picnic or stop for a snack. Since the parents in one focus group used bikes as a frequent form of transportation in their neighbourhood, they mentioned the presence of bike racks at outdoor play spaces as a positive feature. One parent talked about how she used to seek out fenced outdoor play spaces when her child was younger and would run off.

In addition to discussing infrastructure as a positive feature of outdoor play spaces, parents expressed frustration at the absence of desired infrastructure at parks. Overall, parents described an absence of bathrooms and bike racks at neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. The provision of benches and tables varied depending on the park.

Sub-theme 1.5: Pleasant setting. The setting of an outdoor play space was considered a supporting factor that greatly impacted parents' enjoyment of the space. Parents described a "pleasant setting" as a positive aspect of their neighbourhood outdoor play space. Spaces that had good sun, trees, shade, and a nice view were considered to be pleasant spaces, as described in this quotation from a participant,

You know, it's nice when you have a view of the mountains or there's a nice sunny spot and benches, you know, a pleasant place to hang out.

A quiet setting, characterized by the absence of road noise, also contributed to making an outdoor play space more appealing.

Several parents expressed the belief that whether a space was enjoyable for them was an important consideration of an outdoor play space. Descriptions of positive settings usually focused on the features that made these spaces pleasant for adults. With the exception of one

child's desire for shade, setting was not described by parents as an important characteristic for children's enjoyment of space. In discussing their ideal play space, several parents voiced a desire for spaces that were more enjoyable spaces for adults as well as children. Parents perceived their needs to be often overlooked in the design of outdoor play spaces, but they felt they deserved some consideration, because, "we are people too." One parent describes the lack of thought given to parents' needs,

Because that is one thing, some of the parks around here, I think just get kind of boring for the adults. There's not a lot. Sometimes there's not even a bench.

Sub-theme 1.6: Community programming. Parents commented on the presence of community programming as a positive contribution to neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. Two parents in particular spoke very highly of these programs and expressed appreciation for them. They viewed these programs as offering additional play opportunities for their children and enhancing the quality of these neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. As one of these parents said,

I just really appreciate the organized activities that they do at the parks...summertime, they have, you know, they'll have all those organized activities for kids that the city has put on. I think that's amazing.

One example of community programming mentioned by these parents is the provision of outdoor toys by the local family centre for a daily outdoor play time. A second example is a volunteer run summer program at a neighbourhood park organized by the city park board.

Theme 2. Limiting factors. Limiting factors refer to the features of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces that parents perceive as negative. These features discouraged parents from using an outdoor play space or limited their child's play opportunities. The limiting factors described by parents in this study are *Safety*, *Uncleanliness*, and *Inadequate Features*. These sub-themes are explained in the following sections.

Sub-theme 2.1: Safety. Safety was a core theme in parents' discussions of factors that limited their use of outdoor play spaces. Parents described avoiding particular outdoor play spaces due to safety concerns or limiting their child's play behaviours as a result of fears about their safety. Parents' discussions of safety varied, as one parent focused on safety issues while other parents rarely mentioned safety.

Specific safety concerns commonly mentioned by parents included nearby busy roads, dogs, dangerous litter, and potentially unsafe playground design. Concerns about safety around busy roads were often cited by parents who described feeling nervous about their children running around at outdoor play spaces bordered by busy roads or biking on roads. These concerns affected some parents' choice of outdoor play spaces, as mentioned by one parent,

We don't go a ton there. We've been. Mainly because it freaks me out. (Main road) freaks me out, like having that there, and my daughter used to just run off.

Dogs were another major safety concern according to four parents. They commented on the lack of off-leash dog parks in their neighbourhood, which results in dogs often being let off-leash at neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. This idea is represented in Figure 20. The presence of dangerous litter was also noted as a safety concern by parents. Differentiated from other forms of litter which are categorized as *Uncleanliness*, these are items with the potential to injure a child, like needles. Concerns about playground structures were also expressed by parents. In the case of one parent, this was the result of her child's injury while using a particular structure.

In addition to parents' discussions of their safety concerns, safety was also perceived as a limiting factor for an entirely different reason. Two parents expressed concerns that fears about safety and design decisions based on these fears can limit children's play opportunities. One parent shares an example of how playground design can be limited by safety concerns,

Uh, I guess one of the things that I do think about is, I mean, wanting to have more things like rocks and logs and stuff for them to climb on, and one of the problems is there's sort of some safety concerns. Like people worry about having that stuff, in terms of the city does or the school board or whatever. My daughter's elementary school is going to be designing a new playground, and they've got this log in it that they've planned and the school board doesn't want it to be there.

During member checks of the research findings, another participant voiced a similar perspective, commenting that safety concerns can be a limitation of play spaces, because they may result in challenge being eliminated. Having moved to Canada from Denmark, this parent expressed her annoyance with, “how safety conscious Canadians are.”

Figure 20.
Photograph of a Limiting Factor: Safety



“I don't think there are any dogs in the background, but the field in the background, the soccer field, is treated as an off-leash dog park.”

Sub-theme 2.2: Uncleanliness. Uncleanliness was another theme mentioned by parents as a limitation of their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. Although certain forms of litter

perceived as dangerous were related to the theme of safety, other forms of litter were considered to be a separate problem. The presence of gross or unhygienic items limited children's play, by creating a mess to be cleaned or resulting in parents limiting their child's play opportunities. For example, one parent describes how encountering dog poo detracts from play,

All of a sudden your child is covered in dog poo, and you have to deal with it and clean it up, and we'd rather just be playing and having fun.

Other examples of uncleanliness shared by parents include garbage left behind at play spaces and people using the bushes as bathroom. Figure 21 shows one example of beer cans left behind at an outdoor play space. In one focus group, parents discussed how their children liked to play in the bushes and trees, however, these parents mentioned how their concerns about things in the bushes meant that, "you can't really let your guard down completely".

Furthermore, one parent shared her experiences of finding hair and dog poo amongst the woodchips and gravel playground surfacing, which she described as "gross" (Figure 22).

Figure 21.
Photograph of a Limiting Factor: Uncleanliness



“...we go and explore there quite a bit, but then when we came there last, somebody had put their beer cans over there...and of course my kids b-line for the beer cans that were not even completely empty.”

Figure 22.
Photograph of a Limiting Factor: Uncleanliness



“Gravel, I don’t—I understand why they put gravel down, because it’s soft, but that’s a sock in there, so it’s kind of yucky...”

Interestingly, while several photographs captured images of graffiti in neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, parents did not consider this to be an issue (See Figures 23 and 24). When asked how they felt about the presence of graffiti, parents responded that they were used to the sight of graffiti and it did not bother them.

Figure 23.
Photograph of Graffiti



“I mean, I guess I’m used to seeing graffiti all over the place, so it doesn’t really phase me.”

Figure 24.
Photograph of Graffiti



“I think it’s just kind of everywhere, and as long as my kid is not licking the fence, right? They’re not going to—it won’t really affect them.”

