

A photograph of a residential street in Belhar, South Africa. The street is paved and lined with houses and fences. A car is parked on the road. The sky is clear and blue. The text "Street Play as occupation for pre-teens in Belhar, South Africa" is overlaid on the image.

# Street Play as occupation for pre-teens in Belhar, South Africa

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# Order of content



- Literature review
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# Literature Review

- Play through many lenses –
  - “turbulence, free improvisation, and carefree gaiety” vs. arbitrary, imperative, and purposefully tedious conventions
- Play: emergent of context –
  - Inseparable, contrasts in different **contexts**
- Street as contested space: Protecting children at what cost?
  - **Sense of community**
- Children’s play and occupational therapy
  - “play as frivolity”, “**play as identity**”, “**play as power**” often overlooked
- Foregrounding children’s voices on play
  - Research from perspective of adults, **voices of children** missing from research
- Research context
  - Belhar (Cape Town), previous research on occupational profile

# Objectives and Methodology

## Gaining access

- UCT Research Ethics
- Western Cape Education Department
- Consent and assent forms

## Criterion Sampling

- 11-12 y., Belhar
- Lived experience of street play
- Ability to express and "articulate their conscious experiences,"
- Speak either English and Afrikaans

## Data Collection

- In depth, semi-structured interviews
- Journals
- Photo elicitation

## Objectives

- To describe the experience of preteens
- To explore the essence of street play as a phenomenon
- To explore the meaning derived

Participant	Gender	Age	Age started playing on the street
Richard	M	12	5
Sean	M	11	5 or 6
Gerald	M	12	9
Christine	F	11	8 or 9

\*pseudonyms used

# Results

THEMES	SUB-THEMES
<b>Fun and Control</b>	It is fun
	Ownership
	Free on the street...but not entirely
<b>We run</b>	Running as a game
	Running as exercise
<b>Forming a collective identity</b>	Our road – our home ground
	Sharing resouces – sharing blame
	Our games...our rules

# Fun and Control: **It is Fun**

*"It's 'lekker' for me, it's fun to play on the street"*

*"lekker, fun, then it keeps you busy in the day and nothing bad to get up to."*

*"outside is more fun"*

*"We played lekker in the street and meet more friends"*

# Fun and Control: **Ownership**

*"But it's not their road, so they can't force us now, we can play wherever we want to."*

*"my play place"*

*"they come to our road"*

*"Yes, this is like our home ground (smiling)"*

Fun and Control:  
**Free on the street... but not entirely  
free**

*"...then my mother 'skell'(reprimands) me and then my mother says "no you can't play anymore, no you [are] grounded for a week"*

*"As die grootes speel"*

*"You can play anything you want to, by doing it yourself not by the control of the play station"*



We run:  
**Running as a game**

*"We knock on people's doors and then we run away"*

*"You run, you run to reach over the sticks"*

*"If you run and there... and there's a bunch of people and if you can laugh"*

**Running as exercise**

*"You can run some more"*

*"If you run, that, it's almost like exercise and that, and if you practice, that make you fit, your body... it get fit and that"*

Forming a Collective Identity:  
**Our road – our home ground**

*"They come to our road"*

*"Yes, this is like our home ground (smiling)"*

*"I [have] always played on the street"*

# Forming a Collective Identity: **Sharing resources – sharing blame**

*"All my friends, we put money together and we buy the ball"*

*"We use, we use like stones, to make poles for the soccer. Sticks, for Three Sticks...  
for the game..."*

*"People don't find out and they can't blame just one of us as everyone played  
together."*

# Forming a Collective Identity: **Our games... Our Rules**

*"...there is a spot to sit, then they sit there, and they watch us how we play, then afterwards they ask, 'can I play with' then they know how to play the game"*

# Street play and the paradox of freedom and constraint: A shared struggle

- Link between Fun & Control
- Street play is 'Lekker'
- No resources = more fun
- Freedom with constraint as underscoring the essence of play fits with Wesolowski's (2012) description of capoeira
- 'Intrinsic motivation' similar to fun
- Free choice vs. control
- Free choice and individual freedom vs. free choice and a collective 'control'



# Protecting Children on whose behalf?

- Parental anxiety, perception of danger and the basis of recreational programmes
- Children's view- to stay out of trouble

*"lekker, fun, then it keeps you busy in the day and nothing bad to get up to"*

- Western woman clubs - danger of street play vs. Belhar street play sanctioned by adults

## Opportunity for physical activity

- Street play potential for physical active play
- Overweight and obesity being responsible for 5% of global mortality (WHO, 2009)
- Physical active play has been found to be a stronger buffer against child obesity than school-based exercise (e.g. P.E)

# Collective identity and occupational trajectories in context

- Meaning, agency, responsibility and identity, protected and earn their place
- Street play not as dangerous as we think, strong social agent
- Abu-Ghazze (1998), the street offers more than any playground can
- Advance the rhetoric of play as identity (Sutton-Smith, 1997)
- Parallels between street play and gangsterism - is fear warranted? Context?
- Human occupations cannot be separated from context (Galvaan, 2012)
- Factors impacting occupational trajectory of children: safety of the context, socio-economic conditions, political contexts, current gang activity
- Street play's role in forming a collective identity and a sense of community *must be understood in context*

# Conclusion & Recommendations



- Discursive nature of fun and control - paradox of freedom and constraint
- Collective dimension of free choice
- Running as important opportunity for physical active play
- Forming a collective - shared meaning, agency and identity - mirrored Western contexts
- Occupational justice approach to Occupational Therapy
- Historical focus of occupational therapy on play as progress, renewed interest and research in play as power and play as identity
- Open Streets Cape Town initiative



# Thank you!

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