Sub-theme 2.3: Inadequate equipment. Another limitation of outdoor play spaces was a perceived lack of play equipment. Parks with a small amount of playground equipment or a lack of popular features were described as examples of poor quality outdoor play spaces (Figure 25). Several parents brought up the idea that some parks did not have enough equipment to meet the needs of all the families using the park. This idea is captured in one parent’s description of an outdoor play space she considers to be low quality,

Yeah, I would just like to see more structures on a playground than that. I feel like it’s not adequate to service that— as many people as live in that part of town.

An inadequate amount of playground equipment was viewed as limiting children's play, because it resulted in line-ups to use equipment or fights over equipment. One parent reflects,

This one, there's one baby swing and one older-sized swing. I think there should be maybe another baby swing and another older-sized swing. It's quite limiting. You have to wait in line and stuff. So that's why I took that one. I was like, "There's only one of each." It doesn't seem very efficient (Figure 26).

Swings were by far the most common playground feature parents described as insufficient at their local playgrounds. Five parents shared experiences of line-ups or fights over swings. The lack of swings was considered especially problematic by parents, as they also perceived swings to be a favourite item of playground equipment for their children. This is captured in one parent's comments about a local park,

Yeah, there's only two swings, so that's— I feel like there's always a lot of interest in the swings, especially my kids.

Expanding on their frustration about a lack of swings at playgrounds, parents also described a particular problem with the number of baby swings at their neighbourhood playgrounds. The following quote captures this frustration,

Seriously had to wait half an hour to get a baby swing, because there was two, and one person was just on it for that long.

Figure 25.
Photograph of a Limiting Factor: Inadequate Equipment



Figure 26.
Photograph of a Limiting Factor: Inadequate Equipment



Theme 3. Supporting and limiting factors. While the factors mentioned above were clearly viewed as either supporting or limiting use of outdoor play spaces, parents' views on the following sub-themes were more varied and complex. These two factors could not be considered solely as supporting or limiting, rather they are supporting in some ways and limiting in others. This concept is better explained through the detailed descriptions of these factors, *Presence of Others* and *Public Space*, which are presented below.

Sub-theme 3.1: Presence of others. Parents' views on the presence of others at outdoor play spaces were complex, featuring both positive and negative descriptions. Most parents described the presence of other families at outdoor play spaces as a positive feature that they looked for in an outdoor space. Only one parent said the presence of others did not matter to her at all. For the majority of parents, the presence of others made them feel safe using a space and meant their child had other children to play with. Although parents valued the presence of others, too many other families was generally considered to be negative. Several parents shared examples of parks they felt were "really busy" or "overwhelming". Parents expressed concerns about social interactions that occurred when outdoor play spaces became crowded, such as disagreements and fighting. One parent worried about older children using the space, while another parent perceived that the social dynamic changed as children separated into "teams". Parents expressed a preference for a balance of some other children to play with, but not too many, as is conveyed in this statement,

Um, I think it's nice to have a few other people, so the kids will have someone to play with, but not so that all of the stuff to do at the park is full. You know, all the swings, all the bouncy things, all the slides.

The presence of other parents at an outdoor play space also had positive and negative connotations. Many parents described having other parents to talk to as a positive feature that

made outdoor play spaces more enjoyable for them. On the other hand, one parent found that the presence of other parents could limit her child's play. She explained that she likes to encourage her children to take some risks on the playground, but that she sometimes experiences judgement from other parents, which causes her to change her actions. In her own words,

You're kind of doing things where you may not—you know, you may feel comfortable with your kid climbing a tree, but if someone else freaks out about it, you would have to modify your behaviour. So it's kind of a weird dynamic to be worrying about what other people are going to think about how you're parenting your child.

Another parent commented that she isn't always in the mood to socialize with other parents, but this is an inevitable part of outdoor play spaces.

Sub-theme 3.2: Public space. The nature of outdoor play spaces as public space was represented as both a supporting and limiting factor of outdoor play spaces. Parents placed value in the community aspect of these spaces, that they are open to be used in different ways by different people, however they also expressed concerns about other people's use of community space and noted there are inherent limitations on their use of public spaces.

The use of outdoor play spaces by other members of the community was occasionally perceived to have a negative impact on these spaces. Parents shared examples of how other people used outdoor play spaces in ways that limited their use of these spaces, such as taking drugs, vandalizing spaces, and littering. This was seen as a limitation, not of the space itself, but of the ways other people use spaces, as one parent said,

So there's nothing wrong with the outdoor space as such, it's just that, you come with your kids and you use it, but other people do too, and they use it in different ways, right, so you do have to share.

Despite the negative uses of public space parents sometimes encountered, most parents expressed positive feelings toward the community nature of outdoor play spaces. They liked that the parks were “open for everybody to use in different ways,” and preferred to see lots of

different people using the park in different ways, as they felt this was the purpose of these spaces. This sentiment is expressed in the following excerpt from a focus group:

P4: You get a really wide variety of people who go there.

P6: Yeah.

P4: You get the guys who are drinking in the park. [laughs] You get the, I don't know, the hipster who is having a phone conversation on the bench. You get the people who are just riding through, or using the garden, or running their dogs, or, yeah. Lots of different people.

I: Interesting.

P6: To me a park like that incorporates more of the idea of what I think a park should be.

Finally, parents acknowledged limitations on their use of public outdoor play spaces.

Parents described tension between letting their child interact with spaces and what they considered to be acceptable use of public spaces. In the example of public art as an outdoor play space, several parents commented that depending on the statue, they sometimes felt it was inappropriate for their child to play on it. One parent describes this tension,

So there's always a bit of tension of how much is okay to let them play and interact and things, and then how much of it is like, "No, we're in a city, you have to—that's not our space."

Another parent reflected on the differences between a backyard and a public outdoor play space, noting that the use of public playgrounds is more limited. There are things you can do in your backyard that you can't do in a public space, such as digging and picking fruit.

Summary

In this chapter, the findings of the study related to what parents perceive as outdoor play spaces, how parents and their children use outdoor play spaces, and what factors parents view as strengths and limitations of outdoor play spaces, were presented. The use of focus group discussions enabled participants to co-construct a rich understanding of their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. Although parents disagreed on some issues, for the most part, they shared

similar views about their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces and the strengths and limitations of these spaces.

Parents perceived two different types of outdoor play spaces, *Designed Outdoor Play Spaces*, like parks and playgrounds, and *Outdoor Play Spaces of Opportunity*, like bike racks and public art. The identified uses of outdoor play spaces by parents and their children can be summarized into the four categories of *Play*, *Social Connections*, *Outdoor Space*, and *Modifying Spaces*. *Play* included both *Structure Play* on playground structures, as well as children's open-ended play beyond the structure, *Creative Play*. Both children and adults used outdoor play spaces for socializing and for spending time outdoors as a substitute or extended backyard. Finally, parents described how they modified outdoor play spaces to better meet their needs by *Enhancing Spaces* and *Reducing Concerns*.

Features of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces were perceived as either supporting, limiting, or both supporting and limiting. Six *Supporting Factors* that encouraged parents to use a space or caused them to perceive a space as better quality were identified: *Proximity*, *Multi-Use*, *Natural Elements*, *Infrastructure*, *Pleasant Setting*, and *Community Programming*. These supporting factors also represent parents' desires for an ideal neighbourhood outdoor play space. Reversely, the three *Limiting Factors* that discouraged parents from using a space or reduced their perceived quality of a space were *Safety*, *Uncleanliness*, and *Inadequate Features*. *Supporting and Limiting Factors* represent aspects of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces that are not entirely negative nor entirely positive. These factors include the *Presence of Others* and *Public Space*. These findings represent the perspectives of this group of parents toward the available outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood and outdoor play spaces in general.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Overview

The purpose of this study was to better understand parents' perspectives of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood for their young child. Seven parents (6 female, 1 male) of children ages 2 to 5 years old shared their perspectives through photographs, focus group discussions, and interviews. The findings of this study revealed that parents perceived a variety of spaces to be potential outdoor play spaces, and that parents and their children use outdoor play spaces for different purposes including play, socializing, and a space to be outdoors. This study also identified factors that parents viewed as supporting, limiting, or both supporting and limiting their use of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. In this chapter, the findings of the study are discussed in relation to the previous literature. The implications of these findings for children's outdoor play and the design of outdoor play spaces are discussed, as well as the strengths and limitations of the study. Finally, this chapter concludes with recommendations for future research in this area.

Discussion of the Findings in Relation to Previous Literature

Affordances for outdoor play. The ways that parents in this study defined outdoor play spaces recognizes that a wide variety of spaces have the potential to be play spaces for children. In their discussion of outdoor play spaces, parents emphasized that essentially any outdoor space could be an outdoor play space and described how their children found opportunities for play in spaces they would not expect. Parents used to words like “invite” or “attract” to describe their children's infinity for these spaces, indicating that something about these spaces makes them appealing to children. These spaces, represented by the theme *Outdoor Play Spaces of Opportunity*, relate to the theory of affordances as described by Gibson (1979). Affordances

refer to what an environment offers an individual, in relation to the individual's own abilities. A space can become an outdoor play space for a child if the physical properties of the space in relation to the child's abilities create affordances for play. Using the example of bike racks, one parent described how bike racks are the ideal height for her child to hang upside-down by her knees, whereas the monkey bars are too high for this action; therefore, the design of the bike rack created an affordance for play for her child. The idea that the outdoor environment offers affordances for children's play beyond spaces specifically designed for play has been demonstrated in previous research. From the findings of his study on school-age children's experiences of their neighbourhood, Moore (1986) identifies children's use of "found play equipment" as an example of these children's creative interaction with their environment. He shares the example of a small bridge in one neighbourhood that children used as a piece of "found play equipment" by swinging from the supporting rafters, climbing up the outside of the bridge, and hanging on the railings.

The contrast between the themes *Designed Outdoor Play Spaces* and *Outdoor Play Spaces of Opportunity* is similar to the relationship between the sub-themes *Structure Play* and *Creative Play*, which represent the two types of play children were described engaging in at outdoor play spaces. *Structure Play* refers to play on structures designed to be used in an intended way, whereas *Creative Play* is open-ended play initiated by children based on the opportunities provided to them by an outdoor play space. *Creative Play* also relates to the idea of affordances, as the relationship between the child and the outdoor play space results in affordances for different types of play. For example, parents described their children using the playground surfacing materials, like woodchips or gravel, as materials for imaginary play. Since these materials are small movable parts, they could be manipulated by children and transformed

into other objects in children's pretend play. The finding that outdoor play spaces afford opportunities for children's imaginary play is consistent with previous research that demonstrates how the outdoor environment supports children's imaginary play (Dowell, Gray, & Malone, 2011; Herrington & Studman, 1998; Laaksoharju, Rappe, & Kaivola, 2012).

Prior research on the design of outdoor play spaces at child care centres highlights the importance of available manipulative materials and open-ended play opportunities as components of outdoor play spaces design. During the process of developing the Seven Cs, a guide for the design of outdoor play spaces at child care centres, Herrington, Lesmeister, Nicholls, and Stefiuk (2007) found that outdoor play spaces that contain manipulative elements and allow children's imagination to shape their play offer the most developmentally enriching outdoor play experiences. One of the Seven Cs criteria, *Chance*, is dedicated to the importance of children's creative and open-ended play. *Chance* involves opportunities for children "to create, manipulate, and leave an impression on the play space." (Herrington et al., 2007, p. 31). Although it was developed for outdoor play spaces at child care centres, the Seven Cs guidelines could easily be applied to neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. From parents' descriptions of their child's use of outdoor play spaces, it appears that when opportunities for creative forms of play are made available through moveable parts and play spaces beyond the playground structure, children seek out these play opportunities. Given the developmental benefits of these play experiences, movable materials and areas for open-ended play are important components to incorporate into outdoor play spaces.

Issues of quality. In his book, *Childhood's Domain*, Moore (1986) notes that when it comes to neighbourhood play spaces for children, "The issue of *quality* is paramount, not simply the *amount* of provision" (p. 108). This sentiment is echoed by the perspectives of parents in this

study, who were satisfied with the quantity of outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood, but raised concerns about the overall quality of these spaces. While previous studies identify parents' perceptions of a lack of provision for outdoor play in their neighbourhood, particularly for parents living in urban areas, this was not an issue in this study (Barns, 2007; Valentine & Mckendrick, 1997). Since parents were satisfied with the amount of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, parents' discussions of strengths and limitations revolved around the factors they perceived as contributing positively or negatively to the quality of a space.

Parents mainly discussed the negative aspects of outdoor play spaces in terms of the absence of strengths. Numerous sub-themes that were initially identified as *Limiting Factors* were later combined with sub-themes of *Supporting Factors*, because they represented the inverse of these sub-themes. For instance, with the sub-theme *Infrastructure*, the presence of infrastructure like bathrooms was considered to be a strength of some neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, while the absence of bathrooms was described as a limitation of other spaces. Identifying factors that could be considered *Limiting Factors*, and not just the absence of *Supporting Factors* revealed few results, which explains why there are fewer sub-themes within *Limiting Factors*.

For the most part, parents shared similar opinions about what makes a "quality" outdoor play space. While particular features were important to some parents and not others, the overall narrative surrounding the strengths and limitations of outdoor play spaces was coherent, indicating clear limiting and supporting factors. These findings reinforce the idea that it is not enough to provide spaces, these spaces need to meet the needs of families.

Nature as a critical element. Nature featured heavily in parents' discussions of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. *Natural Elements* was one of the six *Supporting Factors* of

outdoor play spaces described by parents as a positive aspect of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces and a desired feature of an ideal neighbourhood outdoor play space. The emphasis parents in this study placed on their desire for natural elements aligns with the research literature supporting the benefits of outdoor play in nature for children's development and well-being. As described in chapter two, many of the benefits of outdoor play are associated with outdoor play that occurs in natural environments. Play in natural environments supports children's motor skill development, imaginative and creative play, risky play, as well as promoting children's psychological well-being (Dowell, Gray, & Malone, 2011; Fjørtoft, 2004; Stephenson, 2003; Wells & Evans, 2003). Spending time in nature also fosters children's connections with nature and ecological awareness (Chawla, 2007; Wilson, 1996).

It is interesting that parents' views toward natural spaces coincide with the existing research emphasizing the value of natural spaces for child development and play. From this study, it is unclear whether this desire came from an understanding of the benefits of outdoor play in nature, or from other sources, such as parents' own affinity toward natural spaces. According to the concept of biophilia, humans have an innate affinity for nature that stems from our evolutionary history, which could explain parents' desires for more nature in their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces (Wilson, 1984).

In a city as abundant in green space as Vancouver, parents said they found it challenging to find natural spaces to play in their neighbourhood and traveling to more natural spaces was not an option for parents without a vehicle. The experiences of these parents coincide with the fears expressed by Louv (2008) about children's declining access to nature. Louv attributes children's limited contact with natural spaces to a variety of factors including changing lifestyles, increased technology use, and fears about safety. For the parents in this study, the main barrier to play in

natural spaces was simply limited access to these spaces, suggesting the importance of preserving natural spaces for play within urban neighbourhoods.

Obsession with safety. The existing research literature linking parent perceptions of their neighbourhood to children's participation in outdoor play focuses heavily on safety concerns. Commonly identified parental safety concerns associated with limited participation in outdoor play include traffic/road safety, environmental hazards, and "stranger danger" (Bringolf-Isler et al., 2010; Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008; Little, Wyver, & Gibson, 2011). In the current study, road safety was a limiting factor with parents identifying nearby busy roads as one of their main safety concerns under the sub-theme of *Safety*. Environmental hazards, in the form of dangerous litter like needles, were also identified in this study as a safety issue of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, however, concerns about "stranger danger" were not expressed by parents in this study. Parents occasionally mentioned the presence of "sketchy characters" at neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, but they were never described as a threat to their child's safety. The finding that parents were not concerned about "stranger danger" is consistent with the results of a study by Bringolf-Isler et al. (2010), suggesting that parental fears about "stranger danger" may depend on the neighbourhood or cultural context.

While the sub-theme *Safety* was identified as a *Limiting Factor* of outdoor play spaces, the views toward safety expressed by parents in this study were more balanced than indicated by previous literature. Malone (2007) warns of a phenomenon of "bubble-wrapping" children, a product of parental anxiety about their children's safety, which she argues is contributing to children's restricted opportunities for free play in their neighbourhood. Articles by Brussoni, Olsen, Pike, and Sleet (2012) and Herrington and Nicholls (2007) also raise concerns that excessive parental and societal concerns about safety are restricting children's access to

developmentally enriching outdoor play experiences, by making safety, rather than optimal development, the main priority for the design of outdoor play spaces. Parents in this study did express concerns about safety and described safety issues as negative factors of their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, but safety concerns typically did not impact parents' decisions to visit outdoor play spaces. Instead, parents described actions they took to reduce their concerns, such as increasing their supervision or educating their children about particular hazards. The views toward safety expressed by two of the parents even aligned with the critical stance taken in the articles by Brussoni et al. (2012), Herrington and Nicholls (2007), and Malone (2007). These parents expressed their own frustrations with the excessive focus on safety within Canadian society and restrictive safety regulations, which they viewed as limiting their children's opportunities for beneficial outdoor play experiences. Similar to the ideas presented by Malone (2007), these parents felt that restricting children's opportunities to experience risk actually puts them in more danger, because children learn to assess and manage risk through experience. The attitude toward safety expressed by parents in this study did not reflect a "culture of fear" that restricts children's free play. For these parents, safety was viewed more as a balancing act between minimizing potential hazards and supporting their child's engagement in outdoor play experiences.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of this study suggest that a wide range of outdoor spaces can be considered outdoor play spaces, as children find opportunities for play in spaces beyond parks and playgrounds. Expanding the definition of an outdoor play space allows for alternative, creative provisions for outdoor play. Reserving space for parks and playgrounds in a growing city is a challenge, therefore creative uses of small spaces could be a way to increase provisions for

children's outdoor play. Unused spaces outside buildings or at the edges of sidewalks could become small outdoor play spaces, similar to pop-up parks. In addition, future installations of public art could be more intentionally considered as play spaces for children. This connects with the concept of *Proximity*, a *Supporting Factor* identified by parents, as these small spaces could be conveniently located throughout neighbourhoods. As one parent said in an interview, it is important to consider, "how to make various areas accessible to everyone" and not to place unnecessary limitations on children's use of public space, "not prohibiting" children's play. Creating opportunities for outdoor play may be as simple as keeping outdoor space accessible to children.

The study findings have additional implications for the design of public outdoor play spaces. While parents described their children enjoying *Structure Play* on the playground equipment, the importance of including other elements that support children's creative and open-ended forms of play was also highlighted. These elements include natural elements and manipulative materials, which are considered valuable components of quality outdoor play spaces according to existing research like the Seven Cs, guidelines for the design of child care centre outdoor play spaces that support child development (Herrington & Lesmeister, 2006). Given some of the similarities between parents' descriptions of features that supported their children's play and the criteria for outdoor play space design suggested in the Seven Cs guide, perhaps these criteria should also be considered applicable to the design of public outdoor play spaces.

Furthermore, the factors identified by parents as *Supporting Factors* and *Limiting Factors* offer insight into the features parents perceive as positive and negative aspects of outdoor play spaces. For example, parents indicated a preference for multi-use spaces, with lots of different

features that accommodate children of different ages. They also viewed the community nature of outdoor spaces positively, preferring spaces used by lots of people for different purposes. This suggests that the design of outdoor spaces should be versatile enough to fit multiple needs within the community. While parents found it positive that spaces were used for a variety of purposes, they cited conflicts or safety concerns that arose from others' use of space. In the design of outdoor play spaces, consulting community members from different sub-sets of the community would offer valuable feedback for the design of multi-use spaces. A second example of *Supporting Factors* is *Natural Elements*, which are considered a particularly desirable, yet sparse, feature of outdoor play spaces. Given that research indicates the value of play in natural environments for children's well-being and development, this provides clear directions for the future design of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces (Dowell, Gray & Malone, 2011; Stephenson, 2003; Wells & Evans, 2003). Incorporating more natural elements is a way to create outdoor play spaces that appeal to parents' preferences and support children's beneficial play experiences.

Finally, an example of a *Limiting Factor* revealed by parents in this study is *Safety*. Safety concerns usually did not deter parents from visiting outdoor play spaces, rather parents described strategies they employed to reduce their safety concerns. Educating children about hazards was one method for reducing safety fears about outdoor play spaces mentioned by parents. One parent shared how his wife is organizing a class to educate young children about neighbourhood hazards and how to react to them. Further initiatives like this could help reduce parents' fears surrounding safety and empower children to keep themselves safe from potential hazards. Moreover, a couple of parents in this study perceived that excessive safety restrictions could limit children's play by reducing beneficial opportunities for children to experience risk.

Although these parents recognized the importance of allowing their children to take risk in their play, it is evident that this is not a common belief among all parents. Parents shared examples of other parents at outdoor play spaces judging their parenting decisions, because they allowed their children to take risks. According to the research literature, risk-taking in play is beneficial for children, as it allows them to develop competence and learn to evaluate risk for themselves (Little & Wyver, 2008; Stephenson, 2003). Thus parental education around the benefits of children's risky play and how to support this type of play may be beneficial.

This study also demonstrates the value of listening to the perspectives of parents. Parents offered important insight into how their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces could be improved in order to better meet their needs and encourage them to visit these spaces with their children. One core idea related to the sub-theme *Pleasant Setting* was parents' desire for outdoor play spaces to be pleasant spaces for adults as well. Parents described a preference for spaces that considered their needs in addition to their children's needs, because as one parent said, "we are people too". In the future, it would be advantageous for city planners and landscape architects to include parents in the design process.

Limitations of the Present Study

While the findings of the current study provide an enhanced understanding of parents' perspectives of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood and have important implications for the design of public outdoor spaces, this study has limitations that need to be recognized. Mainly, this study is limited by only representing the perspectives of a small group of parents living within one specific neighbourhood. First of all, the sample size was small, consisting of only seven parents, one less than the original sample size outlined in the study proposal. Although the number of participants is consistent with similar qualitative research approaches

and allowed for an in-depth exploration of each participant's experience, the scope of the findings are limited and cannot be generalized given the small sample size. Secondly, the diversity of participants was limited due to the voluntary nature of research participation and the constraints of the methods of recruitment. Since parents volunteered to participate in the research, those who self-selected to participate in the research may differ in meaningful ways from those who did not choose to participate. It is possible that the parents who elected to participate are particularly interested in the topic of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, perhaps because they are highly invested in their local community or use outdoor play spaces frequently. The study also required a significant time commitment from parents. While efforts were made to make the study more accessible by reducing the time commitment, scheduling around parents' availability and offering child care, several interested parents declined to participate due to time constraints. Furthermore, since participants were recruited through community organizations in the target neighbourhood, these parents already had some level of involvement and engagement with resources in their neighbourhood, which may have influenced their perspectives. As a result, the final sample of participants lacked diversity. All parents were part of a two-parent family and most parents came from similar ethnic backgrounds, with the exception of one parent. While specific efforts were made to recruit fathers to participate, the final group of participants consisted of only one father.

Strengths of the Present Study

Despite the limitations of this study, there are also a number of strengths that helped capture an in-depth understanding of parents' perspectives. Firstly, the use of the methodology photovoice for this study was a major strength. Photovoice typically involves the use of participant taken photographs and focus group dialogue to explore community members'

experiences of their community. In this study, the use of photographs allowed parents to represent their perspectives of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces through a compelling visual format. These photographs were able to convey subtle aspects of their experiences and provided a common starting point for discussion. Furthermore, the use of focus groups enabled participants to come to a deeper understanding of their own experiences through engaging in dialogue with other parents. By agreeing, disagreeing and building upon each other's experiences, parents constructed a rich dialogue, and consequently, a rich understanding of their perceptions of their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces.

Another strength was the focus on a particular neighbourhood as the setting for the study. Focusing on a specific neighbourhood provided context for the study and allowed for an in-depth exploration of parents' experiences of the outdoor play spaces within this neighbourhood. Since parents were all from the same neighbourhood, they were familiar with the spaces photographed and discussed by other parents, resulting in dynamic discussion as participants shared their own viewpoints regarding a space. Parents extended each other's ideas and offered contrasting views.

Finally, this research study makes a significant contribution to the current literature on children's outdoor play by demonstrating the multiple ways parents view outdoor play spaces and challenging the idea that parents are mostly concerned about safety. The current literature that explores how parental perspectives impact children's participation in outdoor play focuses mainly on safety concerns and how these concerns limit children's play, however, the findings of this study indicate that parents think about many different factors related to outdoor play spaces, with safety being just a small part of their experiences. This study offers a much more positive view of parents' perspectives of outdoor play spaces, by focusing on perceived strengths as well as limitations.

Directions for Future Research

There are several possibilities for future research that would expand upon the findings of this study and contribute further to the literature on neighbourhood outdoor play spaces and children's outdoor play. This study provides an enhanced understanding of the perspectives of parents regarding the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood for their young child. By conducting similar studies with other populations of parents, including parents from single-parent households and parents from low-income families, further insight could be gained into the ways parents from diverse backgrounds view outdoor play spaces. The inclusion of more fathers in future research studies would be beneficial to better understand the perspectives of fathers and how their perspectives are similar or different from the perspectives of mothers. In addition, conducting similar studies across other neighbourhood settings, such as rural neighbourhoods or high crime rate neighbourhoods, would provide insight into how the neighbourhood context impacts parent perspectives of outdoor play spaces. Several different neighbourhood settings could be explored within the same study, which would allow for comparisons between neighbourhood settings.

Although this study used focus groups and interviews to gain a deep understanding of the perspectives of a small group of parents, the use of a survey measure for future research could have other benefits. Using a survey would make it easier to recruit a large sample of participants and reduce some of the barriers to participation, enabling more parents to share their experiences of their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces. Insights from the findings of this study could be helpful in the future development of a survey instrument.

On several occasions, parents in this study commented on what they perceived to be their child's experiences of outdoor play spaces, as well as how they thought their child's perspectives

differed from their own. In order to avoid portraying children's experiences only through their parents' interpretations, it would be beneficial to hear from children how they perceive the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood, how they use these spaces, what they see as the strengths and limitations of these spaces, and what they desire from an ideal outdoor play space. While parent perspectives are an important factor in children's participation in outdoor play, ignoring the perspectives of children undermines the right of children to express their views on topics that affect them, a right outlined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990). According to Clark (2006), even very young children are capable of offering insight into their experiences through the use of creative research methods that enable researchers to listen to their perspectives. Conducting a follow-up study with the children of the parent participants from this study would be a beneficial starting point for exploring children's perspectives and would provide insight into similarities and differences between the perspectives of these parents and their children.

Finally, during the process of recruiting parents for participation in this study, caregivers of young children expressed interest in sharing their experiences of the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood. Parents were selected as the target participants for this study, because research demonstrates that parents' perspectives of their neighbourhood have an impact on children's participation in outdoor play, however, caregivers represent another group of significant adults in young children's lives who are likely to influence children's use of outdoor play spaces. Exploring the perspectives of caregivers with regard to neighbourhood outdoor play spaces could provide additional insight into how outdoor play spaces can support children's outdoor play.

Conclusions

The present study aimed to capture an understanding of the perspectives of parents toward the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood for their young child. Parents of children ages 2 to 5 years old living within a selected urban neighbourhood participated in the study, sharing their experiences through photographs and discussion. The use of photovoice as the methodology enabled participants to critically consider the outdoor play spaces in their community and co-construct a meaningful understanding of their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces and the strengths and limitations of these spaces. The findings of this study revealed two categories of outdoor play spaces perceived by parents, *Designed Outdoor Play Spaces* and *Outdoor Play Spaces of Opportunity*, as well as multiple uses of outdoor play spaces by parents and children including *Play*, *Social Connections*, *Outdoor Space*, and *Modifying Spaces*. In their discussion of the strengths and limitations of outdoor play spaces, parents identified features of outdoor play spaces that were considered *Supporting Factors*, *Limiting Factors*, or *Supporting and Limiting Factors*. According to parents, *Supporting Factors* encouraged their use of a space and contributed to their perceived quality of the space, while *Limiting Factors* discouraged parents from using a space and decreased their perceived quality. *Supporting and Limiting Factors* were complex aspects of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces that were viewed as either positive or negative depending on the situation.

Children's use of outdoor spaces can be considered in terms of affordances for play. Parents conveyed a flexible understanding of the term outdoor play space, considering that anywhere outdoors that offers children affordances for play can be an outdoor play space. In addition, opportunities for play were afforded by both playground structures and the space around, under, and beyond structures. Parents' discussions of outdoor play spaces focused on

issues of quality, as all parents believed the quantity of outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood was sufficient. For the most part, parents had consistent views regarding the *Supporting Factors* and *Limiting Factors* of outdoor play spaces. Consistent with previous research on the benefits of natural environments for children's outdoor play, parents identified natural elements as one of the key *Supporting Factors* of outdoor play spaces. Finally, parents perceived *Safety* to be a *Limiting Factor* of outdoor play spaces, however, parents' attitudes toward using outdoor play spaces despite safety concerns suggest that the impact of parental safety concerns on children's participation in outdoor play is not as pronounced as other research implies.

The experiences shared by parents expand the current research on parent perspectives of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces, offering a more balanced view of parents' perspectives beyond safety concerns. This study provides a framework for gaining insight into the perspectives of parents regarding their neighbourhood outdoor play spaces and considering their perspectives in the design of future neighbourhood outdoor play spaces.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Card



a place of mind
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

If you would like more information, you can call or email us.

Research Team:
Rachel Phillips,
M.A. Student,
The University of British
Columbia
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
name@XXXX.ca

Laurie Ford, Ph.D.,
The University of British
Columbia
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Parents' Perspectives of the Neighbourhood Outdoor Play Spaces for their Young Child

Are you the parent of a child between the ages of 2 and 5 years old?

Do you live within the [targeted neighbourhood]?

Would you like to participate in a research study about the outdoor play spaces for your child in your neighbourhood?

We are starting a study to learn more about how parents view the outdoor play spaces for young children in their neighbourhood. This will help us to better understand how these spaces can support young children's outdoor play.

If you would like to take part in this study, contact:
Rachel Phillips at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or name@XXXX.ca

Appendix B: Parent Recruitment Flyer



Parents' Perspectives of the Neighbourhood Outdoor Play Spaces for their Young Child

Are you the parent of a child between the ages of 2 and 5 years old? Do you live within the [targeted neighbourhood]?

Would you like to participate in a research study about the outdoor play spaces for your child in your neighbourhood?

The purpose of this study is to learn more about how parents view the outdoor play spaces for young children in their neighbourhood. This will help provide a better understanding of how these spaces can support young children's outdoor play.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to take photographs of outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood and participate in two-three focus group sessions.

This project is research for a graduate thesis.
If you would like more information, you can call or email us.

Research Team:

Laurie Ford, Ph.D., The University of British Columbia,
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Rachel Phillips, M.A. Student, The University of British Columbia,
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

**If you would like to take part in this study, contact:
Rachel Phillips at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or name@XXXX.ca**

Appendix C: Parent Recruitment Letter

Parents' Perspectives of the Neighbourhood Outdoor Play Spaces for their Young Child

Letter of Invitation

Principal Investigator: Laurie Ford, Ph.D.,
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology
& Special Education
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: name@XXX.ca

Student Co-Investigator: Rachel Phillips,
Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology
& Special Education
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Email: name@XXXX.ca

Dear Parent/Guardian,

We are writing to invite you to take part in a research study that we are conducting in the [targeted neighbourhood] of Vancouver. You are receiving this letter because you live within the [targeted neighbourhood] and your child is between 2 and 5 years old.

The purpose of this study is to learn more about parents' perspectives of the outdoor play spaces for their young child within their neighbourhood. Your willingness to take part in this study is very important. Findings from this study may enhance our understanding of how parents view the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood and how these spaces support young children's participation in outdoor play.

Taking part in this study means that you will take part in an initial 1 hour group meeting, take photographs of the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood, and take part in two 1.5-2 hour sessions that involve group discussions and sharing the photographs you have taken. You will be asked questions about the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood, how you and your child use these spaces, and what it is about these outdoor play spaces that encourages or discourages you and your child from using these spaces. The group discussions will be audio recorded so we are able to accurately remember what is said. The audio recording of these discussions will not be used beyond this research study.

As compensation for your time and any transportation expense we will give you a \$15 gift card to a local business. We will also provide child care at the site during the interview if you need.

Your taking part in this study is voluntary and will not affect any services you or your family may receive in the [targeted neighbourhood].

You will be free to stop at any point, or not to take part at all without any consequences, even after you sign the consent form.

It is very important to us that your family's right to privacy is respected. Therefore, all information collected as part of this research study will be kept confidential. **No individual information will be reported and you will not be identified by name** in any reports about the completed study.

We would be delighted if you would participate. If you are interested in taking part or would like to learn more about the study and what is involved, **you may contact Rachel Phillips by phone at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or by email at name@XXXX.ca**. After you contact us to learn more about the study, you will be asked if you wish to take part. If you do wish to take part, our research team will find a time that works for all participants to conduct the initial group meeting and the group discussions.

If you do decide to take part in this study, and if you have any concerns about your rights or treatment as a research participant, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Sincerely,

Laurie Ford, PhD
Associate Professor
Principal Investigator
Department of
Educational & Counselling Psychology
and Special Education

Rachel Phillips,
M.A. Student
Human Development,
Learning and Culture
Co-Investigator
Department of
Educational & Counselling Psychology
and Special Education

Appendix D: Parent Consent Form

Parents' Perspectives of the Neighbourhood Outdoor Play Spaces for their Young Child	
Parent Consent	
Principal Investigator:	Laurie Ford, Ph.D., Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: name@XXX.ca
Student Co-Investigator:	Rachel Phillips, Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology & Special Education Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX Email: name@XXXX.ca

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Please read the following form carefully. This is a request for you to take part in the study that we are doing. If after reading this letter, you would like to take part in this research study, please sign one copy and return. Keep the other copy for your records.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to explore how parents of young children view the outdoor play spaces in their neighbourhood. Outdoor play is important for young children's healthy development. Understanding how parents view the outdoor play in their neighbourhood will help us learn ways to support children's outdoor play.

Research Study Participation:

1. Taking part in the study means that you are willing to take photographs of outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood and take part in group discussions. You will take photographs within your neighbourhood and group discussions will take place at a community location.
2. Taking part in this study means that you would be asked to take photographs of the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood. You would also take part in two 1.5-2 hour sessions that involve a group discussion and sharing the photographs you have taken. The group discussion will be audio-recorded. You will be asked questions about the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood, how you and your child use these spaces, and what about these outdoor play spaces encourages or discourages you and your child from using these spaces.
3. The photographs you take of outdoor play spaces for this study belong to you. However, by taking these photographs you agree for them to be used for the purposes of this research study. This includes sharing these photographs within the focus groups, as well as the use of your photographs for the purpose of reporting the results of the research in presentations or publications, including the final thesis document.

4. We are not aware of any risks if you take part in our study. However, if taking photographs makes you feel uncomfortable, you may choose to stop, and if any of the questions in the group discussions make you feel uncomfortable, you may choose not to respond to those questions. You are welcome to contact us with any questions.
5. If you agree to take part in the study, we will ask you to answer a few questions about the age of your child/children, the name and postal code of the neighbourhood where you live, how long you have lived in your current neighbourhood, and your ability to communicate in English, in order to guarantee that you meet the criteria for this study. If you agree to do this, please complete these questions at the end of this consent form.
6. Your taking part is voluntary and will not affect any services you or your family may receive in your neighbourhood. You will be free to stop at any point, or not to take part at all without any consequences, even after you sign the consent form.
7. You will receive a brief summary about the results of this study when it is completed.
8. The information you give us is confidential. **No individual information will be reported and no participant will be identified by name** in any reports about the study. The information collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet. The only people who will have access to the information you give us are the researchers working on this study.
9. Since this study uses group discussions we cannot promise that other people taking part in the study will not share things discussed in the group outside of the group. However, we will talk with everyone taking part in the study about the importance of not sharing what is discussed outside of our group discussions. The topics we will discuss are not extremely sensitive.
10. As a thank-you for your time and any transportation expense, each person who takes part in the study will receive a \$15 gift card to a local business. The researcher will also provide child care if it is needed.
11. If you decide to take part in this study, and if you have any concerns about your rights or treatment taking part in our research, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at the University of British Columbia, at XXX-XXX-XXXX.
12. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this project you may contact either of the researchers at the phone numbers or emails provided above.

Consent to Participate in this Research Project

By signing below, it means you consent to take part in this research study and to have the photographs you take during this study used for the purposes of this research study. When you sign below it also means that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records.

Please check one of the following:

- Yes, I agree to take part in this project.
- No, I do not wish to take part in this project.

Please check one of the following:

- Yes, I agree for the photographs I take for this study to be used for the purposes of this study, including reporting of the research results.
- No, I do not agree for the photographs I take for this study to be used for the purposes of this study, including reporting of the research results.

Your Name (Please Print)

Your Signature

Date

QUESTIONS TO HELP US GET STARTED	RESPONSE
Child's Birth Date:	
Are you comfortable taking part in an interview in English? (Yes or No)	
Your Postal Code:	
How long you have lived at your current address:	
Your Phone Number: (in case we have any additional questions or need to contact you during the study)	

Appendix E: Background Questionnaire for Parents

Parents' Perspectives of the Neighbourhood Outdoor Play Spaces for their Young Child

Thank you for your willingness to take part in this study. Please take a few minutes to answer a few questions about your children, your family and your background.

General Family Questions

Please answer the following questions for your child between the ages of 2 and 5 years old.

- 1.) What is your child's age? ____ Years ____ Months
- 2.) What is your child's sex? ____ Male ____ Female ____ Other
- 3.) Does your child/children have any siblings that are also between the ages of 2 and 5 years old?
____ Yes ____ No
a) If yes, how many? _____
b) If yes, what are their ages? (Please indicate any siblings who do not live at home)

- 4.) Does your child/children have any siblings that are not between the ages of 2 and 5 years old?
____ Yes ____ No
a) If yes, how many? _____
b) If yes, what are their ages? (Please indicate any siblings who do not live at home)

- 5.) What is your family's ethnic background? _____
- 6.) What is the primary language spoken in your home? _____
- 7.) How many people currently live in your home?
Number of Adults (including you): _____
Number of children and youth (19 or younger): _____

Parent Background Information

- 1.) Are you a primary caregiver for your child?
Yes ____ No ____

- 2.) What is your relationship to your child between 2 and 5 years old?
 Biological or Adoptive Mother
 Biological or Adoptive Father
 Stepmother
 Stepfather
 Other Legal Guardian (please specify): _____
 Other (please specify): _____

3.) What is your sex? Male Female Other

4.) What is your age? _____ Years

5.) What is your first language? _____

Child Experiences

1.) Does your child attend a child care or preschool program? Yes _____ No _____
 If yes, please describe the type of program they attend (e.g., child care centre, home daycare, preschool program)? _____

2.) Is your child regularly cared for during the week by someone other than yourself? (e.g., another parent, grandparent, nanny, family friend)?

Neighbourhood Questions

- 1.) Have you always lived in this home? Yes No
 a) If no, how long have you lived in this home? _____
 b) If no, how long did you live in your previous home _____
 c) Was your previous home located in your current neighbourhood? Yes No
- 2.) Do you visit outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood with your child?
 Yes No
 a) If yes, what types of outdoor play spaces do you visit? (e.g., neighbourhood playgrounds, parks, local school playgrounds, walking trails, etc.) _____

Appendix F: Initial Meeting Guide

Initial Group Meeting Guide

Introduction

- Introduction of research study, researchers, and participants
- Review consent forms with participants and collect signed consent forms
- Discuss guidelines for focus group discussions with participants, including the importance of not sharing what is said in the discussions outside of the focus groups, respecting each other's ideas, and sharing the time.

Outdoor Play Space

- Discuss the definition of outdoor play space used in this study with participants. Ask participants to describe what they think of as an outdoor play space and provide examples of outdoor play spaces they use with their children.

Outdoor play space = any public outdoor area where young children play

Main Questions	Follow-Up Questions
When you think of an outdoor play space, what kind of spaces come to mind?	- How would you define an outdoor play space?
Could you give some examples of the outdoor play spaces you and your children use?	

Neighbourhood

- Discuss the definition of neighbourhood with participants. Ask participants to define and describe their neighbourhood.

Main Questions	Follow-Up Questions
What do you consider to be your neighbourhood?	- How would you describe the boundaries of your neighbourhood? - Where does your neighbourhood end?
Tell me about your neighbourhood.	- How would you describe your neighbourhood?

Photographs:

- Explain expectations for taking photographs of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces and give participants the photographing information sheets
 - 1.) Take photographs that describe the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood. Try to answer these questions with your photographs:
 - What are the outdoor play spaces available in your neighbourhood?

- What outdoor play spaces do you and your child use?
 - What do you like about these outdoor play spaces?
 - What do you dislike about these outdoor play spaces?
- 2.) Take at least 4 photographs. As many as you want.
 - 3.) Select 2-3 photographs you feel best describe the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood that you will share with the group.
- Discuss ethical concerns with taking photographs of neighbourhood outdoor play spaces
 - 1.) Avoid taking photographs of other people when photographing outdoor play spaces.
 - 2.) You may include photographs of your own children, but ask for their permission to take and use their photograph for this study.
 - 3.) Do not photograph situations that may be incriminating or portray other people negatively.
 - 4.) Be aware of your surroundings and your personal safety while taking photographs.
 - Explain to participants that they may use the digital cameras provided or their own cameras for the study. Distribute digital cameras to participants and ensure every participant has a camera to use for the study. Go over the basics of how to use the provided digital cameras.
 - Allow time for questions

Appendix G: Photographing Outdoor Play Spaces Information Sheet

Parents' Perspectives of the Neighbourhood Outdoor Play Spaces for their Young Child

Photographing Outdoor Play Spaces

A picture is worth a thousand words

What to Photograph?

Take photographs with these questions in mind:

- 1) What are the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood?
- 2) What outdoor play spaces do you and your child use?
- 3) What do you like about these outdoor play spaces?
- 4) What do you dislike about these outdoor play spaces?

* Outdoor Play Space = any public outdoor space where young children play, such as parks or playgrounds.

Please try to take at least 4 photographs, but you are welcome to take more.

Select 2-3 photographs you feel best describe the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood to share in the focus group.

When you have taken your photographs you can upload them by following the directions below or contact Rachel Phillips at name@XXXX.ca or (XXX) XXX-XXXX.

Uploading Photographs

1. Go to the website: <http://www.snapfish.ca>
2. Sign up (you will need to give a name and email)
3. Click on the "Upload photos" button, then "upload from your computer" to upload photos to a new album
4. Click "select photos" to add photos from your computer to the album
5. View the album you have just created
6. Select the 2-3 photographs you would like to share with the focus group. Click on these photographs and add the word "Share" to their file names.
7. When your album is ready, click the "Share" button and enter: name@XXXX.ca in the email field

This will send a link to my email, so I can access your photographs for this study.

Please upload your photographs before your scheduled focus group session.

Appendix H: Focus Group Interview Guide

Interview Schedule for the Focus Group Session

Introduction

- Introductions of researchers and participants
- Collect background questionnaires from participants
- Reminder of guidelines for group discussions

Summary of Themes

The researcher will provide a summary of the initial themes and ideas from the initial meeting and ask participants:

- 1.) Do these themes accurately describe the thoughts and ideas shared in our last group discussion?
- 2.) Are there other themes from our last discussion that are not included in this summary?

Photographs of Outdoor Play Spaces

- Photographs of outdoor play spaces taken by participants will be shared with the group and questions will be asked to facilitate a discussion about each photograph.

Questions for Photographer

Main Questions	Follow-up Questions
Tell us about your photograph.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What is this a photo of?- What is happening in this photo?- Where was it taken?
Tell us about why you chose to take this photograph to share with us.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- What is important/significant in this photograph?- What stands out to you?- Does this photo show good aspects of an outdoor play space or issues with an outdoor play space?

Questions for the Group

Main Questions	Follow-up Questions
Do you recognize this outdoor play space?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Is it one you have visited with your children?- Would you consider it within your neighbourhood?
What do you notice in this photograph?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Describe what you see in this photo.- What stands out to you as important/significant?

Main Questions	Follow-up Questions
What are your reactions to the outdoor play space in this photograph?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you like/dislike about this outdoor play space? - Do you think your child would enjoy playing here? What would they do here?
What does this photograph mean for children's outdoor play?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Would you visit this space with your child? Why/why not? - Does this photo show strengths of outdoor play spaces? Or problems with outdoor play spaces?

Guiding Questions about Outdoor Play Spaces

Main Questions	Follow-up Questions
How would you describe the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are there enough outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood? - How would you describe the quality of the ops in your neighbourhood?
Tell me about the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood that you and your child use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What makes you choose to use these spaces? - Do you have a favourite play space? - Does your child have a favourite play space? - How often do you visit the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood?
Do you and your child visit outdoor play spaces outside of your neighbourhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How often do you visit these spaces? - How far do you usually go to visit these spaces – how long to drive there? - Tell me about why you choose to use these spaces.
Tell me about your reasons for visiting outdoor play spaces with your child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you hope your child will get out of a visit to an outdoor play space? - What do you hope to get out of a visit to an ops? - What does your child like to do when they visit outdoor play spaces?
Describe what you like about the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What are their strengths? - What features of outdoor play spaces encourage you to use these spaces with your child? - How do these outdoor play spaces support your child's outdoor play? - What does your child like?

Main Questions	Follow-up Questions
Describe what you dislike about the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What features of the outdoor play spaces discourage you from using these spaces with your child? - What would make you leave an outdoor play space or avoid an outdoor play space? - Are there outdoor play spaces you avoid visiting? Tell me about these spaces.
What would you change about the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would you like to see at the outdoor play spaces? - How could these spaces be better?
Describe an ideal neighbourhood outdoor play space for your child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What would it look like? - What would be there? People, scenery, playground equipment, nature - Where would it be located?
Is there anything else you would like to add that has not been discussed?	

Wrap-up

- Thank participants for sharing their experiences and ideas
- Give out thank you gift cards
- Encourage participants to contact the researcher if they have any further questions

Appendix I: Follow-Up Interview Guide

Introduction

- Review the purpose of the study with participants and outline the purpose of the follow-up interview

Logistical Questions

- Ask participants about permission for the use of photographs of their children to confirm responses given during the focus group sessions.
 - Do you give me permission to include photographs of your children in my final thesis document and any presentations of the findings from my thesis
I would like to arrange a photo exhibition in your neighbourhood to showcase the findings of the study and get other parents talking about outdoor play spaces.
 - Do you give me permission to use the photographs you took for the study for this purpose?
 - Do you give me permission to include the photographs of your children in this exhibition, or would you prefer that I only include photographs without your children?

Summary of Themes

- Review the preliminary findings from the analysis of the initial meetings and focus group sessions with participants.
- Ask participants if the themes accurately reflect their experiences and if there are any aspects of their experiences missing from the themes.

Follow-up Questions for Participants

- 1.) Since taking part in this study, have you had any additional thoughts about the outdoor play spaces in neighbourhood that you would like to add?
- 2.) Many parents described actions they took to reduce their concerns about outdoor play spaces. Tell me about any actions you take to feel more comfortable using OPS.
 - How do you reduce concerns you have about using outdoor play spaces?
- 3.) Parents had mixed views about the social interactions that happen at parks. Some parents described other people at the park as a good thing, others described it as a bad thing.
 - a) In terms of other children and families using the park, describe what you feel is the ideal amount of other people.
 - How do you feel about using a park with no one else there?
 - How do you feel about using a park full of other families?
 - b) How do you feel about the social interactions your child has with other children at outdoor play spaces?

- 4.) Tell me what you think is the most important thing for people designing parks and playgrounds to know about what children and families want from these spaces.
 - If you could give them one key message, what would it be?
 - 5.) Has participating in this study changed how you think about the outdoor play spaces in your neighbourhood?
 - Has it changed the way you use outdoor play spaces or the outdoor play spaces you visit?
 - 6.) Anything else you would like to add?
- Thank participants for their time and for sharing their experiences.